

The Culmination of the Protestant Reformation

Chapter 14



Chapters 3-10 of Ezekiel project a siege against a city named 'Jerusalem' which was to continue for 430 years (Ezekiel 4:1-17). Six grains are parceled out for food to sustain the participants of this siege (Ezekiel 4:9-13). Following the ending of the siege, 'Jerusalem' is subjected to famine/starvation (Ezekiel 5). Subsequently, the inhabitants of this prophetic 'Jeusalem' were selectively marked (transcendental qualification recognition) by an angel with a writing case (Ezekiel 9:4)--following the marking, six angels proceed to execute judgment on the inhabitants of the city who had failed to obtain the critical mark. Following this, live coals of fire are poured out (Ezekiel 10:2) on the city's remaining inhabitants, upon those who had been 'marked'. (It is to be noted that to date history does not record a siege of the sequence, type, and scope to ever have transpired against anyone for 430 years as projected by Ezekiel. And no judgment like that which Ezekiel describes has ever been recorded.)

The question arises as to who, when, or what is designated by this prophecy citing the city Jerusalem. The first known prophetic application of the texts in question was with the ancient Qumran community.¹ These texts were cited as an eschatological expectation and may have served as the motivational rationale for Qumran believers removing themselves to an isolated desert community east of ancient Jerusalem to wait for the culminating textual predictions to materialize. They saw in the texts the harbinger of a time when a predicted Messiah, a teacher of righteousness would appear, and they chose to wait for this event in a Spartan manner of isolation. For this community the prophecy failed, for the Romans attacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the temple was destroyed. Earlier, in 586 B.C., there had been an attack against Jerusalem by the Babylonians in which the sanctuary was sacked and the city razed. Later, in 132 -136 A.D., the Bar Kokhba revolt occurred which was subdued by the Roman Emperor Hadrian with twelve legions in which 500,000 Jews were killed. (In 132 A.D. Jerusalem had been renamed *Aelia Capitolina* and a new temple dedicated to Jupiter was to be built on the ruins of the Second Temple--this, and other actions, had incensed the Jews and there was a revolt.) None of these recorded attacks on ancient Jerusalem, however, fit the time prophecy of Ezekiel chapters 1-10.

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Consideration of the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar and the Siege of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

As cited, Ezekiel chapters one through nine outline the subject, a siege of Jerusalem. The question of our concern: Does the early-recorded siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel? Did the attack by the Roman general Titus in 70 A.D. or the later actions by the Emperor Hadrian fulfill the prophecy? Or is Ezekiel's prophecy predictive of another time? And/or is the prophecy simply the ranting of an early Israelite prophet, in which case the prophecy has no significance at all and nothing is to be made of it?

In regards to the siege by Nebuchadnezzar the archeologist Nahman Avigad, in confirmation of this historical siege, excavated a tower, which originally stood 22 feet high, along Jerusalem's northern wall. This tower, with 12-foot thick walls, was constructed of unworked boulders reinforced by rectangular ashlar at the corners. Babylonian arrowheads recovered from the base of the tower suggest that this tower was the focal point in Nebuchadnezzar's assault on Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This and other evidences confirm the attack of Nebuchadnezzar's army. The Avigad excavation was done four decades ago.

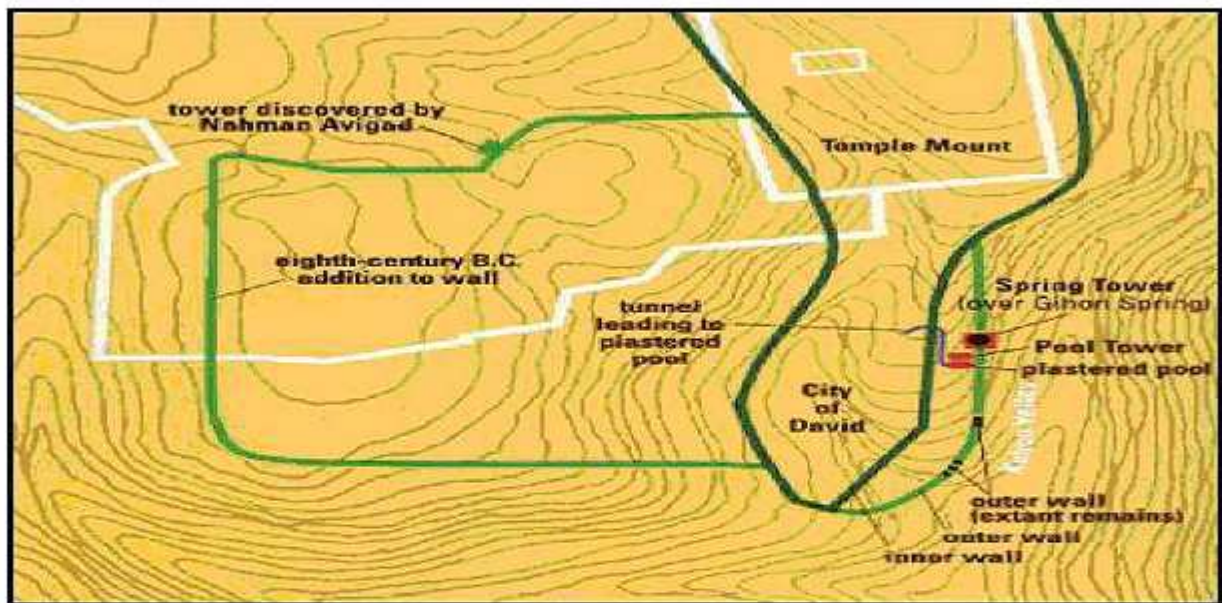
Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged the city in 587-586 B.C. In July of 586 B.C. the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem. In August the temple was reached where people were slain. The Babylonians looted the treasuries of both the sanctuary and the king. All sanctuary vessels and items of value were removed for transport to Babylon. They then burned the sanctuary (II Chronicles 36:17, 18). Additionally, they broke down Jerusalem's walls, burned houses and razed the city. They proceeded to take captives while leaving the poor to be "vinedressers and husbandmen" (II Kings 25:12).

We read concerning the early Babylonian invasion that the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, went up and surrounded Jerusalem because Zedekiah, the king of Israel, had rebelled against him. After a siege of a year and a half, the city was overrun. Zedekiah and his army fled. The final result was the literal destruction of old Jerusalem.

The siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians ended the Davidic dynasty in Israel. However, the historical siege account, does not harmonize with the pattern of attack and smiting as predicted and envisioned by Ezekiel in chapter nine. A candid comparison of the historic facts and the prophetic vision will establish this. Note the attack pattern of the historical siege and the differences with the prophecy.

(1) Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem from without and worked inward whereas Ezekiel's smiting

JERUSALEM TOPOGRAPHY AND PLAT MAP ‡



Not to Scale: Stretched Horizontally for Illustration Illustration From Biblical Archaeology Review

begins from within (at the sanctuary) and spreads throughout the city (II Kings 25:1; Ezekiel 9:6).

(2) When Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged the city they broke down Jerusalem's walls, burned houses, took captives, and razed the city. They left the poorest (II Kings 25:9-12) to be vinedressers and plowmen.

‡ In the 1970s archeologist Nahman Avigad excavated a watchtower from the First Temple period. It stood 22 feet high with 12-foot thick walls and was located some 150 feet from the Broad Wall of Jerusalem. Charred rubble and arrowheads were found at the base of the watchtower. This rubble gave evidence of the furious clash involved in the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

(3) In contrast, the "men" in Ezekiel's prophetic vision were only to mark and to slay those who did not have the mark (Ezekiel 9:5, 6).

(4) After the walls of Jerusalem had been breached, Zedekiah tried to escape at night but was captured. He was taken before Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in the territory of Hamath (II Kings 25:21). Nebuchadnezzar then had a number of male captives killed (about 70+ men-II Kings 25:18-21) and had Zedekiah blinded whereupon he was sent into exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 52:11). He permitted Zedekiah to die in prison after having his sons killed. In comparison, Ezekiel's "men" were not, and did not, spare anyone, but were to slay all the unmarked ones, 'men, maidens, and little children,' without mercy, compassion, or pity (Ezekiel 9:5-10).²

(5) At the ancient city Jerusalem, King Zedekiah, by virtue of office, was in charge of the city. But Zedekiah was a leader under condemnation from God (2 Kings 24:18-20). The "six men" in charge of Ezekiel's visionary Jerusalem were God's servants. They, by contrast, were obedient and were able to receive and to carry out God's instructions (II Kings 24:18, 19; 25:7; Ezekiel 9:1, 2, 3, 6, 11).

(6) Nebuchadnezzar's army, made up of men from a foreign nation, had no way of discerning the innermost secrets or concerns of the hearts of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, no way of marking those who 'sighed and groaned' because of the abominations being committed in the city (Ezekiel 9:4). They were under the orders and command of a foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar.

(7) In Ezekiel's prophetic marking vision, the 'man with the writing case' (Ezekiel 9:3) came from the 'upper gate, which faces toward the north,' (Ezekiel 9:1-2) along with the six men with weapons for destruction. These men had spiritual discernment; they could penetrate the minds of the people and see their innermost secrets and determine who should be marked for mercy and who should remain unmarked. It was the forecast of a Divine transcendent selection process. For the reasons cited, we conclude that the attack by Nebuchadnezzar did not fulfill Ezekiel's prophecy, chapters 1-10. This also must have been recognized by the Qumran community of believers, for they anticipated a future fulfillment of the prophecy.

Furthermore, the attack by King Nebuchadnezzar did not continue for 430 years, the forecasted attack period designated in Ezekiel's prophecy. Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem lasted only for some one-and-one-half to two years.

Although Jerusalem was later subjugated by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD, this was not an attack lasting 430 years. And the Roman Emperor Hadrian subdued the Bar Korkhba rebellion in Israel killing some 500,000 Jews. But Hadrian's actions lasted only for four years, from 132 A.D through 136 A.D. And there were the Crusades of the Middle Ages, but they can be shown as divergent from the specifics of Ezekiel's prophecy. Therefore, we conclude that Ezekiel's prophecy concerning the siege of this visionary Jerusalem has never been realized. The pertinent question then arises: Will this prophecy ever be realized? If it is to be fulfilled, the question returns to the earlier question: To whom, to what, and when does it apply?

Further Analysis

In spite of process contradictions, Christian scholars generally have applied the entirety of Ezekiel's prophecy to that destruction brought by the forces of Babylon. The reasons already reviewed bring this view into question, but extended circumstances surrounding Ezekiel's prophecy give further pause.

It should be noted that the first twenty-four chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy deal with the destruction predicted against a city, Jerusalem. It is critically important to differentiate fulfilled prophecy from that which remains unfulfilled. It is clear that portions of Ezekiel's prophecy do refer to the destruction wrought by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, and was fulfilled in the siege of the land of Israel during King Zedekiah's reign, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem in King Zedekiah's eleventh year (II Kings 25:1-21; II Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 52:1-27).

The unfolding conditions of Ezekiel's prophecy, however, are pertinent in the analysis, as they add questions concerning the historical 'fulfillment view.' We find that, as events begin to unfold, Ezekiel was in captivity, held in bondage in the land of Babylon by the River Chebar a good 600 miles or more north of Jerusalem. (The River Chebar was an irrigation canal which ran water from the Euphrates in a large semicircle through the countryside until it rejoined the Euphrates). His book opens with the first vision, which came five years after the original captivity (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

About a year and a half later he was given a second vision in which he was shown the evils that were being practiced in 'Jerusalem' (Ezekiel 8:1-6). This vision was given in the "sixth year, in the sixth month,

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shown as a sample of
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