

The Visions of Ezekiel

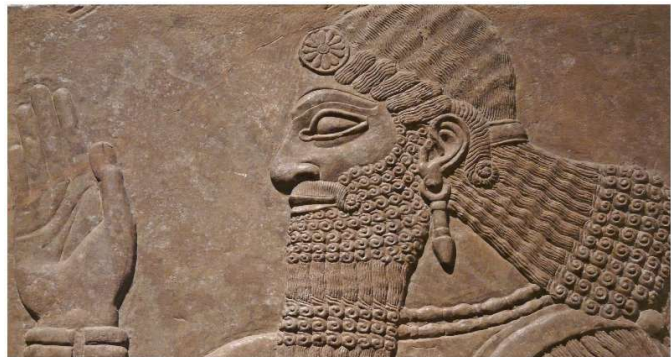
Lesson 12

17. Ezekiel's Seventeenth Assignment from the LORD

- a) Riddle of the First Great Eagle and the Cedar
 - (1) Cedar Tree and Great Eagle Told

Eze 17:1 Now **the word of the LORD came to me** saying, **Eze 17:2** "Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel, **Eze 17:3** saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "A great eagle with great wings, long pinions and a full plumage of many colors came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar.

With chapter 17, the LORD presented a riddle to the *house of Israel* concerning a “great eagle” who “took away the top of the cedar.” He did so in “Lebanon.” Lebanon was not in the Promised Land. It sat north of the Land, north of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel that had been destroyed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. Fortunately, we do not need to speculate about this riddle because the LORD will give the interpretation before the end of the chapter; therefore, we will simply discover the major points of the riddle. This chapter is not totally prophecy. It is a vision given to Ezekiel to speak to the *elders of Israel* who were in exile with him at the time. A riddle does not speak about the future, it speaks about the past. It is always a little test to be solved about something that has already happened. Yet, in the interpretation of this riddle a special prophecy will be given that even those who were part of the events alluded to in the riddle could not expect.



Stone Carving of Nebuchadnezzar

In this part of the vision we see that an eagle had plucked the “top of the cedar.” It was not all the tops of all the cedars; rather, it was the top of a single cedar. Topping a tree does not kill the tree and this eagle did not kill the cedar even though he took the top away.

- (2) Cedar Tree Topped

Eze 17:4 "He plucked off the topmost of its young twigs and brought it to a land of merchants; he set it in a city of traders.

Second, the eagle plucked the “**topmost of its young twigs**” and transplanted them to the “**land of merchants**” meaning the Babylonian Empire. This, too, did not kill the cedars; rather, some of the young were moved away from the place from which they sprouted.

(3) Cedar Seeds Transplanted

Eze 17:5 "He also took some of the seed of the land and planted it in fertile soil. He placed *it* beside abundant waters; he set it *like* a willow.



Pharaoh Hophra

Third, the seeds of the twigs were planted in good soil in Babylon where they could be watered as needed so they would grow. Seeds were easier to move than plants. Many could be collected and carried by one person and then placed in the soil. With time, the growth of the trees from the seeds could not be carried by hundreds of men. We must not run past this line, “**he set it *like* a willow.**” The willow tree is highly dependent on vast amounts of water as well as humidity. Unlike the cedars of Lebanon that would run their tap roots deep into the ground to find sources of cool water deep beneath the surface to constantly feed from, the willow had roots that ran sideways looking for water, shallow roots that needed moisture to survive the heat of the day.

(4) Cedar Sprout Transformed

Eze 17:6 "Then it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine with its branches turned toward him, but its roots remained under it. So it became a vine and yielded shoots and sent out branches.

Fourth, a transformation occurred. The seeds should have given growth to cedar trees, but they did not. When they sprouted they produced vines instead. Not lofty trees but low vines. These vines turned their leaves toward the eagle at all times. “**... but its roots remained under it**” means that tree was firmly planted in the land and did not drift away.

b) Parable of the Second Great Eagle and the Vine (1) Dispatch from the Vine

Eze 17:7 "But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it.

The vine that was well rooted in its place by the abundant water and totally dependent on the first “**great eagle**” was suddenly distracted by “**another great eagle.**” The distraction caused the vine to dispatch its leaves from following the first to following the second eagle. The vine hoped that the second eagle would water it instead.

(2) Delivery from the Vine

Eze 17:8 "It was planted in good soil beside abundant waters, that it might yield branches and bear fruit *and* become a splendid vine."

The vine had been planted in the right place at the right time for the right purpose. Without interference, it would become a fruitful and magnificent plant.

(3) Durability of the Vine

Eze 17:9 "Say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Will it thrive? Will he not pull up its roots and cut off its fruit, so that it withers—so that all its sprouting leaves wither? And neither by great strength nor by many people can it be raised from its roots *again*."

Here the riddle reveals that the vine was unhappy with where it was planted and longed to be with the second great eagle instead and was willing to be uprooted, placing the durability of the vine in jeopardy. Could it survive the move? All plants when transplanted experience stress. Leaves wither and fruit falls when the roots are cut from their established locations. Will the roots be able to establish themselves again in the new soil?

(4) Disinclination of the Vine

Eze 17:10 "Behold, though it is planted, will it thrive? Will it not completely wither as soon as the east wind strikes it—wither on the beds where it grew?"

The LORD then asked the question that we can paraphrase as follows. *"Will the vine survive under the care of the second great eagle when the forces from the east attack?"*

18. Ezekiel's Nineteenth Assignment from the LORD

a) Removal of the King

Eze 17:11 Moreover, **the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ^{Eze 17:12} "Say now to the rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things *mean*?' Say, 'Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon.**

According to the Babylonian Chronicle 5 (stone) stored in the British Museum, Nebuchadnezzar brought his army to capture Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel in 599 BC. Jehoiakim had been the king of the Southern Kingdom for about eleven years at the time. His original name was Eliakim. Speaking of Jehoiakim, Easton's Bible Dictionary says the following.

On the death of his father, Josiah, his younger brother Jehoahaz (Shallum), (Jer 22:11), who favored the Chaldeans against the Egyptians, was made king by the people; but the king of Egypt, Pharaoh-Necho, invaded the land and deposed Jehoahaz (2Ki 23:33, 34; Jer 22:10-12), setting Eliakim on the throne in his stead, and changing his name to Jehoiakim.

After this the king of Egypt took no part in Jewish politics, having been defeated by the Chaldeans at Carchemish (2Ki 24:7; Jer



Babylonian Chronicle 5 - Exile of Judah



Pharaoh Necho

46:2). Palestine was now invaded and conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim was taken prisoner and carried captive to Babylon (2Ch 36:6, 7).

Nebuchadnezzar reinstated Jehoiakim on his throne, but treated him as a vassal king. In the year after this, Jeremiah caused his prophecies to be read by Baruch in the court of the temple. Jehoiakim, hearing of this, had them also read in the royal palace before himself. The words displeased him, and taking the roll from the hands of Baruch he cut it in pieces and threw it into the fire (Jer 36:23). During his disastrous reign there was a return to the old idolatry and corruption of the days of Manasseh.



Jehoakim

After three years of subjection to Babylon, Jehoiakim withheld his tribute and threw off the yoke (2Ki 24:1), hoping to make himself independent. Nebuchadnezzar sent bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, and Ammonites (2Ki 24:2) to chastise his rebellious vassal. They cruelly harassed the whole country (Jer 49:1-6). The king came to a violent death, and his body having been thrown over the wall of Jerusalem, to convince the besieging [sic] army that he was dead, after having been dragged away, was buried beyond the gates of Jerusalem "with the burial of an ass," ... (Jer 22:18, 19; Jer 36:30). Nebuchadnezzar placed his son Jehoiachin on the throne, wishing still to retain the kingdom of Judah as tributary to him.

b) Installment of the King

Eze 17:13 'He took one of the royal family and made a covenant with him, putting him under oath. He also took away the mighty of the land, ^{Eze 17:14} that the kingdom might be in subjection, not exalting itself, but keeping his covenant that it might continue.

Nebuchadnezzar removed King Jehoiakim and placed his son, Jehoiachin, as the new king of the Southern Kingdom. He was only eight years of age, and reigned for one hundred days (2 Ch 36:9). His other name was Jeconiah (Jer. 24:1; Jer. 27:20), and still another was Coniah (Jer. 22:24; Jer. 37:1). He was one of the “**royal family.**” He was the right blood of the right bloodline.



Jehoiachin

c) Rebellion of the King

Eze 17:15 'But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?

According to 2 Kings 25, Jehoiachin had reached out to Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt for help. “**Will he succeed?**” The answer was no! Hophra could do nothing to help. Jehoiachin was helpless against Nebuchadnezzar. All of Hophra’s armies would not be able to thwart the Babylonian king.

d) Death of the King

Eze 17:16 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die.'

We know the history; therefore, we might as well present it here. When Nebuchadnezzar brought down Jehoiachin, he carried him to Babylon along with all the nobility, all the leading men in Jerusalem, and most of the population. We know the number, 13,000 (2 Ki 24:12-16; Jer 52:28). Jehoiachin would be imprisoned for 37 year and finally released (Jer 52:31, 33). He would then live in the Babylonian king's palace and eat with the king until his death. (Jer 52:32-34).

e) Friend of the King

Eze 17:17 'Pharaoh with *his* mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.'

Pharaoh Hophra could not help defend Jehoiachin from Nebuchadnezzar because Nebuchadnezzar had made his way down to Egypt after putting Jehoiachin on the throne and defeated Hophra and became the Babylonian Pharaoh of Egypt.

f) Covenant of the King

Eze 17:18 'Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, and behold, he pledged his allegiance, yet did all these things; he shall not escape.'

Jehoiachin had been in office about 90 days when word came that Hophra was defeated. Nebuchadnezzar learned of the attempted relationship between Jehoiachin and Hophra and left Egypt to return to Jerusalem and remove Jehoiachin from the throne to take him to Babylon where he died of natural causes.

g) Infliction on the King

Eze 17:19 Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "As I live, surely My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke, I will inflict on his head. ²⁰ "I will spread My net over him, and he will be caught in My snare. Then I will bring him to Babylon and enter into judgment with him there *regarding* the unfaithful act which he has committed against Me. ²¹ "All the choice men in all his troops will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to every wind; and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken."

Jehoiachin's punishment for his 100 days of rebellion was 37 years of imprisonment, "inflicted on his head" by the LORD's servant – Nebuchadnezzar.

h) Twig of the King

Eze 17:22 Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take *a sprig* from the lofty top of the cedar and set *it* out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant *it* on a high and lofty mountain."

The young Jehoiachin was but eight years old when he was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and the LORD would not let him be put to death. He was in the line of the kings. His uncle, Zedekiah who took his place on the throne of Jerusalem would not fill the shoes for the task that Jehoiachin needed to do. Jehoiachin needed to have a child, a male child. Why? Because Jehoiachin was in the lineage of the kings of Israel coming down from David and that same line had to continue. Zedekiah was not in that direct bloodline. What was the purpose of the bloodline? The LORD says the following about that.

i) Fruit of the King

Eze 17:23a "On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a stately cedar.

On the high mountains of Israel, a descendant of Jehoiachin would be planted, planted on a tree like a stately cedar. He would be the Messiah, the Savior, the One Who would give His life on that tree for you and me. His name would be Jesus. Counting back from Jesus to Jehoiachin, he was one of his grandfathers from the far past. Zedekiah could not have fulfilled that purpose. Only the last true bloodline king of Jerusalem could do that.

j) Birds of the King

Eze 17:23b And birds of every kind will nest under it; they will nest in the shade of its branches.

Those of us who have knelt at the foot of the rugged tree, the symbol of our Savior's death, considers that moment to be when we began to sit in the nest of the protection of the LORD and in the shade of the shadow of the cross. We are the only living creatures that were affected by what happened on that tree. No other creatures can claim such a blessing. No other creatures will ever be considered the fruit of that event. Nebuchadnezzar could not have imagined at that point in his life why he was saving this young eight-year-old king by the name of Jehoiachin, but he saved him for one single purpose, to protect the bloodline to the King of kings and LORD of lords.

k) Tree of the King

Eze 17:24 "All the trees of the field will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

"All the trees of the field..." means all the people who would be the remnant of the Promised Land and all the people in Babylon.

"...I bring down the high tree..." means that it was the LORD Who took Jehoiachin off the throne.

“...**exalt the low tree...**” means the LORD put Zedekiah on the throne, a nobody with no real purpose but to oversee abomination that would bring an end to the Southern Kingdom.

“... **dry up the green tree...**” means that although Zedekiah had many sons, they were all killed before his eyes in Riblah.

“... **and make the dry tree flourish...**” means that the LORD would be raised up out of the seemingly dry root of Jesse, the family of David, the orderly progression of the kings through Jehoiachin, the last true king of Jerusalem.

“...**I will perform *it*...**” means, it was all the LORD’s doing; Nebuchadnezzar was just the instrument of the LORD to get it all done.

Jehoiachin had to be tucked away in safety. What safer place was there in the world than in the prison and palace of the strongest king, in the strongest empire of the world, anointed and appointed by the only God of the world?



Zedekiah