



DISCOVERY

Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Esther

Call and Commission of Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:1 — 3:27

Inserted Lesson:

The Role of Prophecy in Scripture

Judgment for Judah

Ezekiel 4:1 — 24:27

Inserted Lesson:

Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ

Judgment for Enemy Nations

Ezekiel 25:1 — 32:32

Inserted Lesson:

Prophecies of End Times

Israel's Restoration, Future Temple, and Worship Prophesied

Ezekiel 33:1 — 48:35

Hebrews Taken to Babylon

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The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk 1:12 — 3:19

The Book of Obadiah

Obadiah 1:1-21

The Book of Esther

Esther 1:1 — 10:3

Discovery is a Bible study course for the high school and adult levels. Bible references are taken from the King James Version. The companion to these Sunday school lessons is Daybreak, a daily devotional and personal Bible study continuum. All of the material is available on our website, as well as in printed form. The print version is designed to be stored in a binder; subsequent modules can then be easily inserted. Discovery is an official publication of the Apostolic Faith Church. All rights are reserved.

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SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 1:1 through 3:27

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them. For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel.” (Ezekiel 3:4-5)

BACKGROUND

The prophet Ezekiel’s life spanned a period of significant political upheaval. Assyria had dominated the region for over 125 years, but in 612 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had conquered Assyria and his nation became the major superpower. In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar’s armies carried away the first group of exiles from Judah—a group that included the most prominent men of the country. In 597 B.C., Ezekiel was among the second group of captives deported from Judah to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

In the fifth year of Ezekiel’s captivity in Babylon, God called him to deliver a series of prophetic messages to his fellow Jewish exiles. These were primarily predictions of judgment that would soon come upon Jerusalem and seven Gentile nations around Judah. Ezekiel immediately obeyed, although God warned him that the exiles would reject his words because they were “stiffhearted” and “a rebellious nation” (Ezekiel 2:3-4).

For more than twenty years, Ezekiel faithfully relayed God’s messages through divinely ordained allegories, symbolic enactments, and apocalyptic imagery. Although his messages focused for the most part on soon coming judgment, they also provided hope for a restored Israel in the future Messianic Kingdom.

Chapter 1 describes three aspects of Ezekiel’s initial vision: the four winged creatures, a chariot and its wheels that moved at the impelling of the Spirit, and God on His throne. Chapter 2 records the prophet’s call and commission by God, and chapter 3, his appointment as a watchman for Israel.

QUESTIONS

1. Verses 1-3 of chapter 1 describe the place, manner, and date of Ezekiel’s call. The phrase “the heavens were opened” indicates that Ezekiel began to see visions of God’s glory—divinely inspired images not revealed to others. Why do you think God prefaced Ezekiel’s call to prophetic ministry with a revelation of His glory?

2. Ezekiel’s first vision given in chapter 1, began with a great storm cloud that arrived from the north—a storm that represented God’s judgment, which would come upon Jerusalem through the armies of Babylon. The vision itself had three parts: the four living creatures, the wheels within wheels, and the glorious throne room and One with “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (verse 28). What are some of the details given in verses 5-8 and 16-18 regarding the four living creatures and the wheels that propelled them?

3. Verses 22-28 of chapter 1 record what Ezekiel saw of God’s glory and the firmament above the cherubim—a vast scene flooded with “the colour of the terrible crystal,” perhaps a spectrum of color that appeared as light refracted through crystal, with the hues of a rainbow. There was a sapphire throne, and above it, a brilliantly shining Form with the appearance of fire. This radiating brightness was an expression of the glory of God. How did Ezekiel respond to this vision of God’s glory, and what attitude did his response indicate? Ezekiel 1:28

4. In chapters 2 and 3, God commissioned Ezekiel as His spokesperson. More than ninety times in the book, including Ezekiel 2:1, God addressed Ezekiel by the term “son of man.” This form of address emphasized Ezekiel’s humanity and his lowly position in comparison to God’s divine sovereignty. It also stressed the prophet’s need for dependence upon God. Why is total dependence upon God necessary if we are to serve Him effectively?

5. In Ezekiel 2:6, and in several other verses in chapters 2 and 3, God told Ezekiel not to be afraid. Based on the description of the people Ezekiel was called to confront, why do you think this encouragement was needed? Ezekiel 2:3-7

6. In verses 8-10 of chapter 2 and the first three verses of chapter 3, Ezekiel’s willingness to obey God was challenged by a difficult command from God. What unusual action did God instruct the prophet to take, and what do you think that action symbolized?

7. God’s instruction to Ezekiel to eat the roll of the book should cause us to ask ourselves if there are parts of God’s Word and His calling upon our lives that we have not yet fully absorbed. What are the benefits of fully taking in every part of God’s Word?

8. In chapter 3 verses 16-21, Ezekiel’s responsibilities were explained to him through his appointment as a watchman. What were the duties and responsibilities of a watchman in that era? Given that, how would you describe what Ezekiel was called to do?

CONCLUSION

God called the prophet Ezekiel to declare coming judgment to his fellow captives in Babylon, in spite of the fact that his words would be rejected. The subsequent visions that the prophet experienced were a living reality that encompassed him completely, and he faithfully obeyed God’s instructions.

NOTES



Inserted Lesson:

The Role of Prophecy in Scripture

This lesson is the first of three on Biblical prophecy that are interspersed in this quarter. Please note that these three depart from the textual style format of our Discovery curriculum in that they are topic-based lessons. Most of the Scripture references in these lessons are drawn from books other than Ezekiel, as each lesson will examine the Biblical view on differing aspects of prophecy. In addition, more material is included in each question, and supplemental Scriptures are provided in footnotes. The insertion of these lessons into the unit allows the chapters of Ezekiel concerning Judah's judgment to be grouped into a single lesson.

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 40:1-2; Ezekiel 33:7-8

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Peter 1:21)

BACKGROUND

The Bible was written over a period of about fifteen centuries and is the work of more than forty authors. Its sixty-six books deal with a wide range of topics and have very different literary styles, but they all provide insight and instruction that God desired humanity to have. Prophetic declarations were one way God imparted His messages, so prophecies appear in various places throughout Scripture.

While Jewish Bibles include Joshua, Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel in the prophetic books, much of Biblical prophecy is contained in the Old Testament books called the Major and Minor Prophets—a reference to the length of the books rather than the importance of their content. These books were recorded during the decline, exile, and return of the Children of Israel to their native land, over a period of about 350 to 400 years. Most of the messages were directed to Judah and Jerusalem: the prophets Isaiah, Joel, and Micah wrote before the fall of Jerusalem; Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah prophesied at the time of Jerusalem's fall and during the exile; and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi wrote at the time of the exiles' return and later.

Some of the prophets had names that were symbolic. Hosea means "salvation"; Nahum means "comforter"; Zephaniah means "the Lord hides"; and Zechariah means "the Lord remembers." Whether or not the prophets' names reflected their calling, all true prophets spoke with the authority of the Holy Spirit.

The prophetic messages recorded in the Word of God are both intriguing and mysterious because many of them concern ancient kingdoms that no longer exist. However, God included them in His Word for a reason. Prophecy can teach us many lessons about God's nature, His plan for mankind, and His desire for a relationship with the people He created. When we understand the prophets' motivations and methods, we are better equipped to grasp how their words have significance for our day.

QUESTIONS

1. The dictionary defines *prophecy* as "an inspired utterance of a prophet; the inspired declaration of divine will and purpose; a prediction of something to come." While "a prediction of something to come" is probably the most common usage in contemporary society, in the Old Testament era, prophecy not only was a foretelling of future events but also a way God communicated His will to His people. According to our text, what are some other purposes of Biblical prophecy? 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 40:1-2; Ezekiel 33:7-8

2. Biblical prophets were intermediaries between God and man. As emissaries commissioned to challenge His people to remembrance, repentance, and obedience, they functioned in Israel alongside other spiritual leaders such as priests and elders. Scripture also identifies the prophets as "messengers" of the Lord, "seers," "servants" of God, and "watchmen."¹ Each of these titles provides insight regarding the role these individuals filled.

God chose His prophets from many walks of life. They included princes and priests like Abraham and Ezekiel, but also shepherds and farmers like Amos and Elisha. Women and even children were among the prophets. Some ministered for decades, while others delivered just a single message.

Whatever the details of their personal backgrounds and messages, God's prophets were called to be a positive spiritual influence, and this frequently brought opposition by national leaders. When rulers turned away from worship of the true God, the prophets were

commanded to correct them, and in some cases, to pronounce judgment. This often placed the prophets in life-threatening situations. What are some of the spiritual qualifications these individuals needed in order to serve as prophets of God?

3. The manner in which the prophets received God's call varied. God spoke to Daniel through a dream and to Ezekiel in a vision. Some of the prophets, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, were chosen by God before birth. Perhaps one of the most well-known and detailed calls in the Bible is found in 1 Samuel 3. Based on verses 11-18 of that chapter, how would you summarize the message that Samuel was told to deliver to Eli the priest? How did Samuel respond to God's instruction?

4. While most Biblical prophecies were delivered orally, at times prophets were instructed to communicate through actions that were highly unusual in their culture. For example, Isaiah was told to give his sons names that symbolized prophetic truths—they would be ongoing reminders of the coming invasion by enemy forces and of the Jewish people's eventual return to their land. Hosea was commanded to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to her marriage vows, as a picture of God's commitment to Israel in spite of the nation's spiritual adultery.² Jeremiah was instructed to bury his unwashed girdle near the Euphrates River and later to recover it when it had deteriorated beyond use, as a parable portraying the spoiling of Judah.³ Ezekiel built a model representing Jerusalem's coming siege and dramatized the attempted escape of King Zedekiah through a hole in the wall.⁴ Why do you think God chose at times to have His messages delivered through actions or dramatic reenactments?

5. All the prophetic books of the Old Testament with the exception of Hosea include messages of judgment against the nations around Israel and Judah. These judgment messages reveal some important Biblical principles. What are some of the lessons we can learn by studying God's proclamations of judgment against heathen nations?

6. Two key prophetic themes woven throughout Scripture are the coming of the Messiah and the events that will transpire on this earth at the end of time. These topics will be studied individually in upcoming lessons in this unit. However, there are a number of other prophetic themes in the Bible that reflect the nature of God and His requirements, including the following five.

- *God is sovereign.* The prophets understood that as Creator, God had the right to control all nations and people.
- *God is holy.* Knowing that holiness is central to His nature, the prophets taught that God requires complete separation between the holy and the unholy.
- *God will not tolerate sin.* The prophets could not compromise their stern exposure of sin because the only hope for the people they addressed was a humble turning to the Lord in genuine repentance.
- *God requires obedience.* The prophets reminded the people that God had a rich purpose for them, but they must believe and follow His commandments.
- *God will judge sin.* The prophets warned that if the princes, priests, and people arrogantly rejected God's moral and spiritual principles, they would face the consequences.

How are the principles revealed in these prophetic themes applicable in our day?

7. In Isaiah 30:1-2, the prophet Isaiah pronounced woe upon the people of Israel for rebelling against God and forming an alliance with Egypt. In Jonah 3:1-4, the prophet Jonah gave a message of coming doom to Nineveh, the powerful and wicked capital city of Assyria. What were the responses to these prophetic messages? Isaiah 30:8-11; Jonah 3:4-10

8. Old Testament prophecies sometimes had dual or multiple fulfillments, even though the prophet spoke the prophecy as a single event. While the prophet's audience would have viewed it in the historical context of their own day, a more complete fulfillment would come later. In a sense, the prophets saw the "mountain peaks" of prophetic events, but they could not identify the "valleys" of time between the peaks. We find one example of this in God's promise of a "son" and a "house" to David in 2 Samuel 7, which was only partially fulfilled in David's son, Solomon. The second and complete fulfillment of that promise will be realized when Jesus, the "Son of Man," establishes His kingdom on earth.

Another example of this type of dual fulfillment is the "day of the LORD" referenced in Joel 2:28-32 and Amos 5:18-19. Joel and Amos viewed this as a one-time event when invading armies would bring judgment and destruction upon Israel. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10-13, what is the secondary and future fulfillment of these verses?

9. In the Old Testament, false prophets dishonestly claimed to deliver messages from God, while in actuality, they were speaking deceitfully. At times, they also spoke on behalf of false gods or prophesied for monetary gain. Based on the following Scriptures, what are some ways we can discern whether a prophet is true or false? Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 23:32; Lamentations 2:14; Matthew 7:15; 1 Corinthians 14:32-33; 1 John 4:1-3

10. What are some reasons that Christians of our day should study prophecy?

CONCLUSION

The world in which Biblical prophets delivered God's messages was much like our own—it was filled with individuals who wanted their own way, and rebelled against the instructions of the God who created them. It took courage for the prophets to proclaim what the people *needed* to hear rather than succumbing to the temptation of telling them what they *wanted* to hear. Nonetheless, these men and women of God ministered in obedience to Him, and their words have been preserved in the Scriptures for our benefit and instruction.

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1. See Isaiah 44:26; 2 Samuel 24:11; Amos 3:7; and Isaiah 62:6.
2. Hosea 1:2
3. Jeremiah 13:4-9
4. Ezekiel 4:1-8, 12:3-13
5. An example of when judgment was restrained due to repentance is found in Jonah 3:4-10.



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 4:1 through 24:27

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations.” (Ezekiel 7:8)

BACKGROUND

Following Ezekiel’s call and commission as a prophet (described in chapters 1-3), chapters 4-24 contain the record of the prophetic messages he gave over a period of about twenty years. Most of these messages dealt with God’s soon-coming judgment on the nation of Judah, with many of them alluding to the siege and destruction of the capital city of Jerusalem.

The phrase “Behold, I am against you” appears thirteen times in Ezekiel. This revealed God’s anger, and indicated that the coming judgment would exceed anything that had occurred before. Ezekiel’s messages disclosed why such severe judgment would come. Israel had always been at the center of God’s plan and work in the world. In spite of numerous evidences of God’s favor throughout her history, the people had rejected Him in both worship and governance, and adopted their pagan neighbors’ gods and practices. They repaid God’s numerous blessings and great mercy with disloyalty and rampant idolatry. For many years, the prophets had cautioned the people of Judah regarding the consequences of their disobedience, but they had refused to heed the words of warning. Now, judgment would come.

QUESTIONS

1. Throughout Ezekiel’s ministry, God instructed the prophet to present His messages in a variety of unusual ways, including parables, symbolic demonstrations, and object lessons. For example, in chapter 4 Ezekiel was commanded to publicly lie on his side for a portion of 430 consecutive days and eat starvation rations as an illustration of God’s judgment. Why do you think God chose these unique methods to communicate to the exiles in Babylon what was coming upon Jerusalem?

2. Chapter 5 continues God’s instructions regarding actions Ezekiel was to take to depict three aspects of God’s coming judgment against Jerusalem: the siege of the city, the suffering and distress of its inhabitants, and the destruction of the city and its people. In Ezekiel 5:1-4, what was Ezekiel told to do, and what did his actions symbolize (see verses 11-12)?

3. Time after time, God reiterated to Ezekiel how completely the people of Judah had embraced idolatry. In chapter 8, God revealed the depth of their spiritual and moral failure by showing Ezekiel the abominations that were taking place in the Temple in Jerusalem — abominations that included the worship of ceremonially unclean animals. Given this flagrant violation of God’s commands, why do you think the elders said “The LORD seeth us not” (Ezekiel 8:12)? How does this parallel the mindset of many people today?

4. In Ezekiel 11:14-21, God had Ezekiel tell the exiles in Babylon that the coming judgment would not be the end of Israel. In a restatement of a promise previously made in Deuteronomy 30:3, God said He would sustain the exiles during their absence from their land and Temple, and would regather the people to their land in the future. God said that when they did return, they would no longer pursue idolatry. What does verse 19 mean, and what evidence can you give that such a complete transformation is possible?

intended to promote sincere individual repentance. What does Ezekiel 18:24 mean, and what Bible doctrine does it support?

5. In chapter 14, the elders of the exiles in Babylon came to hear from Ezekiel. Some Bible scholars view Ezekiel 14:12-21 as a reply to a question in these elders' minds: Wouldn't God spare Jerusalem because of the righteous people who remained there? At God's direction, Ezekiel responded by pointing to three of the most righteous men in Israel's history: Noah, Daniel, and Job. What Biblical principle is found in God's declaration in verse 14?

6. Judah's King Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar's rule. Since Judah's subjection to Babylon was God's decreed will, Zedekiah would forfeit his sovereignty. However, God indicated that He would not let the line of David be forever destroyed. Ezekiel 17:22-24 predicts the earthly establishment of the Messiah in the end time. The "high cedar" of verse 22 is a reference to the royal house of David, and the tender twig that Lord God breaks off and plants is the Messiah—the anointed One himself, who will be from the lineage of David. In what ways does this prophecy of the Messiah impact our lives?

7. In chapter 18, Ezekiel corrected a misconception regarding individual responsibility. By refuting a well-known proverbial saying of that era, he made it clear that each person would be judged for his own sins. There was neither inherited judgment nor reward. The wicked individual would die, no matter how righteous his parents and no matter if he himself had once been good. Conversely, God promised life to the righteous man, no matter how wicked his parents, and even if he himself had once been sinful. These judgments proved God's righteous judgment, and were

8. In chapter 19, Ezekiel mourned for Judah's pending ruin. Ezekiel 19:10 states that Israel had been "planted by the waters." This is a reference to Israel's privileged and fruitful state in the past, particularly during the reigns of David and Solomon. In what ways have you been "planted by the waters," and what responsibility does that entail?

9. In chapter 20, God likened Judah and Jerusalem to a forest ready to be burned. Ezekiel was to tell the people that the coming "fire" of judgment would be kindled by God himself. What characteristics of a forest fire make it such a vivid representation of Judah's coming judgment?

CONCLUSION

God is long suffering, but there is a limit to His patience. Someday, God will send divine judgment upon the world for peoples' continued rejection of Him. We need to be sure our names are written in Heaven.

NOTES



Inserted Lesson:

Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled in Christ

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 10:34-43

KEY VERSES FOR MEMORIZATION

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

BACKGROUND

From cover to cover, the Bible is a book of prophecy. The Old Testament contains a wide range of predictions concerning individual nations, cities, peoples, and events. However, the primary subject of prophecy in the Old Testament is the coming Messiah. His story saturates the narrative—in fact, more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies concern Him. In addition, many other passages typify or hint at the work of redemption that He would accomplish.

The New Testament documents the fulfillment of many of those prophecies and types. Hundreds of years after the era of the prophets, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, His lineage, His betrayal, His death, and His resurrection aligned precisely with what the prophets foretold. In addition, the New Testament contains prophecies about His coming back again.

Following Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, as He walked on the road to Emmaus with two of His followers, He explained to them how the whole of Scripture foretold His coming. Ezekiel, Haggai, Isaiah, and others had spoken of Him because the central component of the prophets’ teachings was the coming of the Messiah who would represent, save, and restore Israel. Jesus helped the two disciples understand that He was the “thread” woven throughout all Scripture when “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we may at times be unsure about prophecies regarding Jesus. How do we know what applies to Him? And why is it so crucial for us to grasp what the Old Testament foretold about the Messiah? In this lesson, we will explore the answers to those questions and others.

QUESTIONS

1. The beauty of the Creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis was marred when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God. As a result, the relationship they had previously enjoyed with Him was severed, and the righteous nature with which they had been created was changed to a sinful one. In addition, the serpent who had tempted Eve to sin was cursed. God’s pronouncement to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 is the first Old Testament Messianic prophecy. How would you explain this prophecy?

2. The prophecies of the Messiah span from Genesis to Malachi—the prophet Malachi said that the “Sun of righteousness” would arise with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). This was part of the final recorded utterance of the Old Testament prophets. Four hundred years passed, and during all that time, devout individuals waited for the promised Messiah. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John present Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. What do the following prophecies tell us about the Messiah’s birth? Genesis 12:3; 2 Samuel 7:12-14; Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Hosea 11:1

3. Long before Christ's birth, a number of Old Testament prophets described His mission on this earth. Isaiah was one of them. Though he lived about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus, he gave us much insight about how and what the Messiah would preach. What details about the Messiah's ministry do the following prophecies by Isaiah give? Isaiah 11:1-5; 42:1-4; 61:1-2

4. Perhaps one of the most beautiful and familiar prophecies regarding the coming Messiah is found in our key verses, Isaiah 9:6-7. Four descriptive names are given for the Messiah in these verses. The words "Wonderful" and "Counselor" could be linked together in translation as being "The Wonderful Counselor." The other names ascribed to Him are "The mighty God," "The everlasting Father," and "The Prince of Peace." What do these names suggest to you regarding the character and nature of the Messiah?

5. Despite the Messiah's peaceful and healing ministry, the prophets foretold that He would be rejected by His own people and that the rulers would plot to kill Him. The prophets warned that someone who had broken bread (eaten) with the Messiah would betray Him¹ for thirty pieces of silver that would later be used to buy a potter's field.² Upon His betrayal, the Messiah's closest friends would desert Him.³ How were these prophecies fulfilled at the close of Jesus' earthly ministry? Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:3-10; Mark 14:50

6. The most detailed Old Testament prophecies about Jesus concern His death and resurrection—this was the pivotal moment in human history, and the most important event the world has ever known. Isaiah described how the Messiah would remain silent in the face of false accusations and would be beaten, mocked, and spat upon.⁴ The Psalmist foretold that the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced but His bones would not be broken.⁵ The Savior would die among criminals,⁶ and people would cast lots for His clothing.⁷ Also, onlookers would taunt the Anointed One by telling Him to ask the Lord He spoke of so often to rescue Him.⁸ Jesus fulfilled these prophecies of the Messiah's death down to the last agonizing detail during His trial and crucifixion. What does the crucifixion of Jesus mean to you?

7. King David foreshadowed the Messiah's resurrection by proclaiming in Psalm 16:10 that God would not abandon the Messiah to the realm of the dead or let the Messiah's body decay. He also wrote that the Messiah would ascend to Heaven and sit at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1). What proof do we have that these prophecies were fulfilled by Christ? Matthew 28:5-10, 16-17, and Acts 7:54-56

8. The only reasonable way to explain the many fulfilled prophecies regarding Jesus Christ is that they were of divine origin. We read in 2 Peter 1:21, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, contains over three hundred prophecies that Jesus fulfilled through His life, death, and resurrection.

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Old Testament prophets offered a wide range of details about the Messiah's life, death, and victorious resurrection. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies so precisely that there can be no doubt that He is the promised Messiah.

[illegible]

1. Psalm 41:9
2. Zechariah 11:12-13
3. Psalm 31:11, Zechariah 13:7
4. Isaiah 50:6
5. Psalm 22:16-17; 34:20
6. Isaiah 53:9
7. Psalm 22:18
8. Psalm 22:8

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SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 25:1 through 32:32

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.” (Ezekiel 25:17)

BACKGROUND

After relaying God’s messages of judgment to the Jewish people in previous chapters, the focus shifts in Ezekiel 25-32 as God directed the prophet to proclaim judgment upon surrounding nations. Oracles were given to seven places—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. Brief mention is also made of several additional areas.

Most of these nations bordered Judah, and they exemplified hostility toward her. God would judge them for their attitudes and aggression against His people, along with their own sins of pride and materialism. Judah’s disobedience had resulted in God’s stern rebuke and the people’s eventual captivity, and God indicated that the punishment of these other nations would be just as severe.

These neighboring countries may not have realized that the recent overthrow of Judah by Babylon was not merely a judgment upon the Jews; it was also a warning to their own countries. Although God had focused first on the sins of His people, He would not ignore the pagan nations around them that had also sinned.

Babylon was not included among the nations addressed in these chapters. While the reason for this is not given, perhaps it was because God was using the Babylonians to execute His judgment. In Ezekiel’s time, Babylon had already or would soon conquer all of these countries.

These chapters contain several important lessons:

- God is sovereign over all people and nations.
- God is just. He takes note of evil and punishes it in His own time and way.
- God sometimes uses unrighteous nations or people as His instruments of judgment.
- God’s moral law is universal and all will be judged by His standards.

A recurring theme in these messages is “they shall know that I am the Lord GOD.” Still today, God wants every person to understand that He is over all and is worthy of obedience, worship, and praise. Every

soul will recognize this in eternity. We want to learn from the fate of Judah’s neighbors, and give God His rightful place in our lives.

QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 25, Ezekiel delivered messages against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia. What was the sin of these nations, and what punishment was predicted?

- Ammon (verses 2-7)
- Moab (verses 8-11)
- Edom (verses 12-14)
- Philistia (verses 15-17)

2. The messages of judgment delivered to Edom and Philistia in Ezekiel 25:12-17 include eight instances of the words *vengeance* and *revenge*. What is the definition of “vengeance”? How can we avoid God’s vengeance in our lives?

3. Chapters 26-28 address Tyre, also called Tyrus, which was the capitol of Phoenicia. Built in two sections—part on an island and part on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea—the city was a commercial hub whose mariners were renowned. Greed and materialism were among the sins of Tyre. Its people were self-sufficient and intent upon obtaining

wealth and all the pleasures and benefits that riches could buy. As a result, God said Tyre would be demolished. Greed and materialism continue to be a trap in our time. What could be some of the signs of a materialistic focus, and how can we prevent it in our lives?

4. Chapter 27 describes Tyre’s magnificent ships, her adept mariners, and the costly merchandise that she traded. While there was much about the city to admire, God condemned Tyre for boasting, “I am of perfect beauty” (Ezekiel 27:3). The king of Tyre (also called the prince) exemplified pride as well. Ezekiel 28:2 says he considered himself to be a god and believed he had become wealthy by his own wisdom and understanding. Ultimately, pride was what caused God to determine the downfall of Tyre and its king. What is the difference between the pride that God hates and will judge, and a sense of satisfaction about a job well done?

5. Zidon (also called Sidon) was a Phoenician town about twenty miles north of Tyre. While its sin is not named, Ezekiel 28:24 indicates that disdain for Israel may have been one of its problems. What did the prophecy say would happen to Zidon, and what would the people understand as a result? Ezekiel 28:22-23

6. The last few verses of chapter 28 extend a message of hope to the people of Israel. What was the promise given to them? Ezekiel 28:25-26

7. Chapters 29-32 contain seven messages of judgment against Egypt. In Ezekiel’s time, Pharaoh and the Egyptian empire were mighty forces in the world, second only to Babylon. However, God instructed the prophet to “take up a lamentation for Pharaoh” (32:2) and “wail for the multitude of Egypt” (32:18). In Ezekiel 32:11-12, what did God say would happen to Egypt? Given the many grievous sins of Pharaoh and Egypt, what do you think God’s instruction for Ezekiel to feel sorrow for them reveals about His nature?

8. Egypt had a long history of interaction with Israel, and as a result, the nation had experienced both God’s favor and His judgment. During the time of Joseph, the Egyptians enjoyed the benevolence and blessing of God. Years later, when Pharaoh and his people hardened their hearts against God during the time of Moses, God sent judgment in the form of devastating plagues and the eventual drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. In Ezekiel’s time, the Egyptians had watched God’s judgment unfold upon the nation of Judah. Egypt should have understood that rebellion against God always brings consequences. In our day, many people have heard the Gospel, yet do not follow God’s instructions. How can we learn from the Egyptians and be sure that we heed what God says? And how can we encourage others, including the unsaved, to heed also?

CONCLUSION

The Bible says that all nations and people will one day be humbled before God, and only the righteous will enjoy His eternal blessings. The judgments that fell upon the nations in today’s text should both warn and encourage all those who honor God.

NOTES



Inserted Lesson:

Prophecies of End Times

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Matthew 24:3-14, 2 Timothy 3:1-5

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.” (Isaiah 42:9)

BACKGROUND

The Bible is a written record not only of history but also of what is to come. The pages of the Old and New Testaments contain hundreds of prophecies and revelations — some of them very detailed and specific — of events that have not yet occurred. However, we know they *will* take place. Scripture is full of prophecies that already have taken place precisely as God revealed, and prophecies of events in the last days will transpire just as surely.

People around the globe discuss and debate what the future holds, though many ignore the prophetic signs playing out around them. There has never been a period in history when end-time prophecies aligned more closely with the conditions of the world than they do today. For believers, that is an exciting thought! Clearly, the culmination of God’s dealing with the people of this earth will soon occur.

Fully understanding prophecies concerning coming events can be challenging, so we should approach such passages with humility rather than dogmatic absoluteness. God has given man only limited glimpses of many aspects of the future. On the other hand, Scripture is very explicit about some coming events. As followers of Christ, we should seek to understand Biblical prophecies as clearly as possible, looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance. As we explore these indicators of what the future holds, we discover God’s hand in the chaos around us, and that gives us hope.

QUESTIONS

1. In Daniel 2, we read of a prophecy that encompassed a wide swath of world history. This chapter tells of King Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream of a great image made of various materials, and Daniel’s interpretation of the dream’s meaning. Bible scholars concur that the various parts of the image represented a succession of world empires through the ages. In verse 34, the stone cut without hands that destroyed the last kingdom represents the Messiah and King of kings, Jesus Christ. Looking back through world

history and the rise and fall of great kingdoms and dynasties, what can we conclude from this prophetic revelation about earthly powers? Why is this important to us as believers?

2. In God’s Word, the nation of Israel often is a prophetic signpost. In Isaiah 11:12 we read a specific prophecy regarding Israel: “And he [God] shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” That prophecy was fulfilled in 1948 when Israel became a nation for the first time since 597 B.C. Since then, numerous Biblical prophecies regarding Israel have come to pass, including the return of rainfall to the land, the restoration of a pure language, the establishing of the shekel as official currency, and a number of astonishing military victories. We find another prophecy regarding Israel in Zechariah 12:1-3. In what ways has this prophecy been fulfilled in the nation of Israel?

3. One of the most detailed passages in the Bible concerning end-time events, apart from the Book of Revelation, is found in Matthew chapter 24. When Jesus’ disciples asked Him what signs would precede His coming and the end of the world, He responded with a comprehensive list in a message referred to as His “Olivet Discourse.” In it, Christ telescoped near future events concerning the Jewish people of His

day, and distant future events that would not occur until the time of the end. Some of these signs have already occurred, some are occurring today, and some are still to come. In Matthew 24:3-14, which of the signs Christ predicted do you see occurring in the world today?

4. In addition to Jesus’ warning in His Olivet Discourse, prophets in the Old Testament and Christ’s disciples in the New Testament spoke of signs that would indicate Christ’s return to this earth is imminent. For example, in the Old Testament, Daniel predicted that in the last days, multitudes would travel to and fro, and knowledge would increase (Daniel 12:4). Zechariah spoke of the use of nuclear weapons (see Zechariah 14:12). In the New Testament, Peter predicted that many false prophets would emerge, bringing in heresies (2 Peter 2:1-2). John the Revelator indicated that the Gospel would be preached as a witness to all nations (Revelation 14:6). Why do you think God provided so many and varied signs related to the condition of the world at the end of time?

5. In addition to foretelling world conditions just prior to Christ’s return, Biblical prophecies paint a graphic picture of the human condition at that time. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, described to Timothy how the last days would be

characterized by sinfulness. He introduced this portion of his epistle with the statement, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” In that statement, the Greek word translated *perilous* means “hard to bear, troublesome, dangerous.” Then Paul proceeded to describe what brought about the peril: the sinfulness of man. What does 2 Timothy 3:1-5 tell us about the condition of humanity in the last days?

6. The Second Coming of Christ is a future event so important that it is mentioned in almost every New Testament book, and the imminence of His return is a theme woven through the prophetic passages of Scripture concerning this subject. The Second Coming encompasses two separate events: the Rapture of the Church, when Christ comes to claim His waiting Bride; and the Revelation of Christ, when Jesus comes with His saints from Heaven to execute judgment upon the ungodly and to set up His Millennial Kingdom and reign on this earth for a thousand years. According to the prophetic statements Paul made to the saints in Thessalonica and Corinth, what will happen to believers at the time of the Rapture? 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

7. While the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is taking place above, Bible prophecy indicates that a terrible outpouring of God’s wrath will occur on earth because of mankind’s rejection of God’s love and mercy. In the Book of Revelation, chapters 6-19 describe that time of catastrophic trouble and terrible suffering. Daniel, prophesying of it, said, “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1). How did Jesus characterize this time of trouble upon the earth? Matthew 24:21

9. The Word of God contains numerous prophecies of Christ's future reign on this earth following the seven-year period of the Great Tribulation. Matthew 2:6 predicts that a governor will come out of Judah and reign over God's people. In Luke 1:32-33, the angel announced to Mary that Jesus would be given the throne of his father David, and that He would reign over the house of Jacob forever. The prophet Daniel foretold that dominion, glory, and a kingdom

CONCLUSION

NOTES

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SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ezekiel 33:1 through 48:35

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (Ezekiel 37:26-27)

BACKGROUND

The fall of Jerusalem marked a turning point in the subject, tone, and emphasis of Ezekiel's messages. Up to chapter 33, the prophet's primary purpose had been to warn the exiles in Babylon of the soon-coming judgment upon Judah (chapters 1-24) and upon the surrounding heathen nations (chapters 25-32). Once Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, God directed the prophet to change from messages of doom and punishment to messages of comfort and future restoration for Israel. While there are still warnings in these chapters, they are part of a larger emphasis on hope.

The climax of the book comes in chapters 40-48, which describe a future time in which the people of Israel will be fully restored to their God. This restoration will fulfill the promise God made to Abraham: that his descendants would be blessed and would be a blessing (see Genesis 12:1-3). In Ezekiel's vision of God's final, perfect kingdom, the restored Temple worship portrayed Israel's future redemption and restoration in a way both the prophet and the people could understand, and confirmed God's faithfulness to Israel.

These chapters reveal the sovereignty of God, His fairness, and His good plans for Israel that will be fulfilled one day when God and His people live in a new era of blessing and communion. The book of Ezekiel opens with a vision, and closes with the longest recorded vision in the Old Testament—one that offered the people hope in spite of the depressing realities of the captivity they were enduring.

QUESTIONS

1. In the first nine verses of chapter 33, the prophet was reminded of his call to be a watchman who would warn the people of spiritual dangers. God declared that if Ezekiel failed to fulfill this charge, he would be held accountable for the messages he had been commissioned to proclaim. The chapter continues with a message from the Lord asserting that spiritual life could be gained through turning from wickedness to

righteousness. What key Bible doctrines are alluded to in Ezekiel 33:13-16?

2. Chapter 34 presents a contrast between the behavior of Israel's unfaithful shepherds—the civil and religious leaders of Israel—and the behavior of a good shepherd. Verses 2-7 outline the offences of the shepherds of Israel, which included exploiting the common people to feed and clothe themselves. In addition, they had neglected the sick and infirm, failed to search for the lost, and ruled with force and cruelty. As a result, the sheep—the people of Israel—were “scattered upon all the face of the earth” and had become prey. In contrast, what did God promise in verses 11-16 that the true Shepherd would do for the people?

3. Military invaders of Ezekiel's era typically employed a “scorched earth” policy designed to wipe out any future resistance by the conquered nation. Nebuchadnezzar's lengthy siege of Jerusalem had taken a devastating toll on Judah, and the land was left ravaged and uncultivated. In chapter 36, God indicated through Ezekiel that this severe judgment was because the people had engaged in idolatry and bloodshed (see verse 18). However, Ezekiel also was told to describe a coming restoration that would be truly remarkable. What specific evidences of renewal were promised in verses 8-12?

4. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the people who survived were overcome with hopelessness. They cried in despair, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost” (Ezekiel 37:11). God responded by giving Ezekiel a striking and visual message of encouragement. Transported by the Spirit to the midst of a valley full of dry bones, Ezekiel was asked the question, “Can these bones live?” When the

prophet responded, “O Lord GOD, thou knowest,” he was told to prophesy to the bones. What happened when he obeyed? Ezekiel 37:7-10

5. In Ezekiel 37:15-17, God instructed Ezekiel to take two sticks and write on them names representing the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah). Then Ezekiel was instructed to join the two sticks together to “make them one stick” in his hand. According to verses 19-22, how was he to respond when the people asked him the meaning of this object lesson?

6. Ezekiel 38 and 39 are a prophecy against a confederacy of nations, referred to as Gog and Magog, that will attack Israel with the purpose of destroying the Jewish nation. This will draw God’s profound anger; the words “my fury shall come up in my face” in Ezekiel 38:18 describe His wrath when enemy armies set foot in Israel. As a result, the Lord will personally intervene to defeat them. Based on Ezekiel 38:19-22, what are some of the natural elements God will use to overcome the enemy armies in this battle?

7. Chapters 40-42 continue the theme of Israel’s eventual restoration, with a focus on Ezekiel’s vision of a rebuilt Temple. This vision took place about 573 B.C., fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem to the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. In the vision, a divinely appointed guide led the prophet through the restored Temple complex. Precise measurements were taken, and Ezekiel was told to record what he saw and declare it to the people of Israel. Why do you think it was important for the people of Ezekiel’s era to hear about a Temple that did not exist at that time?

8. After the vivid and detailed description of the Temple complex in the preceding three chapters, in chapter 43 Ezekiel witnessed God’s return by way

of the eastern gate. Then Ezekiel was transported to the inner court, where he observed the glory of the Lord fill the Temple, much as had happened at the dedication of Solomon’s Temple. Though Ezekiel had witnessed the glory of God twice before, he was so overwhelmed that once again he fell on his face in reverence and awe. Since the departure of God’s glory had signaled the onset of the destruction of the city and Temple, what do you think the return of God’s glory symbolized?

9. Chapters 45-46 describe the renewal of worship in the Temple and the offerings, feasts, festivals, and worship ordinances that will one day take place in restored Israel. Many Bible scholars believe that the offerings described in these chapters are commemorations of Christ’s sacrifice of Himself for the sins of mankind—they will be “picture lessons” and reminders to the people of the Messiah’s marvelous saving work. What type of offerings can we bring the Lord in our day to show our gratitude and appreciation for all He has done for us?

10. Chapter 47 begins a description of the transformed land of Israel that continues through chapter 48. We read of the great river that flows from the Temple, which begins as a small stream but rapidly increases in size. A description is also given of the land allotments made to the various tribes. The city at the center of the restored nation will be named “The LORD is there,” using God’s proper name. The details found in these chapters portray a land and city very different from the Israel or Jerusalem that previously existed in all of recorded history. What blessings will be enjoyed by those living in restored Israel? Ezekiel 47:8-9, 12, 21-22

CONCLUSION

Although many of us are not Jewish by birth, Jesus Christ made it possible for each of us to have an eternal possession in a place where God will dwell. What a hope! This homeland will be blessed beyond anything we can imagine, and it will be worth any effort necessary to be there.



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Daniel 1:1 through 3:30

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”
(Daniel 1:19-20)

BACKGROUND

As the prophets Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah had warned, Israel’s continued sinning eventually led to God’s judgment, and the Babylonians were the instrument God used to administer that judgment. In 605 B.C., the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah. Daniel, a young man at the time, was among the first group of Jews carried into exile after Nebuchadnezzar’s armies plundered and subdued Jerusalem.

Living in a pagan and idolatrous culture, Daniel maintained his integrity and allegiance to the one true God. His faithful service to the Lord in a land and culture not his own makes him an exemplary figure in Scripture.

Sometime after the overthrow of Babylon in 539 B.C., Daniel recorded his experiences and prophecies for his fellow exiles, reminding them that God had orchestrated the events of world history according to His sovereign will, and encouraging them with God’s promises of restoration in the final stage of His Kingdom. The first six chapters of the Book of Daniel are historical in nature and concern Daniel’s life in Babylon under three administrations. The remainder of the book records Daniel’s revelations concerning Israel and various world empires.

Chapters 1-3 of the Book of Daniel are a part of the historical narrative that opens the book. Nebuchadnezzar commonly enrolled the brightest and most talented youth from conquered nations in a program indoctrinating them in the language and culture of Babylon, with the intent of equipping them to serve in his realm. The text for this lesson recounts the challenges Daniel and other Jewish captives encountered in their early years in the Babylonian kingdom, revealing how they proved their commitment to God, and how He stood with them and delivered them in times of crisis.

QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 1 begins the account of Daniel and his three companions who were among the captives taken to Babylon. As part of their indoctrination, the young men were given a specialized diet that included a daily provision of “the king’s meat.” However, Daniel and the others named did not want to defile themselves by eating of this meat, likely because it had been offered to idols and so was unlawful for a Jew to eat. What did Daniel request of the person in charge of their care, and what was the outcome? Daniel 1:8-15

2. Daniel and his companions in exile held strongly to their principles. Verse 8 indicates that Daniel “purposed in his heart” not to defile himself by eating the specific foods provided for them by the command of the king. What can we learn from this account regarding the importance of establishing and staying true to our religious convictions?

3. Like Daniel, we live in an environment where ungodliness and immorality are pervasive. What are some aspects of society that could destabilize your Christian values or potentially “defile” your conscience? What are some steps you can take to avoid being contaminated?

4. Chapter 2 recounts King Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream and the impossible demand he made of his wise men regarding its interpretation. Daniel and his companions were not among the wise men initially summoned before the king, but according to verse 13, they were among those to be slain. In what ways was the providential care of God apparent in this incident? Daniel 2:14-19

5. Verses 24-45 of Daniel 2 describe Daniel's confident claim regarding the king's dream and his subsequent interpretation of it. The image in the dream was a prophecy of the future Gentile world powers. Looking back through the history of the world, what can we conclude about earthly governments? Why is verse 34 important to us as believers?

6. Chapter 3 describes King Nebuchadnezzar's self-glorifying image, the edict for all to bow down to it, and the refusal of the three Hebrews to do so. The wording in verses 8 and 12 implies that the "certain Chaldeans" who brought the charges against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were resentful that these conscripts from a conquered nation held positions above them in authority. What three charges did the Chaldeans make against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and how did Nebuchadnezzar react to the accusations? Daniel 3:12-13

7. Though King Nebuchadnezzar was enraged when informed that the three Hebrews had not bowed, he offered them a chance to reverse their position (see verse 15). However, he made clear that if they refused again, they would immediately be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. What are some of the rationalizations the Hebrews could have come up with

in order to obey the king and avoid this terrible fate had their trust in God not been so strong?

8. The threatened punishment for not bowing before Nebuchadnezzar's image was immediately enacted. The fact that the three Hebrews were "bound in their coats" and the furnace was heated "exceeding hot" (verses 21-22) shows that everything was done to ensure the three men would be quickly and completely consumed. What details found in Daniel 3:20-27 prove the supernatural nature of the three Hebrews' deliverance?

9. While the deliverance of the three Hebrews from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was a mighty miracle, not every believer throughout the ages of history has been delivered. Many have suffered intense persecution and have given their lives for their faith. Why do you think God miraculously intervenes for some of His followers, but not for others?

10. How might the experiences and example of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in today's text help you deal with the challenges in your life?

CONCLUSION

Do we hold so strongly to our faith in God that whatever happens, we will do what He says? Such conviction helps us overcome temptation and gives us wisdom and stability in changing circumstances. Let's purpose to prayerfully live out our convictions in everyday life and trust God for the results!



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Daniel 4:1 through 6:28

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (Daniel 6:5)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Daniel can be divided into two nearly equal parts. The first six chapters are historical in nature and concern Daniel’s life in Babylon under several foreign kings. The remainder of the book is primarily a record of Daniel’s revelations concerning Israel and various world empires. This week’s text continues the historical narrative begun in chapters 1 through 3.

Chapter 4 covers the judgment of King Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned over the Babylonian Empire from 605-562 B.C. During that time, he led his armies in conquering numerous kingdoms and expanding and fortifying the city of Babylon. This portion of text describes the king’s troubling dream and Daniel’s interpretation, the king’s mental failure and dethronement due to pride, and his ultimate restoration. Although the precise dates of these events are unknown, scholars believe they took place near the end of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign.

The events of chapter 5 occurred sixty-six years after Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem and the deportation of Daniel and other exiles to Babylon. During this period, Belshazzar was co-ruler of the Babylonian Empire with his father, Nabonidus. While Nabonidus was away attempting to reopen trade routes captured by Cyrus and his Persian armies, Belshazzar held a profane feast for a thousand of his lords. During the feast, a hand appeared and wrote upon the wall of the banquet chamber, and Daniel was called upon to interpret the meaning of the words. That very night, as the writing foretold, Belshazzar was slain and the Chaldean Empire fell to the combined military forces of the Medes and the Persians.

Chapter 6 records events that occurred during the reign of Darius the Mede. Daniel, by then an elderly man, was one of Darius’ three presidents set over the princes of the kingdom. This chapter describes the plot the other presidents devised against Daniel because he was preferred over them, the king’s distress over the punishment that could not be rescinded, and Daniel’s miraculous deliverance from the den of lions.

QUESTIONS

1. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest of the Babylonian kings. He had been victorious in battle and was the successful builder of a flourishing realm. However, chapter 4 describes a troubling dream that destroyed his peace. When the pagan “wise men” of Babylon could not interpret the dream’s meaning, Daniel (referred to by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar) was called upon to explain it. What did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? Daniel 4:10-16

2. In verse 27, Daniel advised the king to humble himself, hoping that would forestall the pending judgment. However, Nebuchadnezzar did not do so. A year later, as he was walking in his palace, he boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built . . .?” When and how was God’s judgment poured out? Daniel 4:30-33

3. The events of chapter 5 took place in 539 B.C. during the reign of King Belshazzar. The territories surrounding Babylon had fallen into the hands of the Medes and Persians, and the city of Babylon itself was under siege. However, Belshazzar seemingly felt the city was sufficiently fortified and had provisions enough to withstand any assault. In spite of the military threat, he hosted a great feast for a thousand of his lords. What profane action did Belshazzar take while the feast was underway? Daniel 5:1-4

4. Daniel reminded Belshazzar that his ancestor, King Nebuchadnezzar, had a “heart [that] was lifted up” and a “mind hardened in pride,” and God had humbled him. Although Belshazzar knew this, he

ignored that warning in his family history, to his own detriment. According to Daniel 5:22-23, Belshazzar was condemned because he had not humbled his heart but had lifted up himself against the Lord of Heaven, and used sanctified vessels in a profane way. What are some indicators of a prideful spirit? What steps can we take to avoid allowing a spirit of pride to creep into our lives?

5. During Belshazzar’s feast at the royal palace, an astonishing and disquieting event took place: a man’s hand appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the banquet chamber. The message consisted of only three words, with the first repeated for emphasis. However, the wise men of the realm were unable to explain the meaning, and ultimately, Daniel was brought before the king to interpret it. How would you summarize Daniel’s explanation of the words on the wall, and when was the prophetic message fulfilled? Daniel 5:25-30

6. In chapter 6, Daniel’s “excellent spirit” prompted power-hungry colleagues and subordinates to set a unique trap for him. They persuaded King Darius to sign a decree that prohibited making a request of anyone other than the king for thirty days. Since Daniel prayed openly and regularly to God, he had to choose whether or not he would obey the royal decree. What do you think enabled Daniel to make the decision he did?

7. In the Medo-Persian Empire, a formal decree by the king was so binding that even the king himself could not change it. Thus, when the jealous presidents reported to King Darius that Daniel had disobeyed his edict, the king had no choice but to follow through with the stated punishment. What details in verses

14 and 18-20 are indicators of Darius’ mental and emotional state when he became aware of the fate that awaited Daniel because of his decree?

8. King Darius arose very early the next morning and went to the den of lions. He cried out, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?” The law had been kept; Daniel had received the prescribed punishment for disobedience to the king’s decree. However, the outcome was not what Daniel’s opponents expected. Daniel’s voice sounded forth from the den, “O King, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.” In verses 23 and 25-27, what evidences do we see of the esteem in which the king held Daniel?

CONCLUSION

When we are secure in our relationship with God and are doing our best to live in obedience to Him, God will help us face challenges with composure and grace. He will not fail His own!

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Daniel 7:1 through 12:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.” (Daniel 7:27)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Daniel can be divided into two nearly equal parts. The first six chapters are historical in nature and concern Daniel’s life in Babylon under several kings. The remainder of the book, our text for this week, is primarily a record of Daniel’s revelations concerning Israel and various world empires.

Bible scholars consider the Book of Daniel to be the major apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, as chapters 7 through 12 relate to the end times. (Apocalyptic literature is usually symbolic, visionary, and prophetic in nature, and typically was written under oppressive conditions with the intent of encouraging the people of God.) These chapters offer not only information regarding the near future of Israel in Daniel’s time but also a view of end-time events with worldwide implications. The key message conveyed is that in the last days, the great nations of the world will rise up against the Lord, but God will protect His people, and the Kingdom He establishes will prevail and endure forever.

QUESTIONS

1. In the vision described in chapter 7, Daniel saw a number of troubling images that included violent conflict between powerful animal-like creatures, symbolizing the four successive world empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In verse 9, the vision shifts to a prophecy of the end times that is considered one of the pinnacles of Old Testament revelation. In it, Daniel saw the “Ancient of days” upon a throne, meting out judgment to the four beasts. Following the divine judgment, who came before the Ancient of days, and what was given Him?
Daniel 7:13-14

2. Daniel’s second recorded vision, described in chapter 8, occurred during the final year of Belshazzar’s reign. In it, the prophet witnessed a conflict between a ram (representing the Medo-Persian empire), and a he-goat (representing Greece). Verses 15-17 relate that as Daniel was pondering the meaning of this vision, a divine being identified as Gabriel came to help him understand. Most of us will not experience an angelic visitation when we have questions about spiritual matters, but what are some ways God might help us gain spiritual understanding?

3. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 9 indicate that Daniel had read a prophecy by Jeremiah, in which he foretold that the exiles would return to their homeland after seventy years. Since Daniel had been in exile for about seventy years, he knew that the captivity was nearly at an end. In response to this understanding, Daniel fell on his face before God and prayed. What lessons can we learn about effective intercession based upon verses 2-20?

4. Following Daniel’s earnest prayer to God, once again the angel Gabriel came to him, this time with a message of hope. Beginning at verse 22 of chapter 9, Gabriel informed Daniel that God had put in place a timetable of seventy weeks of years, which would start when an edict would be proclaimed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Why do you think Gabriel gave Daniel this message? In verse 24, what six purposes did he give for the seventy weeks?

5. Chapter 10 contains an account of Daniel’s experience during the three weeks when he set himself to seek God, and describes what transpired. Verses 5-9 detail his encounter with “a certain man” near the Hiddekel (Tigris) river. This man had a distinct and unusual appearance, but Daniel understood the words he spoke. According to verses 12-14, the messenger was sent in response to Daniel’s prayer. What explanation did he give for the fact that there had been no immediate response to Daniel’s prayer? How did Daniel respond to the messenger?

6. In chapter 11, the angelic messenger began explaining to Daniel the divine plan regarding what would occur in the future of the Jews. Verses 1-35 allude to various ancient rulers, concluding with Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Greek ruler who defiled the Temple in about 168 B.C. While there were no doubt many parts of the plan that Daniel could not fully comprehend, the revelation offered reassurance for God’s people. When they observed previously foretold events taking place as predicted, they would recognize that God was shaping man’s actions in conformity with His will. What does the knowledge that God has planned and ordained the events occurring on the world stage today mean to you?

7. In chapter 11, verse 36, Daniel’s narrative appears to transition from a historical figure to a person who will exalt himself above all gods, including the God of gods. In the New Testament, this individual is

referred to as the Antichrist. The remainder of the chapter describes some of the wars the Antichrist will engage in and the establishment of his headquarters in Jerusalem. The Antichrist will prosper until he sets himself up as god in the Temple in the middle of his seven-year rule. Daniel 12:1 indicates that after the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel, there will be “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.” What is this “time of trouble” a reference to, and who will be protected?

8. Given the events described in chapters 7 through 12, and Daniel 12:1, how would you summarize why is it so important to be ready for Christ’s return?

CONCLUSION

In Daniel 12:9-10, Daniel was told that the prophecies he had received would be “closed up and sealed” and not understood until the time of the end. So while Daniel offers us a glimpse of future events, we have no need to try to completely decipher them. The angel went on to tell Daniel to live out his life, and then rest as he waited for the resurrection at the end of time when he will participate in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. That is also good advice for those of us today who are waiting for the return of Jesus.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Habakkuk 1:1 through 3:19

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

BACKGROUND

Habakkuk wrote during a turbulent period of Judah’s history, likely during the reign of Jehoiakim, and shortly before the Babylonians’ siege and capture of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Little is known of the personal details of Habakkuk’s life; we are merely told in Habakkuk 1:1 that he was recognized as a prophet. The probable time frame of his ministry would make him a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and possibly Zephaniah and Obadiah.

Verse 1 of our text describes Habakkuk’s prophetic vision as a “burden,” indicating that it was a message of destruction. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was deep in sin, and the prophet was troubled about why evil seemed to go unpunished. His perplexity and distress intensified when God revealed that judgment would come to Judah at the hand of the wicked Chaldeans (Babylonians). Habakkuk complained that the Chaldeans were worse than the people of Judah, with a reputation of aggression, cruelty, and horrible atrocities. He struggled with why God would use such an evil nation as His tool of judgment.

In chapter 2, Habakkuk determined to watch and wait for God’s answer to his questions. God gave him a vision (a prophecy or revelation) of events that would come upon Judah. He then pronounced five “woes” of judgment upon the Chaldeans, assuring Habakkuk that justice against that nation would be accomplished in God’s time and according to His plan.

Habakkuk responded in chapter 3. In his prayer, written in the form of a psalm, he sought revival, recalled various historic deliverances of Israel, recognized God’s power over creation and the nations, and rehearsed how God had previously delivered Israel through anointed leaders. Although the stress of the current situation remained, Habakkuk concluded with a declaration of trust in God and a proclamation of God as his strength.

QUESTIONS

1. Habakkuk began with the searching question, “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” In the original Hebrew, the order and tense of his words reveal that the prophet’s question was an indictment of sorts. In essence, he was lamenting, “I have called and You have not listened!” In Habakkuk 1:3, what words describe the cause of the desperation felt by the prophet?

2. God often works in ways beyond our comprehension. He responded to Habakkuk’s question by stating in verse 5 that He would do something to cause onlookers to “wonder marvellously”—they would be completely astounded. In Habakkuk 1:6, what did God say would happen to the land of Judah?

3. The prophet questioned why a holy God would use an evil nation as an instrument of judgment on His own people. However, in Habakkuk 2:1, he determined to station himself like a watchman on the wall and wait to see how God would respond. What attitude do you think was indicated by Habakkuk’s portraying himself as a watchman?

4. God’s response to Habakkuk’s questions is recorded in Habakkuk 2:2-3. In what form did the answer come, and what assurance did it offer the prophet?

5. God reminded Habakkuk that “the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). In the light of what was ahead for the people of Judah, why was this an important point for the prophet to remember?

6. List the five “woes” detailed in chapter 2—the essence of the “burden” written and delivered by the prophet—which indicated that God’s justice would be meted out to the Chaldeans also.

7. In Habakkuk’s concluding prayer, recorded in chapter 3, the prophet entreated God for a revival of His work among the people of Judah. While his word pictures and historical allusions may not be entirely clear in our era, what clues can you find in this chapter concerning how to pray for revival in our day?

8. Habakkuk ended his prophecy with a dynamically personal declaration. Summarize his conclusion, given in Habakkuk 3:17-18. What do his words in these verses teach us?

9. In the final verse of the book of Habakkuk, the prophet declared, “The LORD God is my strength . . .” and then went on to allude to the agility and balance of a deer in treacherous high places. What point do you think he was making with this illustration?

CONCLUSION

While we cannot see all that God is doing or will do in the future, we can rest assured that He is God and He will do what is right.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Obadiah 1:1-21

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.” (Obadiah 1:15)

BACKGROUND

Obadiah’s prophecy, recorded in the brief book bearing his name, is unique in that the prophet had little to say to the nations of Israel or Judah. Instead, his focus was on the sins of Edom, Judah’s southern neighbor, and the judgment God would send upon that nation.

The age-old, smoldering animosity between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Esau had flared up once again, as it had many times in prior centuries. The first and largest portion of Obadiah’s prophecy is the condemnation of Edom. Fearlessly, the prophet delivered God’s message: disaster was coming. Despite the Edomites’ arrogant pride and the supposed security provided by their natural defenses, the nation would be destroyed because of their treachery toward their “brothers” in Judah.

After delivering his scathing denunciation, Obadiah’s concluding words contain a foreshadowing of end times in a reference to the Day of the Lord, a prominent Old Testament theme. In that great day, Edom will be among the godless nations to be judged. By contrast, Mount Zion will be a scene of holiness and deliverance. The house of Jacob (Israel and Judah) will possess the territories God gave their forefathers, and “the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (Obadiah 1:21).

While we do not know if Obadiah’s prophecy stirred a reaction in the streets or palaces of Edom, it has unquestionably provided a somber reminder for the children of God through the ages. His message tells all Christians everywhere that God’s perfect justice will one day prevail over those who ignore the needs of others, rejoice at their problems, or take advantage of their crises.

QUESTIONS

1. Obadiah’s prophecy was inspired by a “vision” or divine revelation. As an ambassador (or messenger), he had been sent among the people of Judah with a “rumour [report or tidings] from the LORD” (verse 1). According to verse 2, what was the rumor, and how would you explain what this message meant?

2. Verse 3 begins a series of detailed indictments against Edom. First, the prophet stated that the Edomites were filled with pride, and that their pride had deceived them. In what ways do you think pride is deceptive?

3. Verses 3-4 point to one source of the Edomites’ feeling of security—the fact that they lived in a location with unique natural fortifications. The capital of the Edomites, known then as Sela (and later as Petra), was a city carved into rock cliffs, and was accessible only by a narrow canyon almost a mile long. Since the Edomites dwelt “in the clefts of the rock,” they thought they were impregnable to invading armies. However, God indicated that their trust was misplaced, and that He would bring them down from their lofty location. What are some aspects of life that people of our day put their trust in? Why is such trust so precarious?

4. In verses 5-6, what two types of individuals did Obadiah refer to, and how did he describe the extent of Edom’s devastation?

5. According to verse 7, by whose hand would the destruction of Edom come?

6. The Edomites were proud of their wise men. In spite of the reputation of these supposedly wise individuals, how do we know that they were actually foolish?
Obadiah 1:8-9

7. God never sends judgment that is not deserved. In verses 10-14, Obadiah told the Edomites why this awful devastation was coming upon them. What did he say Edom had done that resulted in God’s judgment?

8. Today, we can see people who are much like the Edomites of Obadiah’s time. Arrogance, pride, dishonesty, and envy are all around us. What is the appropriate response when we observe such individuals suffering distress or calamity?

9. Obadiah’s prophecy ends with hope and encouragement (verses 17-21). The prophet looked forward to a day when “the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites,” when “saviors” (deliverers) will come to Mount Zion, and “the kingdom shall be the LORD’s.” What parallel do you see between the prophet’s final statement of hope to the people of Judah, and the hope we have for the future?

CONCLUSION

Through the prophet Obadiah, God told Edom that the people of Judah whom they had viewed with disdain, plundered, and killed, would one day be restored and enriched. Let us learn from this book not only how certainly God will judge the wicked, but also how much He values His own!

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Esther 1:1 through 10:3

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Esther is a compelling illustration of God’s providential hand at work. Although no direct mention of God occurs in the book, detail after detail reveals His sovereignty. Even though the Jewish people had been exiled from their homeland because of their disobedience to God, they were still the objects of His divine mercy while living in Persia.

The events in this book occurred over an approximate twelve-year span, beginning around 483 B.C. During this period, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever known. Shushan, the capital city, was the location of King Ahasuerus’ winter palace where most of the happenings in the book took place. Ahasuerus’ regime enjoyed an abundance of wealth, which he flaunted before the world to portray the empire’s strength and power.

Chapters 1-2 record that when the king’s first wife was banished for refusing to make an appearance at the king’s banquet, Esther was chosen to be the new queen. Esther’s Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning “myrtle.” Her Persian name, Esther, meant “star,” and likely was a reference to her beauty.

Esther’s relative and guardian, Mordecai, was a Benjamite living in Shushan. Although the events of the book took place some eighty to ninety years after his great-grandparents had been brought there in captivity, he had not lost sight of his heritage or his identity as a Jew. In chapters 3-4, Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman, the king’s prime minister. Infuriated, Haman devised a plot to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Mordecai heard of this plan, and in the well-known words of this week’s focus verse, he challenged Esther to go before the king on behalf of her people.

Chapters 5-10 relate how Esther courageously made her petition to the king and pled for the protection of her people from Haman’s wicked devices. As a result, Haman was executed and Mordecai promoted

to a position of honor. The king then issued a new decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves, thus preserving them from extinction and maintaining the Davidic lineage from which the Messiah would one day come.

The Jewish people celebrate this deliverance on their annual holiday of Purim. The name is the plural form of the Hebrew word *pur*, meaning “lot.” This two-day feast takes place on the fourteenth and fifteenth days in the Jewish month Adar, which typically occurs in February or March. It is a celebration of joy, in which special food is eaten, children dress in costumes, and the participants react loudly at the mention of Haman’s name as the entire Book of Esther is read.

QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 1, an angry King Ahasuerus asked his advisors what he should do when his queen, Vashti, refused to appear at his banquet. Memucan, one of those advisors, suggested that the queen’s refusal would incite kingdom-wide insubordination among the women, and that they would rise up against their husbands. What did Memucan recommend the king do, and what did he suggest would be the outcome? Esther 1:19-20

2. Mordecai apparently had a role in the Persian legal system, as we are told in chapter 2 that he “sat in the king’s gate.” That was where civil trials took place; individuals who sat in the gate were judges or other government officials. Verses 21-23 of chapter 2 describe an assassination plot against the king, which Mordecai overheard and reported to Esther. Esther, in turn, “made known this plot to the king,” and the assassination attempt was foiled. What can we conclude about Mordecai’s character based on his civic role and his actions after learning of the plot against the king’s life?

3. In Esther 3:5-6, we read of Haman’s plot to destroy the Jewish people in revenge for Mordecai’s refusal to bow down to him—he persuaded the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all Jews on a certain date. As the Jewish people contemplated a brutal end to their lives, their families, and their nation, it no doubt seemed that Satan was in control. In our day too, it may seem at times that evil is winning the battle against righteousness. How can the account of Esther encourage us to have a different perspective?

4. Queen Esther had a role in God’s plan, and Mordecai reminded her of that when he asked the rhetorical question of our focus verse, “Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” What did Mordecai want Esther to do, and why was his instruction dangerous for her?
Esther 4:8-12, 16

5. After the king authorized Esther’s presence, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet rather than immediately voicing her request regarding her people. Haman was joyful when he left that banquet, no doubt elated over the honor of dining personally with the king and queen. However, his joy disappeared when Mordecai once again refused to bow to him. What words would you use to describe Haman’s mindset and attitude toward Mordecai? Esther 5:9-13

6. In reviewing the timing and events of chapter 6, what evidences do you see of God’s providence?
Esther 6:1-2, 4, 10

7. Chapter 7 describes Esther’s second banquet for the king and Haman, and her courageous request on behalf of her people. What was the implication of her statement in verse 4 that selling her people into slavery would not “countervail the king’s damage”?

8. The final verse of chapter 8 relates that many of the people of the land became Jews as a result of the mighty deliverance the Jewish people experienced at the hand of God. What are some other benefits that may result from times of hardship and suffering?

9. When the king issued a second decree, this one allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves, the mourning of the Jews turned into joy. Why do you think Mordecai instructed the Jews in Esther 9:20-22 to commemorate their deliverance every year with an annual feast? What are some steps we can take to ensure we do not forget spiritual victories in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Although the name of God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, His providence and deliverance are manifested in a spectacular way. God cares about the needs of His people and He will show Himself mighty on their behalf when they walk according to His plan.

NOTES

Exile in Babylon

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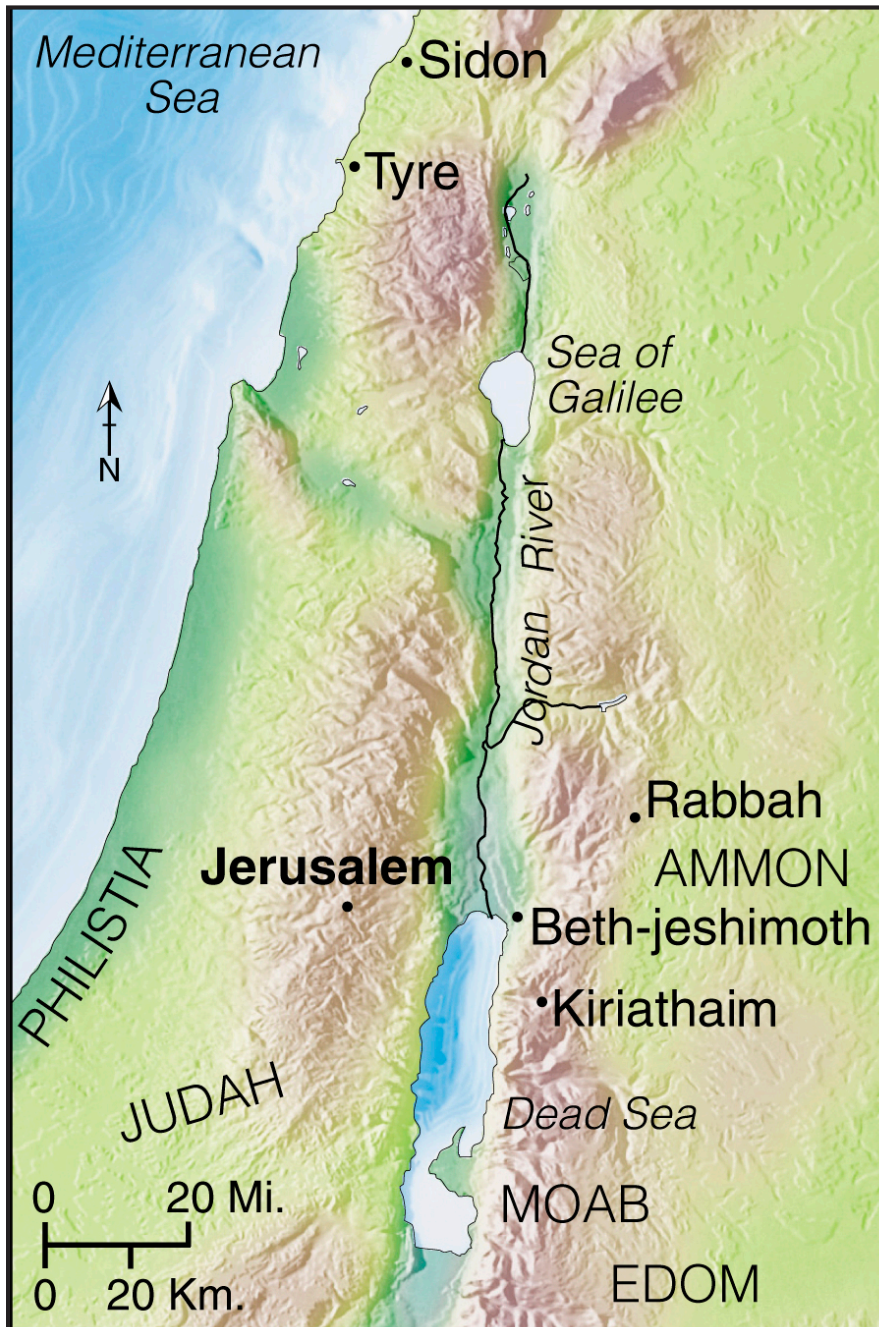
Ezekiel 1:1-3

Ezekiel worked for God right where he was—among the exiles in various colonies near the Kebar* River in Babylonia. Jerusalem and its Temple lay over 500 miles away, but Ezekiel helped the people understand that, although they were far from home, they did not need to be far from God.

*or Chebar

Judah's Enemies

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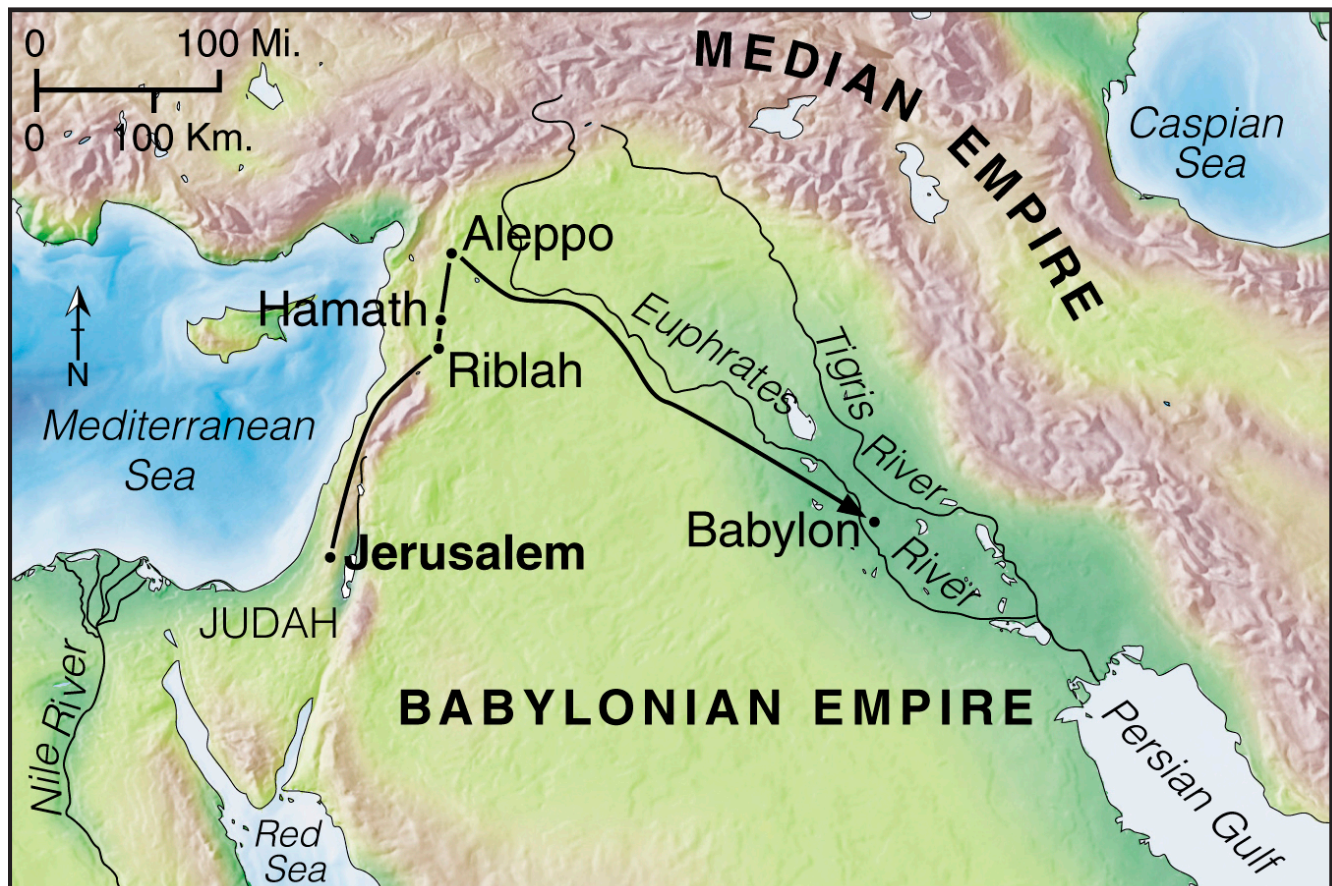


Ezekiel 25:1-17

Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Philistia, although once united with Judah against Babylon, had abandoned Judah and rejoiced to see her ruin. But these nations were as sinful as Judah and would also feel the sting of God's judgment.

Taken to Babylon

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Daniel 1:1-7

Daniel, as a captive of Babylonian soldiers, faced a long and difficult march to a new land. The 500-mile trek, under harsh conditions, certainly tested his faith in God.

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The World of Esther's Day

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Esther 1:1-4; 10:1-3

Esther lived in the capital of the vast Medo-Persian Empire, which incorporated the provinces of Media and Persia, as well as the previous empires of Assyria and Babylon. Esther, a Jewess, was chosen by King Xerxes* to be his queen. The story of how she saved her people takes place in the palace in Susa.

*or Ahasuerus

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