



Aim of the Lesson

To see how the books of Ezekiel and Daniel fit into Old Testament history and to see how the lives of the prophets, the visions they saw and the prophecies are appropriate to the time of the exile of Judah to Babylon.

Bible background

Ezekiel and Daniel

Preparation required

If you are part of a teaching rota, have a look at lessons 17 and 18 to see what has been covered previously. In the students' books for this lesson there is a set of pictures for recognising the stories from all the major prophets, and they may have been used in some way by a previous teacher. Either way, now is a good time to decide how much time is appropriate for your class to spend on the pictures, and how you might use them.

Outline of Lesson

Revise briefly with the class the history they have talked about in the last two lessons, and explain that Ezekiel and Daniel were prophets for the people in exile in Babylon.

You could enlarge on this looking at the table in the students' books and it could be completed as below.

Reference	BC	What happened?
Daniel 1:1-6	606	1st Deportation - Daniel taken
Ezekiel 1:1-3	597	2nd deportation - Ezekiel taken
2 Kings 25:13-17	586	Jerusalem destroyed; 3rd deportation; vessels of the temple taken
Daniel 5:29-31	536	Fall of Babylon; start of the Medo-Persian empire.

The students could mark these events on the class or personal timelines.

The dates of Ezekiel's prophesying were about 593-571, and Daniel's 605-530 B.C. Ezekiel was probably 40 when he began prophesying. Daniel would have been a young man when he started and a very old one when he was thrown into the lion's den. Get the students to notice the difference between the time spans of the two. If you have already got the kings of Israel and Judah and Jeremiah marked on your timeline the students may be interested to notice that when Nebuchadnezzar was dreaming of the image (Daniel 2) Jeremiah's scroll was being cut up and burned in Judah by king Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36).

Where were they?

Several times Ezekiel refers to himself as being 'by the Chebar canal', which in Ezekiel 1:3 he says is 'in the land of the Chaldeans' where (Ezekiel 3:15) the exiles were dwelling. One possibility is that the Chebar (or Kebar) was the royal canal of Nebuchadnezzar, the Nahr Malcha, which connected the Tigris with the Euphrates. Perhaps the Jewish captives were employed in building it (see Psalm 137:1-3).

Daniel, on the other hand, seems to have spent much of his time in the city of Babylon, though later (Daniel 8:2) he sees a vision in which he is in Shushan (or Susa) in the palace, in the province of Elam, by the river of Ulai.

If these views are correct the two prophets were not that far apart, and it is at least possible that they met from time to time.

Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a priest, but we know very little about him personally, or his life in Babylon. Most of the book of Ezekiel contains the prophecies he gave, the parables he enacted and the visions he saw.

Tell or remind the class about the enacted parables in chapters 4 and 5. There is also a section in the students' books about Ezekiel's wife dying. Even this was a parable to teach the people that they wouldn't be able to mourn when they lost things that were precious to them.

The visions are in great detail and concern the glory of God. Ezekiel was concerned with Judah's spiritual life in exile and ensuring that they kept the faith and God showed him glorious things to enable him to do this.

Many of Ezekiel's prophecies still have to happen and give us reassurance that God is still at work as world events lead up to the return of Jesus.

Daniel

Daniel was probably a member of Judah's royal family and ended up at the heart of government in Babylon, much like Joseph in Pharaoh's court. He was a very high ranking civil servant to a succession of Babylonian and Medo-Persian kings.

The first six chapters contain some of the most well known stories in the Bible. Get the class to tell you what the stories are and maybe in which chapters they are written. From these chapters we can see that often Daniel had to make a stand for his beliefs and deal with jealous court officials.

Daniel's visions (chapters 7-12) are largely about the history of the Jews and the empires which would dominate their land in the centuries to come, and much of the imagery reappears in the book of Revelation.

The siege of Jerusalem

This section in the students' books is an interesting study to show how the things we read about in different parts of the Bible hang together.

- Ezekiel 24:1 and 2 Kings 25:1 give very precise dates for the start of Jehoachin's and Ezekiel's captivities. We can believe the Bible's truth.
- About 6 months later the wall is breached. In 2 Kings 25:3 Zedekiah escaped but was later captured. A month later the city is burned.
- This is reported to Ezekiel in Babylon (Ezekiel 33:21) by someone who escaped.
- Jeremiah also lived at this time and was left behind in Jerusalem. He had prophesied that the captivity would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-12)
- Daniel, also in Babylon, uses Jeremiah to calculate that something significant is about to happen (Daniel 9:2) The significant thing was the return to Jerusalem of the first group of captives under Cyrus (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). We will return to Cyrus in the next lesson, but we can note here that God, through Isaiah, named him some 200 years before he was born.

Relevance to our lives

There is so much in these two books that rings true. The consistency of historical details between them and other books would be amazing if the books were not inspired. And the occurrence of the same ideas and words in different parts of the Bible, that were written over 500 years apart (Daniel and Revelation) gives us confidence that God is behind it all. Knowing that God is in control also gives us confidence that the predictions about the future will come to pass.

Extension activities

The Shepherds of Israel

This section compares the Good Shepherds in Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34 and John 10 (God and Jesus) and the bad shepherds who weren't doing their job. The people were taken into captivity for not obeying God. They weren't being led to obey him by their leaders, the bad shepherds.

You could discuss whether Ezekiel 34:11-16 has happened yet.

Ram and the Goat (Daniel's visions)

In the 3rd year of Belshazzar Daniel saw a vision (Daniel 8). The students could identify when this was - around 550BC, on the timeline. It is interesting to note that the visions that Daniel had, although grouped together at the end of the book, seem to have been spread throughout his life.

The class could discover the characteristics of the Ram and identify it as the kings of Media and Persia. They could try to draw it if they like that sort of thing. Similarly with the male goat in verse 5. and its great horn, Alexander the Great. The Greek empire split into 4 parts which is why 4 horns appear. Trying to work out what it all means is not always easy. Even Daniel who saw the visions 'was appalled by the vision and did not understand it'.

Prophecy does matter because when events happen we will be able to see where they fit into God's plan and be encouraged that he is still in control of events. However, we probably shouldn't worry too much if we don't understand everything yet. We are not on our own.

If you want to extend this study you could discuss how Media, Persia and Greece this fit into the image Nebuchadnezzar saw?

The time of the end

Read with the class Daniel 12:1-4. Ask the class if they think this has happened yet. It was written over 2,500 years ago!

Daniel is told about a time of distress or trouble worse than anything that has happened before. We believe that time has still to happen. In many ways it is frightening. Daniel was appalled by the visions he saw. But there is also reassurance of deliverance, resurrection and everlasting life. This matters to us because we have to make a choice of everlasting life or everlasting death.

The students can use a concordance to find New Testament parallels, especially from Revelation.