

Outline Studies
in
Biblical Chronology

**A Continuous Chronology
from
Creation to the Cross**

Chapter 7
The Prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah
and
Two 70-Year Periods



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**Ch. 7: The Prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah
and Two 70–Year Periods**

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The Prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah *and* Two 70-Year Periods

A Biblical Chronology

Pertinent Scriptural Background

The prophet Zechariah makes explicit reference to two distinct periods of 70 years, both of which pertain to events connected with the fall of Jerusalem and Judah's period of exile in Babylon.

"On the 24th day of the 11th month, ... , in the 2nd year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the prophet, ..."

"And the angel of Yahweh answered and said, 'O Yahweh Sabaoth, how long wilt Thou have no compassion for Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, **with which Thou hast been indignant these 70 years.**" *Zech. 1:7, 12*

"Then the word of Yahweh Sabaoth came to me saying,

'Say to all the people of the land and to the priests,

"When you fasted and mourned in the 5th and 7th months these 70 years, was it actually for Me that you fasted?" ' " *Zech. 7:4-5*

These quoted texts reveal two 70-year periods in God's dealing with Judah:

- ◆ 70 years of indignation;
- ◆ 70 years of fasts.

The first quoted reference speaks of a 70-year period of Yahweh Sabaoth's indignation toward Jerusalem, a prophecy spoken in the 2nd year of Darius, the great Persian monarch also identified as Darius Hystaspes. The quoted second reference speaks of a different 70 year period – a period of time over which the captives have celebrated annual fasts on specific days of specific months. Examining the broader context of the latter passage (cf., *Zech. 7:1*) reveals that Zechariah spoke of this second 70-year period in the 4th year of the reign of Darius. Further, it seems that Zechariah's prophecies pertaining to these 70-year periods were uttered in the concluding year of each of the 70 year intervals – both intervals are referred to by the term "these 70 years".

What remains to be clarified is the time and event (or events) which launched these two 70-year periods. The roots of these periods will be considered and detailed consecutively.

The 70 Years of Indignation.

There is a particular prophecy by Ezekiel that speaks of the initiation of a period of indignation by Yahweh against Jerusalem and the house of Judah. It is referred to either as the "prophecy of the boiling pot" or the "prophecy of the cauldron of indignation".

Ezekiel's prophecy of the boiling pot (cauldron)

"And the word of the Yahweh came to me in the 9th year, in the 10th month, on the 10th of the month, saying, 'Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The King of Babylon has laid a siege to Jerusalem this very day. And speak a parable to the rebellious house, and say to them, "Thus says Yahweh Elohim, 'Put on the pot, put it on, and also pour water in it; ... Make it boil vigorously. ... You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again, until I have spent My wrath on you." I, Yahweh, have spoken; it is coming and I shall act. I shall not relent, and I shall not pity, and I shall not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I shall judge you,' declares Adonai Yahweh." *Ezek. 24:1-14*

Notice particularly the words "You will not be cleansed from your filthiness until I have spent My wrath on you". There is clearly an element of indignation, and equally clear is a fixed time element to the expression of this indignation – note the word "until".

Now the occasion, the very day, of this prophecy by Ezekiel is stated quite explicitly: it was “in the 9th year, in the 10th month, on the 10th of the month”. However, we are not given a reference point for the start of the clock which, by the issuing of the prophecy, has now marked 9 years.

Question: The 9th year from what reference point?

Answer: A careful examination of the Book of Ezekiel reveals that the prophet marks his prophecies relative to that date when Judah’s king Jehoichin (alt., Jeconiah) was taken captive to Babylon. Moreover, since Ezekiel was numbered among the captives taken with Jehoichin, this reference point also marks the beginning of his own exile. That this is indeed the employed reference point for Ezekiel is readily seen in the following texts.

“(On the 5th month in the 5th year of King Jehoichin’s exile, the word of the Yahweh came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar, and there the hand of the Yahweh came upon him.)”
Ezek. 1:2-3

“Now it came about in the 7th year, in the 5th month, on the 10th of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of Yahweh, and sat before me.” *Ezek. 20:1*

“And the word of Yahweh came to me in the 9th year, in the 10th month, on the 10th of the month, saying, ‘Son of man, write this name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.’” *Ezek. 24:1-2*

Ezekiel opens his prophecy with reference to the year of Jehoichin’s exile, and proceeds to repeatedly use that date as the reference point for dating later prophecies.

(Note: an accurate and detailed chronology was clearly deemed important to the Spirit of God in His ‘breathing out’ of the holy Scriptures, and we should not diminish what He has accented.)

That Jehoichin’s exile is indeed the reference point for Ezekiel is even more explicitly manifested in this later reference:

“In the 25th year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the 10th of the month, in the 14th year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of Yahweh was upon me and He brought me there. In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel, and set me on a very high mountain; and on it to the south there was a structure like a city.” *Ezek. 40:1-2*

Thus, since Ezekiel’s reference point is the exile of Jehoichin, it is important to fix clearly the year in the chronology of the kings of Judah when he was taken captive. This is detailed in *II Kings 24*, occurring during the 2nd invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. The essential information is as follows:

“Jehoichin was 18 years old when he became king, and he reigned 3 months in Jerusalem; ... And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. ... So he led Jehoichin away into exile to Babylon; ...”
“Then the King of Babylon made Jehoichin’s uncle, Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.”
“Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, and he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem,”
II Kings 24:8-18

Conclusion:

Since the prophecy by Ezekiel relating to a period of “boiling indignation” by Yahweh being poured out on the city of Jerusalem was given in 9th year of Jehoichin’s exile (*Ezek. 24:1*), we are in position to set with precision the origin of the 70-year period of indignation spoken of by Zechariah.

To this end, a summary chronology of the kings of Judah in its declining years is included here for reference. With the fixed dates of this chronology as reference, both the beginning year and the ending year of the 70-year period of indignation can be unequivocally identified.

Comment:

In light of the preceding identification of Ezekiel's chronological reference point as being the year of Jehoichin's captivity, there is a further point in Ezekiel's writing that deserves analysis and comment. It pertains to a chronological reference in the opening sentence of the Book of Ezekiel.

"Now it came about in the 30th year, on the 5th day of the 4th month,
while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles,
the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God." (*Ezek. 1:1*)

Ques. What is the reference point and significance for this "30th year"?

Possible Answer: The parenthetical statement beginning immediately in vs. 2 almost surely fixes this "30th year" as being in the 5th year of Jehoichin's exile. Hence, we may measure 30 years back in time, and seek as to what notable event might have occurred which was of such import that Ezekiel used it as his introductory time reference.

Based on the chronology presented on the preceding page, it is readily evident
that 30 years previous to the 5th year of Jehoichin's exile places this
"30th year" in the midst of Josiah's reign.

Now a most notable event during Josiah's reign was the discovery of the Book of the Law
in the temple by Hilkiah the priest. This occurred in the 18th year of Josiah's reign (*II Kings 22:3*).
But the 18th year of Josiah would be, using inclusive reckoning,
in the year 3487 + 17 = 3504 An. Hom.

Then, the difference between the 5th year of Jehoichin's captivity and the 18th year of Josiah
is: 3533 – 3504 = 29 years. This is "about in the 30th year" (*Ezek. 1:1*).

In fact, using inclusive reckoning for "in the 5th year of King Jehoichin's exile" (*Ezek. 1:2*),
one might argue that reference to "the 30th year in *Ezek. 1:1* is most likely
pointing to the beginning of the spiritual revival in Judah under Josiah's leadership,
and the re-institution of the Passover celebration. (*II Kings 23:21-22*)

The 70 Years of Fasts

We now consider the second of the two 70-year periods mentioned in the Book of Zechariah. There are two texts from Zechariah's prophecy that provide key inputs in regard to this 70-year period.

"It came about in the 4th year of Darius, that the word of
Yahweh came to Zechariah on the 4th day of the 9th month, ..."

"Then the word of Yahweh Sabaoth came to me saying,
'Say to all the people of the land and to the priests,
**"When you fasted and mourned in the
5th and 7th months these 70 years,**
was it actually for Me that you fasted?"' "

Zech. 7:1, 4-5

"Then the word of Yahweh Sabaoth
came to me saying,

'Thus says Yahweh Sabaoth, "The fast of
the 4th, the fast of the 5th, the fast of the
7th, and the fast of the 10th months will
become joy, gladness, and cheerful
feasts for the house of Judah; so love
truth and peace." ' "

Zech. 8:18-19

Key Question: What are the events giving cause for these fasts which have been sustained for 70 years?

Answer: We can understand the causal reason these fasts were instituted by reviewing events associated with the fall of Jerusalem in that fateful 3rd and final siege by Nebuchadnezzar. As noted in the chronological table on the preceding page, this siege lasted for nearly two years, and the conditions inside Jerusalem nearing the time of its downfall were grievously appalling and devastating. The events giving foundation for these fasts are detailed in *II Kings 25*, and are summarized here.

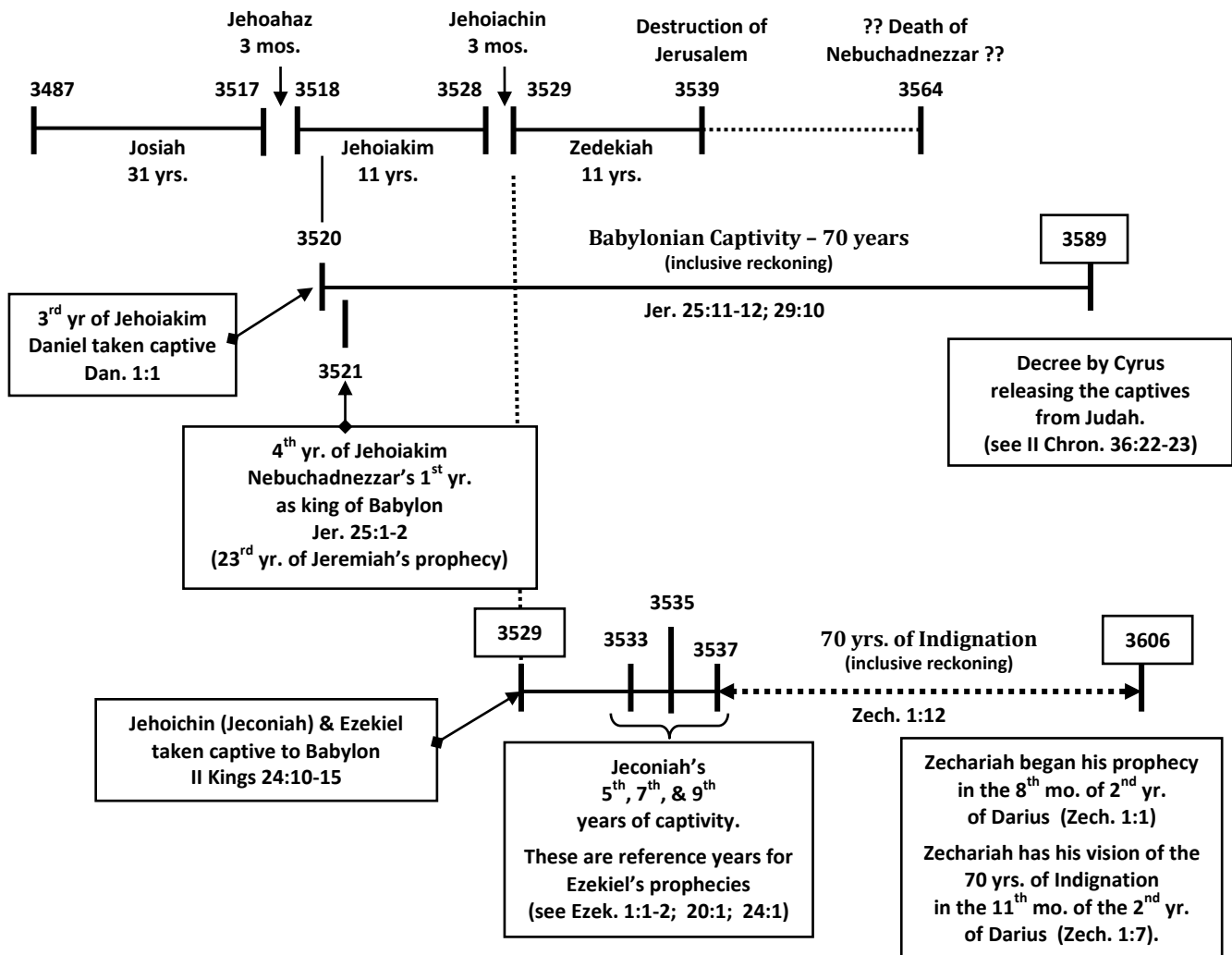
Chronology Pertaining to Jerusalem's Destruction

1. The final Babylonian siege begins on the 10th day of the 10th month of the 9th year of Zedekiah. (*II Kings 25:1*)
2. The walls of Jerusalem are broken through on the 9th day of the 4th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah. (*II Kings 25:2-4*)
3. The Temple is burned on the 7th day of the 5th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah. (*II Kings 25:8-11*)
4. The priestly Gedaliah is slain in the 7th month of the 11th year of Zedekiah, and many of the remaining citizens who were not deported to Babylon flee to Egypt. (*II Kings 25:25-26*)

These devastating events occurring in the 4th, 5th, 7th and 10th months were almost surely the root cause for setting aside these months for mourning and fasting by the captives in Babylon. The surviving captives of this last siege were, evidently, so profoundly traumatized by the horror they experienced that they purposed to set aside annual fast days in commemoration of these four occasions upon arrival at their camps in Babylon. We learn through Zechariah in the 4th year of the reign of Darius that these annual ritual fasts had continued without interruption for 70 years.

A Chronological Flow-Line of the Near-Exilic, Exilic, and Immediate Post-Exilic Period

(all dates are years An. Hom.)

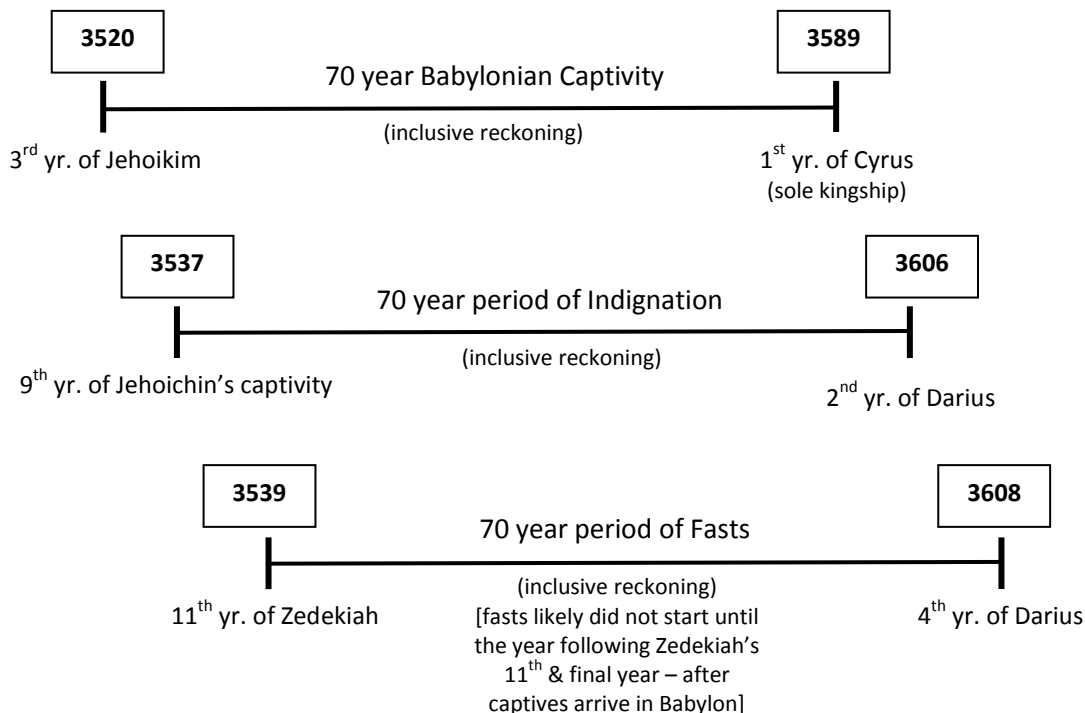


Summary Note

We observe that there were, in truth, three different 70-year periods detailed in the prophetic Scriptures pertaining to the exile of Judah.

1. The prophecy of Jeremiah, given in *Jer. 25:11-12* & *Jer. 29:10*, that the period of captivity in Babylon would encompass exactly 70 years.
2. The prophecy given by Zechariah, which has a root connection to the earlier prophecy by Ezekiel concerning the parable of Yahweh Elohim's boiling cauldron of indignation. It is only 70 years following Ezekiel's prophecy, through the prophecy of Zechariah, that we are informed concerning the duration of Yahweh's expression of indignation. It is explicitly stated that this indignation encompassed a period of 70 years, and related in a specific way to Jerusalem and the temple.
3. The prophecy of Zechariah pertaining to the ritual fasts celebrated by the captives remembering the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and, in particular, the loss of the temple and the discontinuance of the regular sacrifices. These ritual fasts were held four times per year, and continued for a period of 70 years.

Each of the 70-year periods had distinctly different starting points, but yet had extensive overlap. The chronological relations between these periods are illustrated below by three overlapping time-lines.



End Note #1. Since the 70-year period of Captivity ended during the 1st year of Cyrus, and the 70-year periods of Indignation and Fasts reached their climax during the reign of Darius, we have, solely through authoritative and reliable Biblical Chronology, reference dates for the beginning of the reigns of both monarchs. As evident from the above time-lines, the 1st year of Cyrus occurred in 3589 An. Hom., and the 1st year of Darius had to have occurred in 3604 An. Hom. Hence, the span of years between the beginning of the reigns of these monarchs was 15 years. Thus, using the secular (Ptolemaic) date of 536 BCN for the 1st year of Cyrus, we arrive at 521 BCN for the 1st year of Darius. These dates comport well with those listed in most secular histories of this era.

End Note #2. Only by accounting each of these three 70-year periods to have consisted of 70 full calendar years does one find consistency with accepted secular dates bridging across the Babylonian and Persian empires. Thus, since each of these three periods truly involved 70 complete calendar years, years extending from Passover to Passover and from spring equinox to spring equinox, we should be very hesitant to adopt any substitute basis for computing time periods delineated in terms of “years” in other prophetic texts. This argument underlies particularly the author’s thesis (see Ch. 6) that the reckoning of time in the “70 weeks of years” (490 years) prophecy of Daniel’s (*Dan. 9:24-27*) should be in accordance with nothing other than full calendar years.

Appendix

The chronological time-lines depicting the three 70-year periods are repeated here with nominal BC dates (i.e., BCN designation) inserted for ease of reference to other chronologies of the same era.

