

Ezekiel 17-21 • Chapter Study

Ch. 17

Ch. 17 rolls out in 3 sections.

Vs. 3–10 are an allegory of the **political** situation in Judah.

Vs. 11–21 explain the allegory.

Vs. 22–24 extend the allegory beyond the original.

All of this will be familiar to those who were with us during our study in Jeremiah.

Remember that Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah's.

While Jeremiah was in Jerusalem, speaking to the king, court & people of Judah about what was about to happen –

Ezekiel was speaking virtually the same message to the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

1 • 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:

It's always best when reading a parable to use your imagination & try to picture what's being described.

That's the point of a parable. It's a story from everyday life the hearer is supposed to enter in to – and learn an important spiritual point from.

“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.

The cedars of Lebanon were tall, stately trees that represent majesty & power.

A huge eagle swoops down & w/those huge talons, breaks off the top-most tip.

⁴ He cropped off its topmost young twig and carried it to a land of trade; He set it in a city of merchants.

Babylon is often referred to in the Bible as a city of commerce.

⁵ Then he [**the eagle**] 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.

The picture here becomes a little hard to follow – on purpose.

The eagle **meant** the **seed** to be 1 thing, but it **became something else**.

Instead of a stately cedar, it became a low-growing vine.

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.” ’ ”

While the vine owed its life to the 1st great eagle, **another eagle** came along, also great but not AS great as the 1st.

It was toward this 2nd eagle the vine grew.

And because of that, it would wither.

Now the parable is explained.

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?

In the first conquest of Jerusalem, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took the Jewish king Jehoiachin and many of the most influential of the land back to Babylon as hostages.

Nebuchadnezzar is that 1st great eagle and Jehoiachin was the transplanted top-twigg of the cedar.

Before he returned home, Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah as the ruler of Jerusalem and extracted an oath from him to be a loyal vassal.

No sooner did the Babylonians leave than Zedekiah appealed to the Egyptians to assist him in rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah is the low-growing vine & Egypt is the 2nd & lesser eagle.

Though there was great promise in their alliance at being able to throw off the Babylonian yoke – Egypt betrayed Judah and failed to come to their aid.

The Babylonians returned in force, laid siege to Jerusalem & wiped it out.

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. Zedekiah was caught, hauled to Babylon where he eventually died.

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."

Though Ezekiel foretells all this a couple years before it happened, it unfolded exactly as he says.

Now God **adds to** the parable.

While Jerusalem will be leveled, that's not the end of the story.

God will restore the Jews to their land, rebuild Jerusalem & the kingdom.

To & from that restored nation the Messiah will come.

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

Now watch this because it's a seeming obscure remark with amazing meaning

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*."

God will restore Israel under the royal line of David, **but not** thru the old dynastic line of Jehoiachin, who came thru **Solomon**.

God was going to go back to David thru the line of his **other son**, Nathan.

If you've read the Gospels, you know **Matthew** gives Jesus' family tree thru **Joseph** back to **David** thru the royal line of **Solomon**.

Luke gives it thru **Mary**, back to **David** thru his son **Nathan**.

You see, there was a problem with the royal line thru Solomon.

That king Jehoiachin we mentioned earlier, the one Neb carted off to Babylon—He was so wicked, in Jer. 22:30, God cursed his line & said none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne.

Jer. 22:30 • Thus says the Lord: 'Write this man (Jehoiachin) down as childless, a man *who* shall not prosper in

his days; for none of his descendants shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.’
”

Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive dad, comes from that line.

So, **legally**, while Joseph was in the dynastic line, his **biological** son could not rule.

Jesus **wasn’t** His biological son; he was his **adopted** son.

Jesus obtains his link to the royal line of David from Mary, who was a descendant of David via his **older** son Nathan.

Solomon’s line is described here as the high tree that’s brought down while Nathan is the low tree that gets exalted.

Ch. 18

Since we covered all of ch. 18 Sunday, we’ll leave it for those of you who weren’t here to get a copy in the bookstore afterward.

It’s a wonderful promise of how when we turn in faith to Christ, God steps in between us and our past.

Ch. 19

Ch. 19 is another allegory, this one laments the fall of David’s dynasty.

Israel is a **lioness** whose **cubs** are her **kings**.

1 • “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.

Judah’s last good king was **Josiah**.

When he died in battle against the Egyptians, his son **Jehoahaz** became king.

But after a reign of only 3 months, Pharaoh Neco deposed him, & took him captive to Egypt where he eventually died.

⁵ ‘When she saw that she waited, that her hope was lost, she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion.

Ezekiel skips Jehoahaz’s son **Jehoiakim** who reigned after him & goes to **his** son, the dreaded **Jehoiachin** who completed the job of destroying Judah by his wickedness.

It was during Jehoiachin’s reign that Judah was set on a course of inevitable judgment.

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.

Now the image shifts from lions to a vine.

¹⁰ ‘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. [**Babylon**]

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.

This fire that comes from one of the branches to devour the vine is yet another picture of the ruin Zedekiah's foolish rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar will lead to.

V. 14 ends with a clear statement **this** is a **lament**.

A **lion**, king of the beasts, has been brought low.

It's a **pathetic** image to see such a **majestic** creature Trapped, caged, & put in chains.

A **regal vine** w/the potential to produce a harvest of rich bounty, instead withers & dies.

Thru Ezekiel, God laments the fate of what **could have been** such an amazing destiny.

Israel had a taste of the glory, majesty, prosperity; the **astounding blessing** they **could have continued** to enjoy during David's & 1st part of Solomon's reign.

Really, they lived on the afterglow of David's faithfulness for the next 400 years.

Every so often, a good & godly king would reprise David's faithfulness & God would bless them once more.

But really, Solomon, in the 2nd half of his reign introduced the seeds of the kingdom's demise by allowing idols into Jerusalem.

Solomon may have been the wisest man who ever lived but he proves that when it comes to governance, godliness / righteousness is more important than wisdom or political savvy.

Western civilization was profoundly shaped by a Biblical worldview & it produced the amazing benefits of the modern world.

But the post-modern era has consciously rejected that Biblical worldview and works hard to eradicate all evidence of it.

Like Judah in the days of Jeremiah & Ezekiel, we're living on the **fumes** of our Christian heritage.

That heritage is fast running out.

Ch. 20

The elders of Israel once again visit Ezekiel for a consultation.

And he's **again** warned by God of their divided loyalties & delivers a long oracle recounting Israel's penchant to worship idols.

That these elders **came** to Ezekiel shows they'd not entirely abandoned faith in God.

But the **pressure to do so** was there.

The exiles were a small minority in a far larger, multi-cultural society.

Babylonian religion had a **multitude** of gods. // Truly – Babylon was **idol-central**.

And certainly, the Babylonians' material wealth & power; their impressive buildings—seemed **proof** the Babylonian gods were worth following.

It's important to remember that the people of the ancient world saw war as **more** than a contest of armies; it was a contest between gods.

Whichever god was greatest/strongest won the battle & war.

The gods weren't interested in a **personal relationship** with people! That was an absurd idea.

Why would a **god** care about puny humans?

All they cared about was that people worshipped them & brought them offerings.

They wanted their subjects to go out & conquer others so they could **prove** their superiority.

There was not the slightest idea in the ancient person's mind that their god cared about them **personally**, wanted an intimate relationship w/them, or was concerned to shape their character in the path of virtue.

Religion was **utterly formulaic**.

Throw the gods a bone by going to their temple or shrine, making an offering, doing a little religious dance, & enjoy some reciprocal blessing.

The longer the trip to the temple, the bigger the offering, the more elaborate the ritual – the bigger the payoff in the blessing.

It was all utterly pragmatic; pure business.

Religious worship rituals equal blessing.

The **evidence** of all this was your prosperity, power & the grandeur of your stuff.

Babylon was top dog of its day; a city that **to this day** stands as a memorial to the glory of human empire along with **Athens, Persepolis & Rome**.

Babylon's towering pyramidal ziggurats, super-wide processional way, & massive walls all shouted to the ancient pagan mind the utter superiority of Babylon's gods.

This is one of the reasons why the Babylon's **relocated** the most influential citizens of the people they conquered **TO** Babylon; to impress on them their superiority & make them converts to their religions.

The Jewish exiles were being lulled into that mindset.

They'd lost their grip on the reality of **Who their** God – the True, One & Only God **IS**.

Yes, certainly, He rewards obedience – but He's far more interested in our eternal soul than are temporal comfort.

He's all about having an intimate, personal relationship with us.

As that relationship unfolds, it alters our character & makes us more like Him.

The Jews of Ezekiel's day had lost sight of all this.

They still believed in the God of their fathers, barely.

Their thinking had been co-opted by the world w/its plethora of false gods.

So Ezekiel's oracle starts w/a reminder when Israel dwelt in the land of **another** super-power—Egypt.

The cycle of warning, rebellion, judgment & restoration is repeated several times.

Their history proves that even when it hurts, they tend to follow other religions.

Ultimately, **after** their judgment & scattering, Israel will be gathered back into their land & loathe themselves for what they've done.

This oracle illustrates the enduring patience of God.

He remains faithful despite their stubborn rebelliousness.

1 • It came to pass in the 7th year, in the 5th month, on the 10th day of the month,
Since the captivity began ...

that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. ² Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ³ “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Have you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you.” ’ ⁴ Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers. In **vs. 5-9**, God summarizes their slavery in Egypt & the Exodus but how they kept turning from Him.

Then in **vs. 10-26**, God describes the wilderness wandering when for 40 years His faithfulness ought to have convinced them that faithfulness to Him was best.

Yet **still** they rebelled & aped the stupid idolatry they'd learned in Egypt.

What makes that period of their history so crucial is that there was an **immediate** result to their rebellion and idolatry.

There was no delay. When they obeyed, they experienced great blessing. When they rebelled, they suffered. You would think they'd learn but this period of their history proves the old saw = **Sin makes you stupid!**

In **vs. 27-30**, God quickly covers their nearly 1000 years in the land of Canaan, which except for a short periods of time under the good & godly king, they set up & worshipped idols.

He sums it up in vs. 31-32

³¹ For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day.

So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live,” says the Lord God, “I will not be inquired of by you. ³² What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, ‘We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.’

There it is! They wanted to be people of the world rather than people of God.

And isn't that precisely the issue for everyone one of us today?

Do we want to be people of God or people of the world?

We can't be both!

In James 4:4 we read ...

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

God & this fallen world system are at utter odds with each other.

There's no middle ground between the 2 we can take to be buddies with both.

It's God or the world, not both/&.

God's not finished with the oracle.

While Israel has a history of idolatry which is going to climax in their loss of place & scattering, God will restore them & **cure** them of their idolatry.

Actually, it's **THEIR JUDGMENT** that becomes the instrument God uses to effect the much needed change.

³³ "As I live," says the Lord God, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. ³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. ³⁵ And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. ³⁶ Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you," says the Lord God.

³⁷ "I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸ I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

³⁹ "As for you, O house of Israel," thus says the Lord God: "Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols.

God tells the elders to stop being double minded & think they can **both** worship idols & Him.

He tells them if they won't forsake their idols, then stop pretending to follow Him.

They should go worship their idols w/abandon & **GET IT OUT OF THEIR SYSTEM.**

⁴⁰ For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel," says the Lord God, "there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. ⁴¹ I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.

Think of Israel's history like this ...

When they were in Egypt they were **infected** w/idols.

At different times under godly leaders like Moses, Joshua, the Judges, & good kings, they seemed to heal and get better.

But they always relapsed – and each time they did, it got worse till eventually the infection took over and they were quarantined in Babylon.

There, lying on a cot amidst the total sickness of idolatry, they realized how utterly pathetic and foolish it is to worship idols.

They recovered, and when God brought them back into their land, they were **SO** done w/idols & so devoted to God alone that they ended up getting a rep **before the rest of the world** as being oddballs who believed in only 1 God.

⁴² Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers. ⁴³ And there you shall remember your ways and all your doings with which you were defiled; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight because of all the evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴ Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your wicked ways nor according to your corrupt doings, O house of Israel," says the Lord God.' "

V. 45 begins a new section; 4 separate visions of judgment.

⁴⁵ Furthermore the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁴⁶ "Son of man, set your face toward the south; preach against the south and prophesy against the forest land, the South, ⁴⁷ and say to the forest of the South, 'Hear the

word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree in you; the blazing flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be scorched by it.”⁴⁸ All flesh shall see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.” ’ ’

3 different words are used here for “south;” all of them referring to regions in Israel.

God’s going to kindle a fire there – meaning judgment’s coming.

⁴⁹ Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! They say of me, ‘Does he not speak parables?’ ”

When Ezekiel gave his visions of judgment, because people *didn’t want to believe* judgment was coming, they said it was a parable – in other words, *not literal*.

His utterances are seen as just harsh symbols for what they hoped was a *less harsh reality*.

It seems people are keen to know what the future brings, but only if it meets their desires.

When it *doesn’t*, they’re good at explaining away even the most obvious signs.

Ch. 21

In the 2nd prophecy the imagery is even more precise.

1 • And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,² “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel;³ and say to the land of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you.

This hardly seems just – but the point here is that this is the final judgment of Jerusalem in which no one is spared.

They aren’t to think that this is some kind of selective judgment that will just effect a small group.

This is it – the end of the city. // That’s made clear by the next v. ...

⁴ Because I will cut off both righteous and wicked from you, therefore My sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south to north,⁵ that all flesh may know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore.” ’

The sword is an obvious symbol of war.

Judgment will come in the form of a *military invasion*.

⁶ Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes.⁷ And it shall be when they say to you, ‘Why are you sighing?’ that you shall answer, ‘Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass,’ says the Lord God.”

Ezekiel was to deliver this message w/sorrow, not delight.

Judgment was coming all right, but they God wasn’t happy about it - & his messenger wasn’t to misrepresent Him.

We talked about this in an earlier study.

That those who speak for God must be careful to convey His *heart* -- *along w/His* words.

They ought not affect a scowl when speaking of love, nor a grin when warning of judgment.

I like what Charles Spurgeon told young ministers:

He said something to the effect of, “When you speak of heaven, let your countenance take on the light & the glory of that celestial realm. Let your face shine with the joy of anticipation. But when you preach on hell – your everyday face will do.”

In announcing judgment, Ezekiel was to moan & groan.

Now the 3rd vision in *vs. 8-17*.

The image of the sword goes but this time it’s directed specifically at the rulers.

The picture Ezekiel draws is striking.

Imagine a common foot-soldier running into a palace with a sharp, drawn sword.

He’s spent all morning in camp before the attack polishing and honing the edge.

He enters the royal hall and sees the royal court standing there.

He’s been given orders to leave none alive, so he moves toward the nearest foe – who raises a

WHAT?!?! A scepter – a short wooden rod!

Who's going to win in a contest between an iron sword & a wooden stick?

It matters none at all if the one who holds the stick is royal, influential, rich, or important.

The sword in the hand of the common soldier wins every time.

The 4th & final vision in **vs. 18-32** gives even more details about the coming judgment of Judah.

What's fascinating is that what Ezekiel foretells here came to pass exactly as he describes.

Nebuchadnezzar was faced with 2 of his vassals rebelling against him; Judah & the Ammonites with their capital at Rabbah.

He marched south w/a huge army & waited to decide which to attack first until he got to the place where it was one direction or the other.

²¹ For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the 2 roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver.

History tells us what Neb did here virtually **every** ancient ruler did, not just when going to war but for **most** major decisions.

The Egyptians, Chinese, Mongols, Persians, Greeks, & Romans all had soothsayers & priests who were trained in the auguries; reading the signs.

They watched flocks of birds fly.

They threw knucklebones on the floor & read the pattern.

The arrows here was similar. They'd hold a bunch of them like Pick Up stick and let them go, then read the future by how they fell.

One of the most common in the ancient world for hundreds of years was reading a liver.

Color, shape, smell.

Neb did his little dance w/the auguries & concluded they were saying to attack Jerusalem first.

His assault & conquest of Jerusalem is described in **vs. 22-27**.

Once done with that, he turned to finish off the Ammonites, described in **vs. 28-32**.