

The Eagles & Vine

(17) Ezekiel 17:1–24

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**BIG BEND
BIBLE
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Ezek 17:1-10 – A riddle and a parable.

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ² “Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, ³ and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God:

*“A great eagle with large wings and long pinions,
Full of feathers of various colors,
Came to Lebanon and took from the cedar the highest
branch. ⁴ He cropped off its topmost young twig
And carried it to a land of trade;
He set it in a city of merchants.*

*⁵ Then he took some of the seed of the land
And planted it in a fertile field;
He placed it by abundant waters
And set it like a willow tree.*

*⁶ And it grew and became a spreading vine of low stature;
Its branches turned toward him,
But its roots were under it.
So it became a vine,
Brought forth branches,
And put forth shoots.*

*⁷ “But there was another great eagle with large wings and
many feathers; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward
him, and stretched its branches toward him,
From the garden terrace where it had been planted,
That he might water it.*

*⁸ It was planted in good soil by many waters,
To bring forth branches, bear fruit,
And become a majestic vine.” ’*

*⁹ “Say, ‘Thus says the Lord God:
“Will it thrive?*

*Will he not pull up its roots,
Cut off its fruit, and leave it to wither?
All of its spring leaves will wither,
And no great power or many people
Will be needed to pluck it up by its roots.*

*¹⁰ Behold, it is planted, Will it thrive?
Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it?
It will wither in the garden terrace where it grew.” ’ ”*

What is a riddle and a parable?

Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable: Ezekiel the prophet was told to speak forth a saying that would be something of a **riddle** and something of a **parable**. It was a **riddle** in that the meaning was a bit of a puzzle to understanding; it was a **parable** in that it told a story illustrating spiritual and material truth.

- It is a riddle in that its meaning needs to be explained; there is a deeper meaning which underlies the figurative form, for something in its presentation is obscure.
- It is a parable in that it is an allegory.

What did the first great eagle do?

The parable concerns a large and majestic eagle came to Lebanon and took the **highest branch** from a cedar tree. The eagle then **carried it to a land of trade**.

What do eagles symbolically represent?

Often the eagle was used symbolically in the OT to represent God’s punitive power...

Deut 28:49 – The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand

And the speed with which a conqueror advanced (Isa 46:11; Jer 48:40; 49:22).

He took some of the seed of the land: Then the eagle used some of the **seed** from the land of the cedar tree, and he **planted it in a fertile field**, where it **became a spreading vine**, spreading **forth branches**.

What did the second great eagle do?

The second **eagle** appears suddenly, and the vine previously mentioned **bent its roots** and **stretched its branches** toward the second eagle.

- What strikes the reader is this bird’s passivity. In contrast to the first eagle, this bird takes no actions; he is simply there.

That he might water it: The vine did this in the hope that the second eagle would care for the vine, protect it, and give it the right conditions for growth and prosperity – which *it already had under the first eagle*. The hoped for result was that it would **become a majestic vine**.

What question does God ask concerning the vine?

Will it thrive? God asked the question, revealing the fate of the vine. The rhetorical questions show that it would not **thrive**; that the first eagle would **pull up its roots, cut off its fruit, and leave it to wither**.

- The critical issue is, Will the vine survive after it has turned away from the first eagle and oriented itself toward the second?

Will it not utterly wither when the east wind touches it:

Though the vine stretched out root and branches to the second eagle, the second eagle would not be able to shelter it against the coming storm. The vine would perish.

Ezek 17:11-15 – The meaning of the parable

¹¹ Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ¹² “Say now to the rebellious house: ‘Do you not know what these things mean?’ Tell them, ‘Indeed the king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and took its king and princes, and led them with him to Babylon. ¹³ And he took the king’s offspring, made a covenant with him, and put him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, ¹⁴ that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand. ¹⁵ But he rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people. Will he prosper? Will he who does such things escape? Can he break a covenant and still be delivered?’

What explanation did Ezekiel receive for this parable?

Do you not know what these things mean? Ezekiel explained the meaning of his riddle/parable, so his listeners could not claim the excuse that they did not understand.

- The first, *great eagle* represented **the king of Babylon**.
- Lebanon represented **Jerusalem**.
- The highest branch of the cedar represented Judah’s **king (Jehoiachin) and princes**.
- The seeds and the vine represented **the king’s offspring** (Zedekiah).
- The first eagle **made a covenant** with Zedekiah and **put him under oath**.
- The first eagle **took away the mighty of the land**, not only King Jehoiachin, but also other notable men such as Daniel and his companions. He did this to keep Zedekiah **low**, and so that Zedekiah would keep **his covenant**.

- The king of Babylon took **them with him to Babylon**, which was called the *city of merchants*.
- Just as the vine stretched out its roots and branches toward the second eagle, so Zedekiah **rebelled against him by sending his ambassadors to Egypt**, which represented the second eagle. Zedekiah hoped for **horses and many people** from Egypt.

The Bible uses an eagle as a symbol of Babylon in some other places (Jer 48:40, 49:22, and Daniel 7:4).

Regarding the second eagle of Ezekiel 17:7: This was Egypt, specifically Pharaoh Hophra who came to the throne of Egypt in 588 b.c. To him Zedekiah foolishly looked for help to throw off the Babylonian yoke after he had been befriended by Nebuchadnezzar.

- When the vine in the parable turned to the second eagle, it had great hope of life and vitality (Ezekiel 17:8). These rhetorical questions reminded all that the vine would find no help from the second eagle, and Zedekiah would find no help from Egypt.

Who broke a covenant with Babylon?

Can he break a covenant and still be delivered? Zedekiah was a covenant breaker, who ignored the promises of loyalty and submission he made to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (2 Kings 24:20). God expected Zedekiah to be loyal to the **covenant** he made to Nebuchadnezzar, and would punish him for breaking the covenant.

- Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel accused him of disloyalty, and urged submission to Babylon again (Jer. 37:6-10; 38:17-23).
- Zedekiah was surrounded by favorable conditions for his reign, represented in the parable by the fruitful soil, the many waters and the planting as a willow tree (Isa. 44:4).
- The benevolent attitude of Nebuchadnezzar helped Zedekiah to prosper in his rule. If he had remained faithful to his oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of Judah could have continued to prosper as a tributary kingdom.

Ezek 17:16-21 – God’s promise to Zedekiah

¹⁶ ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke—with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. ¹⁷ Nor will Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company do anything in the war, when they heap up a siege mound and build a wall to cut off many persons. ¹⁸ Since he despised the oath by

breaking the covenant, and in fact gave his hand and still did all these things, he shall not escape.’ ”

¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord God: “As I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head. ²⁰ I will spread My net over him, and he shall be taken in My snare. I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me. ²¹ All his fugitives with all his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered to every wind; and you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken.”

What became of Zedekiah?

In the midst of Babylon he shall die: Zedekiah did indeed die in Babylon, and in the most terrible of circumstances...

2 Kings 25:7 – Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

Jeremiah 52:11 says that Zedekiah remained in Babylon until his death.

What would Egypt do?

Nor will Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company do anything in the war: Despite whatever promises or assurances Pharaoh gave to Zedekiah, he and the Egyptians were of no help at all against the Babylonians. It was a foolish alliance.

What promise did God make to Zedekiah?

Since he despised the oath by breaking the covenant: God promised severe judgment on Zedekiah because he did not keep his word and honor the **covenant** he made with Nebuchadnezzar. His fate was sealed; **he shall not escape.**

- He had bound himself by oath, in the presence of Jehovah, to be faithful to the covenant that he made with Nebuchadnezzar, and since he broke it, he shall not escape.

I will spread My net over him: Jeremiah 52:6-9 tells the story of how Zedekiah and some other high ranking men of the government tried to escape when the Babylonians came against Jerusalem. They did not succeed, because God had **spread His net over him.**

How did Zedekiah commit treason against God?

I will bring him to Babylon and try him there for the treason which he committed against Me: When Zedekiah broke his covenant with the king of Babylon, he also committed **treason** against Yahweh Himself. As Jeremiah repeatedly counseled, Zedekiah and the other Judeans should have surrendered themselves to the Babylonians and the judgment God ordained to bring through them.

- God prophetically said of Zedekiah, **My oath which he despised.** God regarded it not only as an oath to Nebuchadnezzar, but to Him also.

What does this tell us about the commitments we make to others?

It indicates that agreements entered into and obligations incurred by worshippers of God are as binding as if they had been made with God in person.

- Because we are representatives of God, any breaking of our commitments reflect unfavorably on Him.

What would be the consequence to Judah due to Zedekiah’s treachery?

All his troops shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered: There would be no recovery from the fall of Zedekiah’s reign. Judea would be conquered completely.

- As plainly as he could declare it, Ezekiel showed that Judah’s political disaster was traceable to moral weakness and deceit. When once the hand was given in token of agreement, that word should have been all the bond needed.

Why is honesty such a big deal with God?

Honesty is truthfulness. An honest person has the habit of making accurate, trustworthy statements about life, self, others and God. An honest person represents himself just as he is and tells others the truth about themselves.

Do you have to expose every thing that pops into your mind to be honest?

That’s transparency, and a person can be honest without being transparent. However, no one can be consistently honest without a commitment to the truth. Honesty will, at times, hurt someone’s feelings, but that does not mean that dishonesty is preferable.

What does God think of dishonesty?

Dishonesty is reprovved in Scripture. God does not accept a person who practices deceit...

Psalm 101:7 – He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence.

How does dishonesty impact our culture?

Wicked societies are characterized by lies...

Jeremiah 9:5 – Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. Speaking the truth, or honesty, is a mark of healthy human interaction.

How is it that God's people must be honest?

Honesty as a character quality is a sign of the Spirit's work in a person's soul. God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18); therefore, His presence in a person gives rise to truthfulness. God's people are honest.

Why is honesty so rare in this world?

People are not naturally honest...

Psalm 116:11 – *All men are liars.*

Dishonesty has worldly rewards—lying can often bring financial gain, power, or temporary satisfaction. But the rewards come at a price. Dishonesty leads to more and more wickedness...

Proverbs 17:4 – *An evildoer gives heed to false lips; A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue.*

Lying to fulfill worldly desires ultimately results in the loss of everything a person has, including his life. Hell's inhabitants will include all liars...

Revelation 21:8 – *But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*

Should we still be honest if it hurts the feelings of others?

While it is sometimes tempting to lie, misrepresent ourselves, or downplay uncomfortable truths in an effort to avoid conflict, dishonesty is never good for relationships. Speaking dishonest words in order to avoid conflict is flattery (Psalm 12:2).

- It's inevitable that honesty will sometimes hurt the feelings of others...

Proverbs 27:6 – *Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses*

That said, honesty should always be accompanied by gentleness. An honest person is motivated by love, not by an obsession with relaying accurate information...

Proverbs 19:22 – *What is desired in a man is kindness, and a poor man is better than a liar.*

Those who follow Jesus (Who is the Truth, John 14:6), will speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Ezek 17:22-24 – The hope and promise of restoration.

²² Thus says the Lord God: "I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. ²⁴ And all the trees

of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."

What would be the hope for Israel?

I will also take one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out: Returning to the images of the parable, God promised that He was *not* finished with Israel and her kings. He would take the **highest** of the branches, would **crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one**, and replant it on a **high and prominent mountain**.

To what does the tender branch refer?

The 'tender one' is the Messiah, the Son of David

Isaiah 11:1 – *There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.* (see also Isaiah 53:2; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15; Zech. 6:12; Rev. 22:16)

To what does the mountain refer?

This refers to the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah...

Daniel 2:35 – *Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*

Isaiah 2:2 – *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.*

How do we know that the Millennial Kingdom is a physical kingdom and not just a spiritual one?

The problem I had with amillennialism is that it often ignores the plain sense meaning of God's Word and instead has to allegorize or spiritualize the text.

How do amillennialists deal with Isaiah 65:17-25?

Amillennialists will look at this passage where it speaks of "new heavens and new earth" and say aha, this has to be speaking of the eternal state.

- But there will not be any death in the eternal state per Revelation 21:4. Isaiah 65:20 indicates there will still be mortal people who die even with the new heavens and new earth.

The best explanation of this is that the new heavens and new earth is the literal Millennial Kingdom where Jesus rules on earth over mortal people. This fulfills the promises

God made to Israel and it is what the Jews expect from the Messiah.

How can the physical Millennial Kingdom be associated with a new heavens and a new earth?

The Millennial Kingdom is a foreshadowing of the eternal state with much of the curse removed... but not all the curse is removed because death will be something that unbelievers will experience.

- Amillennialists might try to spiritualize this by saying the death spoken of in Isaiah 65:20 is hell because mortal people is the context here given that it speaks of children being born (verses 20 & 23).

What will God do to cause the tree of Israel to flourish?

I will plant it: “After the failure of the two great eagles to make a success of establishing the state of Israel under their extensive and powerful patronage, God says, *I myself* (emphatic) *will plant it* upon a high mountain where it will grow and be conspicuous and attract the birds of the air to shelter under its protection.

What do the birds dwelling under the tree of Israel represent?

Under it will dwell birds of every sort: All nations, the Gentiles as well as the Jews, shall build, breed, and multiply under the kingdom of Christ; it shall be no more confined to the Jews, but extend to the Gentiles also. There they shall find peace and safety.

What is the reference to all the trees of the field?

All the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree: This is another reference to the Gentile nations. Through God’s dealing with kings such as Zedekiah, and His future work through the Messiah, God would exalt Himself among all the nations.

What is the grace in this chapter?

The chapter began with judgment and punishment; it ends with mercy and grace. The dethroned and blind Zedekiah is overshadowed by God’s King who is full of power and glory.

What applications do we see in today’s discussion?

- Honesty is always the best policy – always!
- God has promised a glorious future in the Millennial Kingdom