

### Israel's Captive King and Victorious King

#### Ezekiel 17

Ezekiel 17:1-10: *"And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel, <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>He cropped off its topmost young twig and carried it to a land of trade; he set it in a city of merchants. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>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.*

*<sup>7</sup>"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. <sup>8</sup>It was planted in good soil by many waters, to bring forth branches, bear fruit, and become a majestic vine."*

*<sup>9</sup>"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. <sup>10</sup>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."'"*

#### Background Notes

In verse 2 the Lord told Ezekiel to propound a riddle and speak a parable to the Jewish people. The riddle and the parable about two eagles are one and the same. The fact that it's called a "riddle" emphasizes that it was an obscure story and required interpretation. The fact that it was a parable emphasized that God was drawing a comparison to illustrate His dealings with the nation of Judah.

This is the third of three parables that the Lord gave to Ezekiel, in order to emphasize that God had to judge His people because they had been unfaithful to Him. In the parable of the fruitless vine, Israel failed to bear spiritual fruit for the Lord (chapter 15). In the parable of the adulterous wife, Jerusalem (as capital and leader of the nation) committed spiritual adultery with the gods of the foreign nations (chapter 16). In chapter 17, the parable of the two eagles is found in verses 1-10, and the Lord Himself gave the meaning of the parable in verse 11.

The first eagle was Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. The stately cedar of Lebanon represented the kingdom of Judah. The city of traders or merchants was the city of Babylon (v4). The vine of verse 6 represented the Jews who were still living in Judah before the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The second eagle depicted the king of Egypt at that time. Let's move on to our doctrinal points for the details of the parable of Ezekiel 17.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. A king was taken into captivity by the eagle of Babylon.**

Ezekiel 17:11-14: *"Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, <sup>12</sup> '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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand.'"*

In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the eagle of Babylon, invaded Judah and took a number of Jews away as captives to Babylon, including the Jews of influence who might possibly mount a rebellion if they were allowed to remain in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was taken into captivity at that time, along with King Jehoiachin, who was the topmost young twig of the cedar in the parable (v4). Nebuchadnezzar then took Zedekiah from the royal line, set him up in Jerusalem as a puppet king, and made a covenant with him under oath (v13-14). Zedekiah was to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's authority, and swore under oath that he would not rebel.

In the parable, Zedekiah was the "royal seed" of the land that was planted in the fertile soil (v5). The vines (v6) were the Jews of Judah who did not go as captives to Babylon in 597 BC, but remained in the land under the puppet king Zedekiah. At first the vine turned toward the eagle of Babylon and was subject to Nebuchadnezzar, as agreed in the covenant. That's the first part of the parable: a king was taken into captivity by the eagle of Babylon.

### **2. A king broke his covenant by favoring the eagle of Egypt.**

Ezekiel 17:15-21: *"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?"*

*<sup>16</sup> '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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.'"*

*<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.”*

In the parable, the second great eagle represented Egypt (v7). The vine (the Jews of Judah) turned toward the eagle of Egypt. King Zedekiah broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar and favored Egypt, hoping that Egypt would help Judah regain its freedom. It was wrong for Zedekiah to break his word. In this parable and its interpretation, God predicted that Babylon would completely conquer Judah, and Pharaoh and the great army of Egypt would not intervene on Judah's behalf (v17). Furthermore, Zedekiah would be taken as a captive to Babylon, and he would die there.

When Ezekiel wrote this parable, the first part of the parable had already taken place. King Jehoiachin was already a captive in Babylon, and Zedekiah was the puppet king in Jerusalem. But the second part of the parable was yet to be completed, so the parable was really a prophetic warning. Zedekiah's political dealings with Egypt would fail, and Nebuchadnezzar would return and deliver a final blow to Jerusalem and Judah. This all took place in 586 BC, when Jerusalem was conquered and burned, and the Temple destroyed.

The historical account is found in Jeremiah 52. *“Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. <sup>4</sup> Now it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and encamped against it; and they built a siege wall against it all around. <sup>5</sup> So the city was besieged until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah... <sup>10</sup> Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes... <sup>11</sup> He also put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in bronze fetters, took him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death.*

*<sup>12</sup> Now in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month (which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> He burned the house of the Lord and the king's house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire. <sup>14</sup> And all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around.”*

All these sad results were predicted in this second part of Ezekiel's parable of the two eagles. A king broke his covenant by favoring the eagle of Egypt.

### **3. A king will be planted on the mountain of Jerusalem.**

Ezekiel 17:22-24: *“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. <sup>23</sup> 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*

*dwelling birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. <sup>24</sup> 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.”*

In the concluding verses of the parable, God Himself took a sprig from the highest branch of the cedar and planted it on a high and prominent mountain in Israel. This is a Messianic prophecy of the future kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth, with the mountain of Jerusalem as its capital. The “sprig from the cedar tree” is the Lord Himself, from the line of David. He is the “*branch out of a stem of Jesse*” (Isaiah 11). His kingdom will thrive and prosper and become majestic.

This prophecy is not being fulfilled now in the Church (as is sometimes taught), while our Lord is rejected by this world. It will be fulfilled when the Lord returns, sets up His kingdom, and will literally reign from Jerusalem. Then all the nations (represented by all the trees in verse 24) will acknowledge the Lord and submit to Him as the rightful King. Then all the inhabitants of the earth will find provision and peace under the branches of the majestic cedar. A king will be planted on the mountain of Jerusalem!

## **Practical Application**

### **Keep your promises!**

King Zedekiah may have thought that he had a good reason to break his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. He probably thought he could regain independence for Judah with the help of the king of Egypt. But Zedekiah had taken an oath before God that he would submit to Nebuchadnezzar, in exchange for being made king and given a kingdom.

Notice what God said about Zedekiah's rebellion: “*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.*” <sup>19</sup> *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. <sup>20</sup> 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”* (v18-20).

The Lord considered that Zedekiah had despised God's oath and had committed treason against God. Why? Because he had made a promise, and promises are to be kept. Breaking a solemn promise is serious sin.

Don't make promises if you don't intend to keep your word! Have you promised to help someone who is working on a worthy project? Have you promised to be at a place where your presence is needed? Have you promised to help with the youth ministry at your church? Have you promised to pay back a loan or give back something you borrowed?

Don't break your promises. Be a person of your word. Keep your promises!