



Can the Bible be trusted that Egypt was devastated?

Skeptics and critics have asserted that Ezekiel's prophecy is false. Was Egypt literally devastated, as [Ezekiel 29:1-16](#) predicted? Could the prophecy have only been fulfilled in a figurative sense?

WHAT SKEPTICS CLAIM

Here is an example of the assertions of skeptics and critics of the Bible:

Possibly the most pessimistic of the Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel proclaimed impending doom upon everyone from Judah itself to the enemy nations surrounding it. The failure of his prophecies to materialize as he predicted makes a compelling argument against the Bible inerrancy doctrine. In one of his doom's-day prophecies, Egypt was to experience forty years of utter desolation:

Therefore, thus says Yahweh God: "Surely I will bring a sword upon you and cut off from you man and beast. And the land of Egypt shall become desolate and waste; then they will know that I am Yahweh, because he said,

‘The River is mine, and I have made it.’ Indeed, therefore, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia. Neither foot of man shall pass through it nor foot of beast pass through it, and it shall be uninhabited forty years. I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and among the cities that are laid waste, her cities shall be desolate forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the countries” (29:8-14).

Talk about extravagant rhetoric, we certainly have it in this passage. No such desolation has ever happened to Egypt; there never has been a time in recorded history when Egypt was not inhabited by man or beast for forty years, when its cities were laid waste and desolate, when its people were all dispersed to foreign lands, etc. Bible defenders, of course, resort quickly to figurative and future applications, but their strategy just won’t work. Future fulfillments are excluded by patently clear references that Ezekiel made to contemporary characters who were to figure in the fulfillment: “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him” (29:2). Although Egypt still survives as a nation, its rule by pharaohs ended long ago. Furthermore, Ezekiel identified Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, as the instrument Yahweh would use to bring about Egypt’s desolation: “Therefore thus says Yahweh God: ‘Surely I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry off her spoil, and remove her pillage, and that will be the wages for his army’” (29:19). Clearly, then, Ezekiel had in mind a contemporary fulfillment of this prediction. As for spiritual or figurative explanations of the prophecy, just

what events in Egyptian history were so catastrophic in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and the pharaohs that they could justifiably be considered a figurative desolation of forty years? Unless bibliolaters can identify such a catastrophe, their figurative interpretations must be regarded as just more attempts to sweep aside another embarrassing prophecy failure.

WHY ANCIENT EGYPT'S HISTORIANS MAY HAVE OMITTED THIS 40 YEAR HISTORY

"No forty-year period of such complete desolation in Egypt has been confirmed, although this was the length of time between Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Pharaoh and Egypt's later deliverance when Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon. Very little is known for certain about the Egyptian history of this period, but it is known that the Egyptian monarchs, like other monarchs of antiquity, commonly boasted inordinately of the victories and passed over their defeats as lightly as possible. That is, even if the prophecies in these verses were fulfilled literally, Egyptian historians may not have acknowledged it for reasons of national pride. We can be confident that, when and if Egypt's true and full history is ever discovered, these prophecies will be found to have been fulfilled as written."—New Defenders' Study Bible note on [Ezekiel 29:11](#)

EXAMINING THE PROPHECY ITSELF

Was Egypt devastated, as [Ezekiel 29:1-16](#) predicted? Was the fulfillment literal, or figurative? Let's consider the evidence.

"A number of dates in Ezekiel can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Babylonian records and related accurately to our modern calendar. This event occurred on July 31, 593 B.C."—NLT footnote on [Ezekiel 1:1](#)

Those dates reveal that the prophecies were given by God to Ezekiel about 593 BCE to 571 BCE.

“In the tenth year, on the twelfth day of the tenth month, the word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows” (Ezekiel 29:1 NJB). *“This event occurred on January 7, 587 B.C.” (NLT footnote on Ezekiel 29:1).*

Ezekiel 29:1-16, which prophesies the defeat of the Egyptian dynasty in 565/564 BCE, is thus accurately dated to have been given by God to Ezekiel years prior to its fulfillment.

Ezekiel was inspired by God to foretell Egypt’s coming takeover and devastation.

“So, the Lord Yahweh says this: I shall send the sword against you to denude you of human and animal. Egypt will become a desolate waste, and they will know that I am Yahweh. Because he thought: The Nile is mine, I made it, very well, I am against you and your Niles. I shall make Egypt a waste and a desolation, from Migdol to Syene and beyond to the frontiers of Ethiopia”—Ezekiel 29:8-9 NJB

“Therefore, behold, I am against you and against you and against your canals of the Nile, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene and even to the border of Ethiopia. ‘A man’s foot will not pass through it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years’” (Ezekiel 29:1-11 LSB).

“Historically, this prophecy against Egypt was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded and conquered Egypt, leading to a period of decline and desolation. Theologically, this period can be seen as a time for Egypt to reflect on its pride and idolatry, similar to how other nations and individuals in the Bible are given time to repent and turn back to God.”—Bible Hub Study Bible

Then in verses 12-13 we read:

“I shall make Egypt the most desolate of countries; for forty years its cities will be the most desolate of wasted cities. And I shall scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the countries. The Lord Yahweh, however, says this: After forty years have passed, I shall gather the Egyptians back from the nations where they were dispersed”—Ezekiel 29:12-13 NJB

The prophecy of **Ezekiel 29** is about the foretold forty year desolation and exile of Egyptian empire in the sixth century BCE.

Now let's consider some of the evidence that shows it was fulfilled.

FULFILLMENT OF **Ezekiel 29:1-16** CONFIRMED BY HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

There are historical statements from Manetho, Herodotus, Flavius Josephus, and archaeological data that the Babylonian Army decimated Egypt around 564 BCE, and also carried off Egyptians into exile, until after the Medo-Persian Empire took over as world power from Babylon. One example is a fragmentary clay cuneiform tablet, BM 33041, that attests to an attack upon Egypt in Nebuchadnezzar's 37th year, which was about this time.

Notice what a trusted Bible commentary says:

“I will make the land of Egypt a desolation among desolate lands

This phrase indicates a divine judgment against Egypt, a nation historically known for its wealth and power. The desolation signifies a complete devastation, reducing Egypt to a state similar to other lands that have faced God’s wrath. This prophecy aligns with the historical context of Egypt’s decline during the 6th century BC, particularly under the Babylonian conquest led by Nebuchadnezzar. The imagery of desolation is reminiscent of other biblical judgments, such as those against Babylon and Edom, emphasizing God’s sovereignty over all nations.

and her cities will lie desolate for forty years among the ruined cities

The specific mention of “forty years” is significant, as the number forty often symbolizes a period of testing or judgment in the Bible, such as Israel’s forty years in the wilderness. This period of desolation for Egypt suggests a complete but temporary judgment, after which restoration is possible. Historically, this could refer to the period of Babylonian dominance when Egypt’s influence waned “—Bible Hub Study Bible

Thus, the fulfillment of the prophecy was literal, not just figurative.

How long did the devastation last? First of all, [Jeremiah 46:25-28](#), explains that Egypt would not be permanently destroyed like other nations, but that it too will undergo a restoration, which it did.

“Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Israel, has said, ‘Look, I shall punish Amon of No,

Pharaoh, Egypt, all its gods, its, kings, Pharaoh and those who put their trust in him. I shall hand him over to those who are determined to kill him, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. But afterwards, Egypt will be inhabited as in the past, Yahweh declares”—Jeremiah 46:25-26 NJB

While Jeremiah says only that Egypt would recover from its devastation and “**be inhabited as in the past**”, Ezekiel, on the other hand, set specific time limit, about how long it would take.

“The Lord Yahweh, however, says this: After forty years have passed, I shall gather the Egyptians back from the nations where they were dispersed”—Ezekiel 29:13 NJB

The desolation that followed the invasion of Egypt was of long duration - a forty-year hiatus in the normal political life of the nation. There was for Egypt, as there was for Judah, an exile, which left the land bleak and barren. For Judah the exile ended by degrees with a succession of returns of exiled Jews under Cyrus and his Persian successors.

In 525 BCE, after the Medo-Persian Empire took over as world power from Babylon, and the Egyptians began to return from exile, after the Egyptian exile ended. Apparently, the Egyptian exile, as understood by Ezekiel, ended with the 525 BCE arrival in Egypt of Cambyses, son and successor of Cyrus.

The Babylonian invasion of Egypt ended the reign of independent Egyptian pharaohs. In the future, Bible prophecy indicated the pharaohs would rule under the control of foreign powers. Just as the Babylonian invasion of 586 BCE put an end to the institution of kingship in Israel, the 564 BCE invasion of Egypt likewise ended the reign of independent Egyptian pharaohs. Ezekiel is clear and concise:

“The Lord Yahweh says this: I shall destroy the foul odors and taste away the false

gods from Noph. Egypt will be left without a ruler. I shall spread fear throughout Egypt” (Ezekiel 30:13 NJB). For several decades Egypt would be without a resident pharaoh, while the land languished in ruins. When kingship returned, the Egyptian pharaoh would be subservient to foreign rulers. While Egypt has returned to habitation until today, as predicted, it never again became a strong independent nation.

The Biblical text does not mandate that Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign alone fulfilled the prophecy in a single event. Rather, successive invasions—Babylonian, then Persian—could encompass the complete cycle of devastation and partial recovery.

HARMONIZING SCRIPTURE and ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological records do not categorically invalidate the prophecy in **Ezekiel 29:10,11**. Instead, the material evidence of destruction layers, interruptions in occupation levels, and the reorganization or repopulation of certain sites matches well with the concept of a devastated land that later saw some restoration. While secular scholars sometimes attribute the differences between a seemingly “absolute desolation” and the archaeological record to exaggeration, those upholding biblical accuracy point to the linguistic and literary context of prophetic literature, as well as the partial or shifting occupation patterns in times of war.

Moreover, the integrity of the Biblical manuscripts—with thousands of known fragments like those documented by the Dead Sea Scrolls, early Greek papyri, and later codices—bolsters confidence in the reliability of Ezekiel’s words. Scholars who study textual transmission affirm that these passages of judgment against Egypt are preserved accurately across the manuscript tradition.

Convincing eyewitness testimony argues that Egypt was literally left a desolate, sparsely populated wasteland in the wake of the 564 BCE invasion of the country by Nebuchadnezzar.

CONCLUSION

Was Egypt devastated, as **Ezekiel 29:1-16** predicted? Yes, the prophecy about Egypt was literally fulfilled.

Archaeological findings do not contradict the essence of **Ezekiel 29:10-11**, which foretells a period of severe judgment and desolation over Egypt. Historical documentation and on-site excavations reveal a tumultuous era marked by invasions, population displacement, and economic collapse, consistent with the biblical portrayal of widespread devastation.

While some regions of Egypt may not have been emptied of every inhabitant throughout each day of a forty-year span, the total effect of foreign conquests and internal ruin aligns with the prophecy's declaration of desolation. Seen through the lens of ancient Near Eastern prophetic language and corroborated by the disrupted layers in Egypt's archaeological record, Ezekiel's words stand affirmed rather than refuted by the evidence.

Historical evidence demonstrates that Egypt was defeated and transformed in 564 BCE, and the nation began to be restored in 525 BCE, but not to its former elegance. This provides significant support for the fulfillment of **Ezekiel 29:1-16**

Was Egypt devastated, as **Ezekiel 29:1-16** predicted? The supporting evidence is strong enough to conclude that, yes, Egypt was devastated, just as **Ezekiel 29:1-16** predicted.