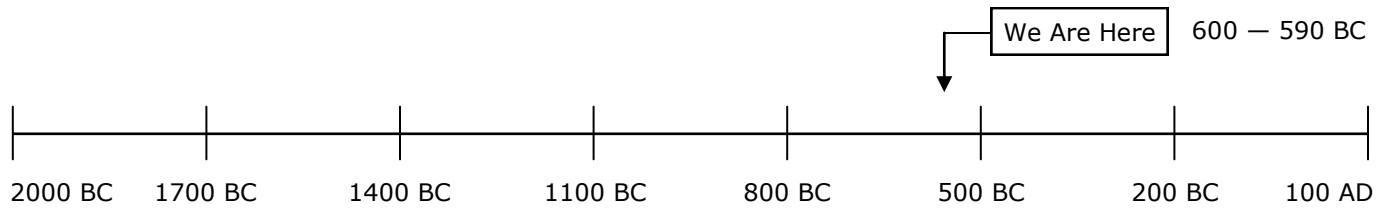


Vines Among Trees

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Week 33: August 13-19 — *2 Kings 24; Ezekiel 1-16; Jeremiah*

63% Complete — 134 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Overview of Bible History (p.37), Kings and Prophets (p.71)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

Since the righteous reign of Josiah, Judah has experienced a moral free-fall under the evil leadership of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. God has brought judgment on His people through the heavy hand of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonians. In 608 BC, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and took captive a number of its elite, of which Daniel was one; after ten years, Nebuchadnezzar returned (597), to take with him another host of captives, of which Ezekiel was part (*2 Kings 24:10-17; Ezekiel 1:1*). Judah was near its end.

Zedekiah was chosen by the Babylonians to be the next king of Judah (*2 Chron. 36:11-14*); unfortunately, he would be its last chance either to postpone or reverse the terrible phases of terminal decadence and avoid God's final judgment. However, despite the many appeals by the prophet Jeremiah, Zedekiah and his officials chose to turn their backs on God; this king led his people straight into the maw of destruction; God's people would never be the same.

- Prophetic Passages
 1. **Zedekiah's Capture and Blindness** (*Ezekiel 12:7-14*): God spoke of the attempted escape of Zedekiah, who later would be caught. God also predicted that Zedekiah would never see Babylon but that he would die there; this came true as Zedekiah's eyes were put out at Riblah (*2 Kings 25:1-7*). He was made a slave in Babylon until his death.
 2. **Rise and Fall of Babylon** (*Jeremiah 27:1-22; 50; 51:59-64*): Certainly the Babylon of ancient history was conquered and destroyed; however, there is prophesied a future rise of Babylon, as well as its destruction in the end times.
 3. **Judah's Return from Exile** (*Jeremiah 27:19-22; 31:16-26, 38-40*): The Jews would return from Babylon, Jerusalem would be rebuilt, and the Temple would be restored. All was fulfilled during the rule of the Medo-Persians (*Ezra 1*).
 4. **End of Idol Worship** (*Ezekiel 11:18-20*): All of God's warnings and temporary judgments did not sway the Jews' addiction to idol worship; but, 70 years in captivity did cure the Jews of this terrible sin. After their return, the Jews' commitment to God would never waver again; they will be forever faithful.
 5. **The New Covenant** (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*): God would forge another covenant with His people, not a physical one like that of Moses, but a spiritual one, in their hearts. Here then is a reference to the Church Age, the covenant established through Jesus Christ.

- Personal Application

The strained relationship between Jeremiah and King Zedekiah is a picture of the struggle between God and Judah. Although Zedekiah heard Jeremiah's words, he did not listen to them; he and his officials held the prophet in contempt, and they constantly had him beaten, flogged, and imprisoned. Likewise, the people of Judah, although they knew the one and only God, they ignored Him; instead, the people worshiped idols and false gods. Take a minute to re-read *Ezekiel 5:5-10*, to discover the reasons why Judah was destroyed. Here are God's own words concerning His precious possession: "I placed her at the center of the nations, but she has rebelled against Me... She is more wicked than surrounding nations. She behaves worse than her neighbors. She has refused to obey the laws I gave her to follow. Because of her detestable idols, I will punish her." God's people had broken their covenant with Him, that is *to worship Him only* and *to obey His commandments*. The people had not kept either statute; thus, they were guilty and deserving of judgment.

God used several choice analogies to describe His apostate people:

1. **Useless Vine** (*Ezekiel 15:1-8*): The wood of a vine is nothing compared to the wood of a tree. God said that His people were like vines among trees, useless before and after it was put into a fire. What are you — a vine or a tree? Are you useful in the hands of the Master, or are you wasting your life in a tangled mess?
2. **Unfaithful Wife** (*16:1-34*): God took Israel from nothing and cleared a place for her in Canaan. He covenanted Himself to her and promised to be faithful; but Israel and Judah both committed spiritual adultery by worshiping idols. Because of their many lovers, God was neglected and disgraced. After all that He has done for you, have you surrendered your all to Him, or have you placed your trust and affection in other loves?
3. **Crooked Bow** (*Psalms 78:56-62*): A crooked bow does not shoot straight. Crooked bows were no good in an archer's hands; they were cracked over a knee and thrown into a fire. Are you fulfilling God's intentions, or are you a crooked bow?
4. **Cursed Fig Tree** (*Mark 11:12-14, 20*): Jesus ran across a fig tree when He was hungry; finding nothing to eat, He cursed the tree (a picture of the Jews). Are we, like this tree, fruitless, with nothing to show, after we've had so many spiritual advantages and opportunities? May it never be! Let us have something to offer the Lord for His use.

These illustrations are similar; they are objects that did not fulfill their intended purpose but grieved those who had use of them. For Israel, God removed His presence from the Tabernacle and delivered His people to their enemies; for Judah (*Ezekiel 10:1-22; 11:22-25*), God removed His presence from the Temple and brought in the Babylonians. May we never force the removal of God's protection and press His hand of judgment.

The Bottom Line

God created you for a purpose. Are you fulfilling or avoiding that purpose?

Questions to Consider

1. Consider where God has placed you. Are you making the most of your opportunities?
2. Spiritually speaking, are you a vine among trees? How can you rise to the next level?