

Israel's Lamentation

Ezekiel 19

Ezekiel 19:1-9: *"Moreover take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, ² and say: 'What is your mother? A lioness: she lay down among the lions; among the young lions she nourished her cubs. ³ She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a young lion; he learned to catch prey, and he devoured men. ⁴ The nations also heard of him; he was trapped in their pit, and they brought him with chains to the land of Egypt. ⁵ 'When she saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion. ⁶ He roved among the lions, and became a young lion; he learned to catch prey; he devoured men.*

⁷ He knew their desolate places, and laid waste their cities; the land with its fullness was desolated by the noise of his roaring. ⁸ Then the nations set against him from the provinces on every side, and spread their net over him; he was trapped in their pit. ⁹ They put him in a cage with chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon. They brought him in nets, that his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel."

Background Notes

A lamentation is a funeral song. Most translations show the poetic structure of the two laments in Ezekiel 19 by using a different layout on the page. Ezekiel gave both laments during the reign of Zedekiah, so Jerusalem and the Temple had not yet been destroyed. But the handwriting was on the wall, and in just a few years the kingdom of Judah was no more. In fact, the purpose of these two lamentations was to emphasize that any hope for some kind of miracle or last minute help for Judah was futile. The funeral dirges were already being sung.

In the first lament, Judah was likened to a lioness, and her cubs were the kings of Judah. Two of the cubs represented the last two kings of Judah: King Jehoahaz (who had already been taken as a captive to Egypt) and King Jehoiachin (who had already been taken as a captive to Babylon.) These two kings were still living in captivity when Ezekiel wrote the laments, but any idea that they might come back to power was hopeless.

Normally a lament was written after a king had died, and it usually mentioned good and honorable things that the departed king had accomplished - but not here. The kingdom of Judah would end, and these two kings would die in foreign lands with no lamentations or praise. There would be no return to power.

Why was King Jehoiakim skipped over here, and only Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin are mentioned? It certainly was not because Jehoiachin was a good king, and the others were not. Most likely Jehoiakim was not mentioned because he was already dead. He was never taken away as a captive, and had died in Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Points

1. The sad story of the two lions called for lamentation.

Notice from verse 2 that Judah was likened to a lioness among lions - the surrounding nations were likened to lions as well. The lion cubs were the last kings of Judah. The first one mentioned was King Jehoahaz, who became king in 609 BC. His father, Josiah, was a good king, but unfortunately he was killed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt at Megiddo, when Josiah tried to interfere militarily with Neco (2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 35).

Jehoahaz was not a good king, and he reigned for only three months. This lion cub was taken with hooks to the land of Egypt (v4). The sad story of the reign of Jehoahaz is found in 2 Chronicles 36:1-4: *“Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father’s place in Jerusalem. ² Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. ³ Now the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. ⁴ Then the king of Egypt made Jehoahaz’s brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Neco took Jehoahaz his brother and carried him off to Egypt.”*

The second lion cub is probably King Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was not a good king either. He was quite active in fighting the other lions, but that was short lived. This proud lion was taken as a captive to Babylon. *“They put him in a cage with chains, and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him in nets, that his voice should no longer be heard on the mountains of Israel” (v9).*

The story of the short reign of King Jehoiachin is found in 2 Chronicles 36:9-10: *“And he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord. ¹⁰ At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar summoned him and took him to Babylon, with the costly articles from the house of the Lord, and made Zedekiah, Jehoiakim’s brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem.”*

The sad story of these two lions called for lamentation - because it didn’t have to be a sad story. Both kings could have been good kings, and they could have led the nation of Judah back to the Lord in revival, as good King Josiah had done. But sadly, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin did evil in the sight of the Lord. The result was captivity - for the kings and for their nation. The sad story of the two lions called for lamentation.

2. The sad story of the tall vine called for lamentation.

Ezekiel 19:10-14: *“Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline, planted by the waters, fruitful and full of branches because of many waters. ¹¹ She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick*

branches, and was seen in her height amid the dense foliage. ¹² But she was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried her fruit. Her strong branches were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. ¹³ And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. ¹⁴ Fire has come out from a rod of her branches and devoured her fruit, so that she has no strong branch— a scepter for ruling.” This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.”

In the second lamentation, the kingdom of Judah was likened to a tall vine with strong branches. Its height was above the clouds and its strong branches represented the kings of Judah. *“She had strong branches for scepters of rulers. She towered in stature above the thick branches, and was seen in her height amid the dense foliage.*

Ezekiel had already given the parable of the fruitless vine back in chapter 15. As a vine, Israel and Judah were to bear fruit. Isaiah also had likened the nation to a vine that was expected to bear fruit, but because there was little fruit the nation would have to be removed. Isaiah 5:1-7: *“My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. ² He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. ⁴ What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? ⁵ And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: ⁶ I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.” For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.*

In the parable of the vine in Ezekiel 15, the fruitless vine would be cast into the fire: *“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷ and I will set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them.⁸ Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,’ says the Lord God.”*

In Ezekiel 19, the branches of the vine were broken off. The vine was plucked up, and it withered and dried up because of the sirocco, the hot dry wind from the east. The sirocco represented the conquering Babylonians who came from the east. Judah would be planted in the wilderness of captivity in Babylon. *“And now she is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land” (v13).*

The fire of rebellion from the last branch of Zedekiah would be put out, and there would be no more branches. The vine was totally consumed. *“Fire has come out from a rod of her branches and devoured her fruit, so that she has no strong branch— a scepter for ruling. This is a lamentation, and has become a lamentation.”*

What a sad story! The nation that was supposed to be a light to all other nations would be removed. Her light would be put out. The sad story of the tall vine called for lamentation.

Practical Application

Look forward to the coming “Lion of Judah

We’ve seen the sad story of the two lion cubs from Judah. The rule of the line of Davidic kings ended with the fall of Judah in 586 BC. Even when the Jews returned from captivity, there was no king in Israel.

But here’s the good news - a King is coming, who will be known as ***the Lion of Judah!*** That King is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who once was rejected as the true King of Israel. When he returns, He will be received as King! He will be received as the rightful King - from the tribe of Judah and in the royal line of King David.

In the book of Revelation, when He opened the scroll of future judgments, He was described as *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah.”* Revelation 5:4-5: *“So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.”*

Get ready for the coming King! Look forward to the coming “Lion of Judah”!