

**Message #20**

**Ezekiel 17:1-24**

Being a prophet of God is not an easy job. The responsibility the prophet has is to carefully and accurately communicate the message of God to the people. Many times those messages were not popular. There was nothing pretty about Israel. She was not a blessed nation of God and she is still not a blessed nation of God. When you look at Israel today, she is anything but a flourishing nation that reflects the glory of God. God has been using Ezekiel to explain to Israel why He has let bad things happen to her.

For example, in chapter 15, Ezekiel told Israel she was a useless and fruitless nation like wood from a vine that bears no fruit. In chapter 16, Ezekiel told Israel she was an immoral harlot who was totally unfaithful to God. Now God says go back to Israel again and show them how sinful and corrupt and rebellious they are, but also tell them that in the end, I will fulfill My program of grace that will restore Israel and bless Israel.

Today if you are a Bible expositor preaching through the book of Ezekiel, you must preach these warning passages to the church. This is not the popular thing to do today.

**GOD GIVES ISRAEL PARABLES DESIGNED TO SHOW EXACTLY WHAT HE WILL DO AGAINST HIS PEOPLE AND ALSO WHAT HE WILL DO FOR HIS PEOPLE.**

This is an amazing chapter of grace. Think of the horrible idolatry we have seen in this book. It is totally unbelievable to think that God would ultimately bless these people. But that is what this chapter promises. Even though God permits a series of negative and horrible things to happen to His rebellious people, in the end He will restore them and in His sovereign grace He will exalt the branch of David.

We may observe from **verse 2** that God gave Ezekiel an inspired riddle to speak a parable to the house of Israel. The Hebrew word “riddle” (hidah) refers to some verbal puzzle that normally requires an explanation. A riddle is designed to hide truth. The word “parable” (masal) is some analogy that compares something earthly to reveal something heavenly. A parable is designed to reveal truth by analogy.

So this message that he was to present to Israel would be one that would require an explanation and interpretation.

**Now the riddle or parable is given in verses 3-10 and it is explained in verses 11-21.**

**SECTION #1 – Ezekiel gives two parables to Israel. 17:3-10**

These are designed to show that Israel is never submitted to God’s will. Now there are two parables in this chapter. These parables and riddles are specifically for Israel. We may make some applications, but let’s not lose sight of what these parables are designed to teach:

**Parable #1** - The parable of the first great eagle. **17:3-6**

In this first parable a great eagle appears. It is a specific eagle, which is indicated by the article “the,” “the great eagle.” The specific great Eagle, according to Jeremiah and Daniel, was Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon (Jer. 27:5-6; Dan. 7:1-4; Jer. 48:40; 49:22). There are two parts to the parable:

**(Part #1)** - What the Eagle was like. **17:3**

It has certain characteristics:

**Characteristic #1** - It has great wings. **17:3a**

This eagle will be able to move fast. He will sweep in with great speed and conquer.

**Characteristic #2** - It has long pinions. **17:3b**

Long pinions enable the flight of the bird to be silent and fast. They enable a bird to thrust and lift with great speed, making the bird ideal for hunting and fighting and conquering its prey. He has long feathers that are able to cover a lot of territory.

**Characteristic #3** - It has full plumage of many colors. **17:3c**

A bird of many colors can have a different look. He can look one way to one nation and another way to another nation. He has royalty, power, speed and protection.

**(Part #2)** - What the Eagle did. **17:3-6**

There are five actions described in which the eagle was involved.

**(Action #1)** - The eagle came to Lebanon. **17:3b**

Lebanon was a place known for cedar trees where one of the royal buildings were located. Solomon, David’s son, built a beautiful house in Lebanon (I Kings 7:2). The Davidic family lived in Lebanon. Lebanon was a symbol of a strong royal house of David, which is obviously conquered by the eagle. In the explanation, God will equate Lebanon with Jerusalem (v. 12).

**(Action #2)** - The eagle took away the top of the cedar. **17:4a**

Jehoiachin was ultimately the top twig or leader after Jehoiakim. He was overtaken and carried away by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C.. He was carried into the land of merchants and traders, which was Babylon (Ezek. 17:12; II Kings 24:1-5; **II Chron. 36:5-7**). Jehoiachin replaced Jehoiakim and he was taken captive (II Kings 24:8-16). According to Ezekiel 16:29, Babylon was the land of merchants who was “the great center of commerce in all Asia” (Mark Rooker, *Ezekiel*, p. 128).

**(Action #3)** - The eagle plucked off the topmost young twigs and brought them to the land of the merchants and set it in a city of traders. **17:4b**

Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, the youngest son of Josiah, King over Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah (II Kings 24:17-20). Plus, we know from Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar brought all the key young men to Babylon (Dan. 1:3-4), which was the land of the merchants (Ezek. 16:29). So Zedekiah was left in Jerusalem to be in charge.

**(Action #4)** - The eagle took some seed of the land and replanted it in fertile soil beside abundant waters. **17:5**

Nebuchadnezzar took Israel to Babylon and replanted the nation in Babylon. He also left a replanted leader, Zedekiah, in Jerusalem. We know that many of the Israelites were living by the Chebar river and they had a good life (Ezek. 1:1).

**(Action #5)** - The seed sprouted into becoming a low-spreading vine. **17:6**

Israel grew and flourished, but she was not a dominant power. Jerusalem's military might was gone and Nebuchadnezzar was permitted by God to subject Israel to him. But God had not abandoned Israel. In fact, He was blessing her. He was punishing her so she would learn not to be so corrupt (16:43).

**Parable #2** - The parable of the second great eagle. **17:7-10**

Now a second eagle shows up with great wings and much plumage (**v. 7**). The vine stretched out itself for water even though it had been planted in good soil by abundant water. It had already been planted in a place where it could bear fruit (**v. 8**), but it reached out to someone else for more nourishment.

This other eagle is Egypt, who enticed Zedekiah and Israel to turn away from Babylon and go against the oath he promised to Babylon and turn to Egypt for help.

Now God was the one who had permitted Babylon to overtake Israel and had Israel learned her lesson in this, God would have restored her. But she did not submit to God or His Word or will and she tried to figure a way out and it would cost her dearly.

In **verse 9** God says will it thrive by reaching out to someone else other than where it was planted? God says Israel will be pulled up by the roots and it will wither and not bear fruit (**v. 10**).

Nebuchadnezzar would not spare Jerusalem and King Zedekiah would die in Babylon and Pharaoh would be of no help.

**SECTION #2** – Ezekiel gives the interpretation to the parables. **17:11-21**

**In verses 11-21**, we get the interpretation to these parables:

**Interpretation #1** - The first great eagle was Nebuchadnezzar, who was king of Babylon, who came and took King Jehoiachin and its nobles to Babylon. **17:12**

Jerusalem was the Lebanon analogy and the king of Babylon came and took the king away, Jehoiachin.

**Interpretation #2** - Nebuchadnezzar made a covenant treaty with Zedekiah and took away the mighty from the land. **17:13**

Nebuchadnezzar made an agreement with Zedekiah, the newly appointed king, to let him stay in Jerusalem and swear by God that he would be loyal (II Chron. 36:11-13).

**Interpretation #3** - The kingdom of Israel was brought so low that its survival depended upon keeping the agreement. **17:14**

As long as the leaders and people remained faithful to Nebuchadnezzar, Israel would live in peace. God had worked this out.

**Interpretation #4** - Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and sent his envoys to Egypt so that they would give Israel military assistance. **17:15**

Zedekiah was seeking to break free from Babylon, not seeking to be right with God. What actually happened was an alliance was formed with some ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon. They came to Jerusalem to see King Zedekiah (Jer.27:1-2). So they decided to combine to form some revolution that would contact the Egyptians and join together and go up against Babylon.

The problem with this is God is the One who sovereignly permitted Babylon to reign over Israel as a judgment for her rebellion. Zedekiah is not a spiritual man of God, interested in doing the will of God. He is an evil man who is just trying to figure a way out from this mess.

I love the question of **verse 15**, will a man prosper and succeed if he turns away from the Word and will of God? The answer is no. If a person turns away from God's Word and will, he will not ever prosper. In fact, God will intervene and will bring him down.

**Interpretation #5** - Because Zedekiah broke the covenant with Babylon, God will see to it that he will die. **17:16**

According to Jeremiah 37:5-7, the Egyptians started to move against Babylon, but God stopped them.

What ultimately happened is that Zedekiah was bound because he broke his covenant with Babylon and his eyes were put out and he was led to Babylon where he was put in prison until the day he died (Jer. 52:11).

**Interpretation #6** - Pharaoh and his mighty army will not help in the war against Babylon.  
**17:17**

The Egyptian army was caused by God to return to Egypt and, as a result, Babylon would unleash her total wrath against Jerusalem and Israel. God's will was to surrender to Babylon because of rebellion (16:43). They did not want to be corrected by God, they wanted out!

**Interpretation #7** - God will cause judgment to come against Zedekiah and Israel because he despised the oath of God and the Word of God. **17:18-21**

The judgment will be so severe that there will only be a few survivors who will be scattered in every direction (v. 19).

The problem with Israel and most of her leaders is that she is not interested in obeying God and honoring Him.

**SECTION #3** – God will one day provide security and prosperity for His people. **17:22-24**

Now the news of chapters 15, 16, 17 was not good. Israel was useless, immoral and dominated by foreign powers because she would not submit herself to the will of God and the Word of God.

Before Ezekiel stopped this parabolic teaching that was totally depressing, he added “an addendum” to his prophecy against Jerusalem. As Dr. Charles Dyer said, God did not want His people to be “overly discouraged” (*Ezekiel*, p. 1259).

God Himself, in pure grace, gets involved in this parable and no longer is using the symbolism of the eagle. He gets directly involved because neither Babylon nor Egypt can do anything to help Israel, but He can.

In **verse 22**, God says that He, Himself, will take a “tender shoot or sprig” from the top of the cedar and will plant it high on the mountain of Israel and it will bear fruit and become strong and stately. It will grow into a Kingdom that will never be destroyed.

Now the shoot was one who would come from the Davidic line (Is. 11:1). There would be a Messianic figure who would come out of the line of David, who would make Israel dominant.

God will plant His King in Israel and all the nations of the world will one day flow to this nation and this King for protection. Many birds of every kind will come and find shelter and shade and nourishment here.

In other words, God says there is a time coming when all the surrounding nations of the world will be looking to Israel and her King for strength and security because all nations will know that Israel is the nation of God.

All the trees of the field, the tall and the short, will know that I am the one in Sovereign control.

All nations will realize that I am the Lord and I will make Israel flourish again. She should have never trusted in anything other than Me.

Now this prophecy has not been fulfilled to this day. We are still waiting for God to establish Israel as His special nation.

God will fulfill this prophecy when Jesus Christ establishes His mighty kingdom on earth from Jerusalem. At that time all nations will know that God is ruling the world and Israel is the nation of God (Dan. 2:44-45; Zech. 14:3-9, 16-17).

There is a great lesson to learn here—walk away from God's Word or God's will and the end result will be disaster.