



Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 17

Theme: Riddle of the two eagles

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Missler Introduction: We are in a context where Ezekiel, trained as a priest, but called to the office of a prophet, was captive in Babylon. The first siege had taken Daniel captive, the second one had taken Ezekiel. The third siege yet forthcoming (in about 2 years from this passage), would be the final fall and destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was not offering them hope. He had pointed out to them that Jerusalem would fall, that God was going to judge them for their idolatry and their sins.

After swearing allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah treacherously conspired against him and sought alliance with Egypt to avoid his commitments. The alliance, which Jeremiah had warned against, proved weak and unsatisfactory and foolhardy.¹

Dake: Eight Predictions—Fulfilled:

1. A great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar) with great wings (longwinged, full of feathers which had diverse colors) came to Lebanon and took the highest branch of the cedar (Jehoiachin, Ezekiel 17:3; 2 Kings 24:6-16). He cropped off the top of his young twigs (princes and best of the people, 2 Kings 24:11-16), and carried them into the land of traffic (Babylon, Ezekiel 17:4,12; 2 Kings 24:15-16); and he set them down in the city of merchants (Babylon, Ezekiel 17:4; 2 Kings 24:15-16). He also took the seed of the land (Zedekiah and Judah) and planted it in a fruitful field (Ezekiel 17:5,12; 2 Kings 24:17-19). He placed it by great waters and set it as a willow tree (Ezekiel 17:5). It grew and became a vine of low stature whose branches turned toward him (Nebuchadnezzar), and the roots were under him (life was sustained through him) so that it brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs (Ezekiel 17:6,14).
2. There was also another great eagle (Pharaoh) with great wings and many feathers. This vine (Zedekiah and Judah) did bend toward him (Pharaoh), and shot out branches toward him (trusted in Egypt for help against Babylon, Jeremiah 37:6-11) that he might water it by the furrows (irrigation ditches) of her plantation (Ezekiel 17:7,15-21).
3. It was planted in a good soil by great waters (the Euphrates) that it might bring forth branches, bear fruit, and be a goodly vine (Ezekiel 17:8).
4. It will not prosper in turning its roots and branches toward him (Pharaoh). He (Nebuchadnezzar) will pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof that it may wither (Ezekiel 17:9,15-21).
5. It will wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof (Ezekiel 17:9,15-21).
6. It will not prosper in looking toward Egypt (Ezekiel 17:10,15-21).
7. It will utterly wither when the east wind (Babylon) touches it (Ezekiel 17:10).
8. It will wither in the furrows where it grew (Ezekiel 17:10,15-21).²

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

² Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

The first eagle in this chapter represents King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (see Ezekiel 17:12), who appointed or “planted” Zedekiah as king in Jerusalem. Zedekiah rebelled against this arrangement and tried to ally with Egypt, the second eagle, to battle against Babylon. This took place while Ezekiel, miles away in Babylon, was describing these events. Jeremiah, a prophet in Judah, was also warning Zedekiah not to form this alliance (Jeremiah 2:36-37). Although many miles apart, the prophets had the same message because both spoke for God. God still directs his chosen spokesmen to speak his truth all around the world.³

The Parable of the Eagles and the Vine: The predominantly theological viewpoint of ch. 16 now gives way to a predominantly political one. It bears the hallmarks of a “fable,” a story form in which flora and fauna take the lead roles in order to teach some lesson (e.g., Judg. 9:8–15). Here two eagles, a cedar, and a vine are the main protagonists, and the story turns on the fortunes of the vine (cf. Ezek. 19:10–14; Isa. 5:1–7). The whole is meant to illustrate the current and imminent state of Judah’s political fortunes, and ultimately its future under God. The fable is narrated in Ezek. 17:1–12 and successively unpacked, first on the natural plane (vv. 11–18) and then in theological terms (vv. 19–21). Finally, the terms of the fable return to articulate an ideal future (vv. 22–24).⁴

Whatever fantasies we may possess of our own importance, God always has the last word. He cannot use a nation or an individual that ignores his pronouncements concerning moral and spiritual issues. On the other hand, God never casts his people away entirely. If there is any trace of usability, God’s grace will offer every opportunity to be of service. No child of God has ever gone so far in rebellion but that he can return, find forgiveness, and dedicate himself afresh to God’s plan for his life.

Chuck Smith: Now in chapter 17 he speaks a parable of a great eagle. And this is where some of these harebrained people begin to spiritualize and try to read the United States into prophecy. Because there is an eagle on the top of the flag and thus, because he uses an eagle in a parable, that must refer to the United States, you know. And they start twisting and spiritualizing to try to make this fit the United States. But, if you’ll just read the beginning, there’s no way that you can twist it.

Constable: This message addressed another objection to the destruction of Jerusalem that the exiles entertained. The preceding parable placed much emphasis on Jerusalem’s long history of unfaithfulness to the Lord’s marriage covenant with her. Was the Lord fair in destroying Jerusalem now since former generations of Judahites had been unfaithful? The present fable clarified that Judah’s recent leaders were also unfaithful and worthy of divine judgment. See 2 Kings 24:6-20; 2 Chronicles 36:8-16; and Jeremiah 37 and 52:1-7 for the historical background of the events described in this riddle.

“. . . what Ezekiel’s pantomime [the sign of the departing deportee, 12:1-16] was to drama, this figure is to rhetoric. Both involve caricature—the first in the form of a dramatic presentation, the second as a literary cartoon—and both require interpretation.”⁵

³ Life Application Bible Notes

⁴ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1522). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ Block, the book, p. 523

"There is obvious logic in the movement of the theme through four distinct stages, each involving a new plane of action: (1) an imaginative fabulous image [vv. 1-10]; (2) a historical interpretation of the fable (vv. 11-18); (3) a theological interpretation of the historical events (vv. 19-21); (4) a theological portrayal of the future (vv. 22-24)."⁶

Ezekiel 17:1

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

1-2. God told Ezekiel to set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a parable. The Hebrew word for “allegory” (*ḥîdâh*) refers to a riddle or an enigmatic saying that normally requires an explanation. It is used of the “riddle” Samson posed to the Philistines (Jud. 14:12-19) and the “hard questions” the Queen of Sheba asked Solomon (1 Kings 10:1; 2 Chron. 9:1).

Ezekiel was told to deliver a discourse or extended riddle that would require an explanation. The word for parable is *māšāl*, which is normally translated “proverb,” a short, pithy statement (cf. Ezek. 12:22; 18:1) but which can also refer to a longer work involving extensive comparison(s). Ezekiel’s riddle or parable was stated in 17:3-10 and explained in verses 11-21.⁷

“Put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel”—because they would not listen to him, Ezekiel had to come to these people in a strange and unusual way.⁸

Ezekiel was told to propound a “riddle” or “parable” to the house of Israel (17:1f.). The prophet compared the royal family of Judah to a cedar tree in “Lebanon,” a symbolic name for Jerusalem. The parable has two distinct parts, and is perhaps better regarded as two distinct but closely related parables. The first depicts the immediate past and immediate future of the Davidic line. The second predicts the long range future of the royal family.⁹

1-10 The Parable Narrated: Although the story is easily followed, it still puzzles the hearer. It proceeds in two phases. A great eagle (v. 3) transplants a twig from a cedar, then plants a seed, which becomes a flourishing vine. But then a second, lesser eagle (v. 7) attracts the vine’s attention and draws it away from the first.¹⁰

Constable 1-2: The Lord directed Ezekiel to present a riddle (Heb. *hidah*, allegory, enigmatic saying) and a parable (Heb. *maschal*, proverb, comparison) to his audience of Jewish exiles. This is the longest *maschal* in the Old Testament and quite a detailed one.

⁶ Ibid p. 526

⁷ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁸ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 17:1–24). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

¹⁰ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1522). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

It is a riddle in that its meaning needs to be explained; there is a deeper meaning which underlies the figurative form, for something in its presentation is obscure. It is a parable in that it is an allegory.

Riddles excite the curiosity and leave the baffled listeners keen for an answer. What follows is not a true riddle but a fable or theological cartoon that is equally intended to whet the hearers' appetites for the plain oracle that follows.

A 'riddle' . . . was commonly used in international politics between kings . . . If one failed to answer the riddle of the other, he might be called on to submit to him as a vassal.

In some cases he might even be put to death.

The purpose for using riddles was apparently to test the intelligence or cleverness of the hearer (cf. Judg. 14:12-19; 1 Kings 10:1; 2 Chron. 9:1; Matt. 13).²⁶⁸

This allegory differs from others Ezekiel was commanded to tell his audience because of its opaqueness, so he was to tell it as a riddle (v. 2).¹¹

Ezekiel 17:2

Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel;

The prophet propounds a **riddle** cf. Judges 14:12; I Kgs 10:1) requiring interpretation, or a **parable** cf. 24:3; Isa 14:4) containing a similitude or comparison.¹²

This oracle appears as a **riddle**, designed to provoke thought, and a **parable** (Hb. *mashal*, also translated "proverb"; see 12:22), which depends on some comparison.¹³

The Hebrew words translated riddle and parable can both be used to refer to allegory. The *parable* primarily refers to a comparison between two things. A *riddle* was sometimes used as political contests of mental competition between kings, in which the loser would submit to the winner and be killed. Some take the following riddle as a contest posed by God to Zedekiah, Judah's king.

Chuck Smith: Not to the United States, but to the house of Israel. But people get all into the spiritualizing of scriptures and they fail to read this part. And they get down into the eagle and snapping the twig from Lebanon and they start making all of these spiritual types of analogies and it just gets off the wall.

Ezekiel 17:3

And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; A great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar:

For the interpretation of this riddle and parable see Ezekiel 17:11-21; 2 Kings 24:6-25:7.

¹¹ Dr. Thomas Constable, 2010 Notes on Ezekiel

¹² Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:2). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹³ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1522). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

[a great eagle] King of birds, symbol of the Assyrian supreme god, Nishroch; so applied to the great king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, his vicegerent on earth. Dan 7:4; Jer 48:10, 49:22. Also see here, verse 12, where it is so applied.

[great wings] great forces. Symbols such as are now seen in the Assyrian remains. An extensive empire.

[Long winged] implying the wide extent of his empire and rapid in his conquests

[Full of feathers] in the full freshness of renovated youth, Ps 103:5; Isa 40:31; answering to the many peoples which, as tributaries, constituted the strength of Babylon. Having multitudes of subjects.

[Various colors] answering to the variety of languages, habits, and costumes of the peoples subject to Babylon. People of various nations.

[Lebanon] the temple at Jerusalem, called “Lebanon” by Jews, because its woodwork was wholly of cedars of Lebanon. Came against Judea.

3–5 The terms of the description are significant, as they indicate the relative status of the various characters. This is the greater eagle, taking a topmost twig as well as a seed.¹⁴

[The highest branch] the king. King Jehoiachin he took captive to Babylon.

[The cedar] The Jewish state and king.

A great eagle. The great broad-winged eagle (*neshar*, (often “vulture”; Hos 8:1; Lam 4:19; but here “eagle” is more fitting) with long pinions represents Nebuchadnezzar. The many colors possibly indicate the various nations included in the Babylonian empire. Lebanon is the mountain of Israel; the cedar is the Davidic house (vv. 12, 22). Nebuchadnezzar is represented as carrying off Jehoiachin, king of Judah, to the land of traffick, Babylon. 5, 6. The seed of the land, native to the region is Zedekiah. It was planted in a fruitful field (the land of Israel), in the vicinity of abundant waters (Deut 8:7; 11:11), where it possessed every natural advantage for growth and fruitfulness. Prosperity is indicated by the fact that the seed sprouted and became a low spreading vine ... and brought forth branches and put forth foliage (RSV).¹⁵

3-4, 11-12. The first of two eagles, with powerful wings, long feathers, and full plumage of varied colors, went to Lebanon.

As Ezekiel explained later (v. 12), the eagle symbolized Nebuchadnezzar, and Lebanon stood for Jerusalem: Do you not know what these things mean? The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem (on the rebellious house see comments on 3:9).

¹⁴ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1522). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:3). Chicago: Moody Press.

Then Ezekiel explained why the “eagle” had gone “to Lebanon.” The eagle clipped the top of a cedar tree and replanted the bough in a city known for trade. This referred to Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on Jerusalem in 597 B.C. when he reestablished his control over the city and deposed King Jehoiachin. As Ezekiel explained, Nebuchadnezzar carried off her king (17:12), the top shoot of the tree, and her nobles, bringing them back with him (cf. 2 Kings 24:8-16) and replanted the “shoot” in Babylon.¹⁶

This great eagle is none other than Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar, the present king of Babylon. The eagle is a figure that is used as a symbol for Babylon elsewhere in Scripture. Jeremiah used it in Jeremiah 48:40 as he wrote of Nebuchadnezzar: “For thus saith the LORD; Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread his wings over Moab” Then in Jeremiah 49:22 he wrote, “Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread his wings over Bozrah: and at that day shall the heart of the mighty men of Edom be as the heart of a woman in her pangs!” Daniel saw the Babylonian Empire rising up out of the sea, and it was in the form of a lion with eagle’s wings (Dan. 7:4). Therefore, what we have here is a picture of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who is going to come and crop the top of the tree.

Who is the tree? It is the nation Israel and, specifically, the royal house of David. Nebuchadnezzar is going to clip it off and bring it to naught. That is exactly what he did with Zedekiah.¹⁷

3–21 Ezekiel used two eagles to symbolize the two great powers of his day, viz., Babylon and Egypt. The parable described what took place in 597 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar deported the king of Judah and ten thousand captives. The parable also predicted what was about to happen in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed and the Davidic ruler was deported to Babylon. After presenting the parable itself, Ezekiel provided the interpretation.

1. *The parable presented (17:3–10)*. Ezekiel began by describing a great eagle. It had multi-colored feathers, great wings, and long pinions. It came to Lebanon and broke off the top most twig of the cedar there. It carried the twig to the land of merchants and commerce. It then implanted the seed of the land of Lebanon as a willow beside many waters. That implanted seed became a spreading vine (17:3–6).

The vine could have prospered had it stayed in its own domain. A second great eagle, however, came along. It also had great wings and many feathers. The vine inclined toward the second eagle. Because of this, the vine could not prosper. The vine would be plucked up by the first eagle. Its fruit would be cut off. It would wither. No great power would come to the aid of the vine (17:7–10).

2. *The parable explained (17:11–21)*. Ezekiel wanted his audience to be crystal clear about the meaning of his parable. The first eagle represented the king of Babylon. He came to Jerusalem and carried off the king (Jehoiachin) and princes to Babylon. He put one of the royal family (Zedekiah) under oath. He allowed Judah to continue as a lowly

¹⁶ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

kingdom. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar by sending envoys to the second eagle, Egypt (17:11–15).

Because he despised his oath and broke his covenant, Zedekiah would die in Babylon. Pharaoh would not be able to provide any relief from the siege of Jerusalem in which so many would die. Violation of a sacred oath was an offense against Yahweh. God would bring down on Zedekiah's head all the stipulations of self-malediction which he pronounced upon himself in his oath to Nebuchadnezzar. Through his agent, the king of Babylon, God would ensnare Zedekiah and deport him to Babylon. By these actions God would enter into judgment with Zedekiah regarding "the unfaithful act" which he had committed when he violated his oath. The army would fare no better than their king. They would fall by the sword, and the few survivors would be scattered to every wind. This terrible judgment would throw new light on the true nature of God (17:16–21).¹⁸

Chuck Smith: Now, this greatest eagle is Nebuchadnezzar. The highest branch of the cedar would be the house of David, the king, who was Jehoiakim at this particular time.

Constable 3-6: In this riddle, a powerful and impressive eagle came to Lebanon, cropped off the top of one of its famous cedar trees, and carried these twigs to a land of merchants and a city of traders. This eagle also took some of the seed from Lebanon and planted it in fertile soil near a body of water so it would flourish, like a willow tree (cf. Isa. 44:4). This seed sprouted and became a low, spreading vine (cf. 15:1-8) that sent out branches upward toward the eagle and roots downward.

Lebanon was an alternative name for the land of Canaan that emphasized its great beauty and fruitfulness (cf. Josh. 1:4; 2 Kings 14:9). The Lord evidently used it here because He wanted to develop the idea of a bird plucking the top off a tree, and this was more typical in Lebanon than in Israel because of Lebanon's many cedar trees.

Ezekiel 17:4

He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants.

[Top of his young twig] who would this be? The princes of Judah.

The very young King Jeconiah, 18 years old, sometimes called Coniah, sometimes called Jehoiachin. He was carried to Babylon, the city of merchants and trade. He was carried into captivity, leaving the Judean throne vacant. Nebuchadnezzar, in an attempt to be lenient, replaced him not with a foreigner, but with Zedekiah who was "of the seed of the land."¹⁹

A land of traffic—Chaldea.

¹⁸ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 17:3–21). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

¹⁹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

A city of merchants—Babylon; for which this city was the most celebrated of all the cities of the east. Its situation procured it innumerable advantages; its two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Persian Gulf, gave it communication with the richest and the most distant nations.

Planted it in a fruitful field—Made him king of Judea in place of his brother.

Placed it by great waters—Put him under the protection of Babylon, situated on the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates.²⁰

And set it as a willow tree—Made him dependent on this city of great waters, as the willow is on humidity.

As the king was taken as a captive to Babylon.

Ezekiel 17:5

He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree.

[Of the seed of the land] Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiachin.

5-6, 13-14. The “eagle,” Nebuchadnezzar, was not totally heartless. He took some of the seed of the land and . . . planted it like a willow by abundant water, and it sprouted and became a low, spreading vine. Nebuchadnezzar weakened Jerusalem, but he did not destroy it at that time. Instead he set up Zedekiah as a vassal king. Jerusalem’s military might was gone; but as long as she remained faithful to Nebuchadnezzar, her people could continue to live in peace. Zedekiah, a member of the royal family, by a treaty was put under oath (v. 13). Though Judah was brought low, weakened and humiliated, she could survive if she kept the treaty with Nebuchadnezzar.²¹

Chuck Smith: That is, he took the son, Zedekiah, and he made him the king, entering into a covenant. Swearing by God you’ll be faithful to him and so forth, Zedekiah made a pledge to Nebuchadnezzar to rule the people as a vassal state to Babylon, and he swore by God his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. But, of course, he rebelled against it. He did not honor this covenant that he had sworn by the Lord.

²⁰ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

²¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 17:6

And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs.

Missler: The implication, in the way this is presented, is that if nothing else happened, he would have blossomed. The impression you get from Ezekiel here is that had Zedekiah kept his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, there would have been prosperity. The “fruitful field” speaks of favorable conditions, Isa 44:4.

A spreading vine of low stature—The Jewish state having then no height of dominion, it must abide under the wings or branches of the Chaldean king.²²

Those branches turned toward him, and the roots—under him—Zedekiah was wholly dependent on Nebuchadnezzar, both for his elevation to the throne, and his support on it.

Ezekiel 17:7

There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation.

But here another eagle is introduced. This is a rival eagle to the first one. The first one was Babylon; the second one was Egypt.

Another great eagle—Pharaoh-hophra, or Apries, king of Egypt.

With great wings—Extensive dominion.

And many feathers—Numerous subjects.

Did bend her roots—Looked to him for support in her intended rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.²³

7, 8. **Another great eagle.** Pharaoh-hopra of Egypt enters the scene (Jer 44:30; 37:7). Through flourishing in good soil, the vine (Zedekiah) sought the agency of another power to supply it more abundantly.²⁴

7-8, 15. Another ... eagle came along to “entice” the vine away from where it had been planted. This new “eagle” was Egypt, which influenced Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon. Judah’s king violated his oath of allegiance to Babylon and joined forces with Egypt, sending ... envoys to Egypt to get horses and a large army. When Ezekiel penned this prophecy Zedekiah’s final revolt had not yet happened. Assuming that the book was arranged chronologically, this prophetic parable was written sometime

²² Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

²³ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:7). Chicago: Moody Press.

between 592 B.C. (8:1) and 591 B.C. (20:1). Zedekiah's final revolt against Babylon actually began in 588 B.C., so Ezekiel predicted Zedekiah's revolt about three years before it happened.²⁵

The other eagle is Egypt which was still a great power at this time. Zedekiah had been put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, and they made a covenant together. However, Zedekiah broke that covenant and turned to Egypt. That is pictured here by the branches which lean toward Egypt. The vine is planted in the soil of Egypt, seeking to draw strength from her, but there will not be any strength because Egypt will go down. Nebuchadnezzar took Egypt and destroyed it and made it subject to himself.

Now this is the message which grows out of Ezekiel's parable:²⁶

The second **eagle** lacks the grandeur of the first, while still remaining "great."

Constable 7-8: Another large eagle, not quite as glorious as the first, came along. The vine reached out with its branches and roots toward it so this eagle might water it. The vine did this even though it was growing in good soil with abundant water nearby, enough to make it a luxuriant and fruitful plant.

Ezekiel 17:8

It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine.

Missler: Nebuchadnezzar had taken the youngest son of Josiah, Metaniah, and renamed him Zedekiah. He put him on the throne with the idea that Zedekiah would be a vassal king. Zedekiah swore an oath before the Lord to be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar.

This second eagle was not only Egypt, but Pharaoh-hophra. (2 Chron 36:9-13; Jer 44, 52:1-7) When Zedekiah turned to him for support, Isaiah spoke out against such an alliance. (Isa 30:1-7) Jeremiah also opposed this idea of Judah aligning with Egypt.

The main thrust you get from this passage and other passages is that there really was no reason for Zedekiah's revolt. They were not under oppression or dispersion; they were really under a beneficial rule under Nebuchadnezzar. They had security under him. It was only through ambition and ingratitude that Zedekiah became insubordinate to his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah had sworn an oath before the Lord. The prophets Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Ezekiel and others, all pointed out that Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument of God bringing judgment to the land in the first place.

Clarke: It was planted in a good soil—Though he depended on Babylon, he lived and reigned as Nebuchadnezzar's vicegerent in the land of Judea.

²⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:1-2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The new orientation of the vine to the second eagle threatens its choice location and flourishing state.

Ezekiel 17:9

Say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof.

Shall it prosper?—Shall Zedekiah succeed in casting off the yoke of the king of Babylon, to whom he had sworn fealty?

Shall he not pull up the roots—Nebuchadnezzar will come and dethrone him.

And cut off the fruit—The children of Zedekiah.

The leaves—All the nobles; all shall perish with Zedekiah.²⁷

9, 10. Ezekiel asks, **Shall it prosper?** Like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel opposed an Egyptian alliance (Isa 30:1-5; 31:1-3; Jer 2:36). Cooke (ICC) suggests a transposition of verses 9 and 10. First comes destruction upon the vegetation of Palestine by the east wind and then destruction by the arm of Nebuchadnezzar, whose city, Babylon, lay almost due east of Jerusalem.

b) The Interpretation of the Allegory. 17:11-21.

Ezekiel addresses the interpretation to the **rebellious house** (v. 12), the Jewish exiles among whom he lived. The history of Jehoiachin's deportation and of Zedekiah's oath of fealty (II Chr 36:13; cf. Gen 15:9-18; Jer 34:8-22) is recapitulated.²⁸

9-10, 16-21. The results for the "vine" (v. 8) would be disastrous. It would be uprooted and stripped of its fruit and wither. Because Zedekiah violated his oath to Nebuchadnezzar (an oath ordained by God; cf. Jer. 27), Nebuchadnezzar would not spare the city. As Ezekiel explained, this revolt meant that Zedekiah would die in Babylon for Pharaoh in Egypt would be of no help. In breaking his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah was also opposing God. I will bring down on his head My oath that he despised and My covenant that he broke. God would see that Zedekiah was caught by Nebuchadnezzar (in his net and snare) and brought to Babylon, with his troops killed by the sword (cf. 2 Kings 24:3-7).²⁹

The provocative questions clearly require a judgment on the part of the hearers and implicate them in that judgment—the function of all good parables.

²⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:9–11). Chicago: Moody Press.

²⁹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Constable 9-10: The Lord rhetorically asked if the owner of such a vine would not pull it out of its soil and cause it to wither and become unfruitful. Nothing that anyone could do could cause such a vine to recover its original health and fruitfulness after such treatment (cf. vv. 22-24). Even though its roots were still in the ground it would not thrive. The hot east wind would easily wither it where it grew (cf. 19:12; Job 27:21; Isa. 27:8; Hos. 13:15).

Ezekiel 17:10

Yea, behold, *being* planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew.

[East wind] this represents Nebuchadnezzar. The undercurrent here is instead of being loyal to the first eagle, it treacherously turned to the second one. “East wind” is also in Job 27:21; Isa 27:8; Hosea 13:15.

Clarke: Shall—utterly whither—The regal government shall be no more restored. Zedekiah shall be the last king, and the monarchy shall finally terminate with him.

This east wind was the hot, dry wind blowing off the desert, a wind that could wither a flourishing crop. The hot wind of Nebuchadnezzar’s armies was about to overcome the nation of Judah.

The explanation of the riddle 17:11-21

Ezekiel first interpreted his fable historically, and then he interpreted the historical events theologically for his audience.

The historical interpretation of the riddle 17:11-18

Ezekiel 17:11

Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

The Interpretation: Now we get to the second part which is in effect the interpretation of this parable. It really does not need interpretation, because from verse 11 - 21 we will see Ezekiel himself interpreting the first 10 verses.

Dake: Ten Predictions—Fulfilled:

1. The king of Babylon has come to Jerusalem and taken Jehoiachin and the princes to Babylon (Ezekiel 17:21). He has taken the king's seed (Zedekiah) and made a covenant with him, and taken an oath of him; he has also taken the mighty of the land to Babylon, so that the kingdom might be base and not rebel, but keep the covenant (Ezekiel 17:13-14). But he (Zedekiah) rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in sending

ambassadors to Egypt to secure their help against Babylon. This alliance will not stand, because he has not kept his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 17:15-16).

2. Zedekiah will die in Babylon, in the land of the king whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke (Ezekiel 17:16).
3. Pharaoh and his great army will not save him from Babylon (Ezekiel 17:17).
4. He will not escape Babylon, because he has despised the oath by breaking the covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (Ezekiel 17:18).
5. The oath and the covenant that he has despised will be recompensed upon him (Ezekiel 17:9).
6. I will spread My net upon him, and he will be taken in a snare (Ezekiel 17:20).
7. I will bring him to Babylon and plead with him there for his sin.
8. All his fugitives with all his hands will fall by the sword (Ezekiel 17:21).
9. They that remain shall be scattered toward all winds.
10. You will know that I the Lord have spoken it.

Dake: Six Predictions—Unfulfilled:

1. I will take the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it (Ezekiel 17:22).
2. I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender One, and will plant it upon a high and eminent mountain.
3. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it (Ezekiel 17:23).
4. It will bring forth boughs, bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar.
5. Under it will dwell all fowl of every kind.
6. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish (Ezekiel 17:24).³⁰

11–18 The Parable Explained: The first phase of explanation identifies the characters of the fable (vv. 11–15) before spelling out the moral of the story (vv. 16–18). The first eagle is the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who takes her king, i.e., Judah’s king Jehoiachin (the “twig”), to Babylon (v. 12). The royal offspring (the “seed”) is Zedekiah (v. 13), Jehoiachin’s uncle and replacement to whom Ezekiel never refers as a “king.” Zedekiah’s failure was to break his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 13–14) by turning to Egypt (v. 15), whose king was Hophra, the lesser eagle. Ultimately, hope in Egyptian aid will prove futile (v. 17; see Jer. 37:6–10). The breaking of this political covenant will bring disaster on Zedekiah and his people (Ezek. 17:18).³¹

Chuck Smith: he's explaining now this parable, and it's nothing to do with the United States. This is the explanation of this eagle parable. It's the king of Babylon who has come to Jerusalem and taken the king thereof and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon. And he has taken the king's seed, and that is Zedekiah.

Constable 11-12: Ezekiel was now to tell his rebellious hearers what this story represented.

³⁰ Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

³¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1522). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

This interpretation is a typical example of a prophetic judgment speech to an individual, many of which appear in the prophetic books of the Old Testament. It contains a summons to listen (vv. 11-12a), charges (vv. 12b-18), and assurance of judgment (vv. 19-21).

The first eagle stood for the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jer. 48:40; 49:22; Dan. 7:4). His invasion of Jerusalem (the specific identity of the Lebanon in the riddle, v. 3) devastated the land like a hot east wind (v.10).

In Scripture the eagle is often a figure used to describe God as a powerful being that comes swiftly to judge, as an eagle swoops down quickly to snatch in flight an unsuspecting mouse or fish (cf. Deut. 28:49; Isa. 46:11; Jer. 48:40; 49:22). In this case the eagle represented God's instrument of judgment, Nebuchadnezzar, who had invaded Jerusalem, cropped off the Judean king, Jehoiachin (the top of the cedar tree, v. 3), and his advisers (the topmost of its young twigs, v. 4) and carried them off to Babylon in 597 B.C. (cf. Dan. 7:4). Babylon was a city of traders in a land of merchants (v. 4; cf. 16:29; 1 Kings 10:27; 2 Kings 24:10-12; Jer. 22:15, 23). Elsewhere in Scripture the cedar tree (v. 3) is a figure used to describe the Davidic line of kings culminating in Messiah (Isa. 10:33—11:1). Cedar trees were beautiful and very hardy, an appropriate figure of the Davidic dynasty.

Ezekiel 17:12

Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these *things mean*? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon;

[king thereof] Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6-16).

Know ye not what these things mean?—They are explained in this and the following verses.

12-15 The interesting thing is that Nebuchadnezzar kept his side of the covenant. God's people broke the covenant, but the pagan nation kept their side of it. What a picture! In some churches you will find people still carrying their Bibles, but their hearts are far from God and you cannot believe what they say. On the other hand, there are businessmen who, although they are unsaved, are men of integrity.

Nebuchadnezzar is going to come and destroy Zedekiah:³²

Ezekiel 17:13

And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land:

[Oath of him] Zedekiah's oath. The issue here is his oath.

³² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

[the king's seed] Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17-25:7).

[made a covenant with him, and hath taken an oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land] Zedekiah freely agreed by covenant to rule Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. He took an oath to obey him, but rebelled after serving for several years (Ezekiel 17:13-14). He turned to Egypt for help and for this God cursed him (Ezekiel 17:15-21).³³

13, 14. Nebuchadnezzar had removed the mighty (chief men) of the land likely to stir up revolt, that Judah might remain as a state dependent on and friendly to Babylon.³⁴

The penalty for breaking a covenant with a human king shows by analogy the seriousness of breaking the covenant with God (Heb. 10:29–31).

Constable 13-14: Nebuchadnezzar set up another king as his vassal, Zedekiah, one of the royal seed whom he planted in the fertile soil of Canaan (cf. v. 5). He deported the leaders of Judah to Babylon so Judah would be a docile servant and continue to exist with a measure of independence under his control (cf. 2 Kings 24:17; Jer. 37:1). Nebuchadnezzar made a binding covenant with Zedekiah obligating him to serve Babylon, and Zedekiah flourished for a time. The vine's roots remained under it, but it grew low and spreading rather than upward and fruitful, and it extended its branches toward the eagle, Nebuchadnezzar (cf. v. 6).

Ezekiel 17:14

That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, *but* that by keeping of his covenant it might stand.

That the kingdom might be base—Have no political consequence, and at last sink into a miserable government under Gedaliah.

Ezekiel 17:15

But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such *things*? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

One of the issues you will discover in the Scripture is that an oath before the Lord, even an oath made under fraud, needs to be honored. Even the Gibeonite oath, made on fraudulent premises, still had to be honored. (Josh 9; 2 Sam 21:1-3) Jeremiah had been

³³ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

³⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:13). Chicago: Moody Press.

warning Zedekiah that he had made an oath and he would have to hold to it. But obviously Zedekiah went ahead despite those warnings, and sought aid from Egypt.

The swearing of an oath in the Old Testament was authenticated by accompanying sacrifices. That involved the Lord who took them seriously.

Clarke: Sending his ambassadors into Egypt—Zedekiah must have sent his ambassadors into Egypt, between the sixth month of his sixth year, and the fifth month of his seventh year. Compare 8:1, with chap. 20:1

15-17. He rebelled. Zedekiah broke the covenant with the king of Babylon, as well as that with the Lord (v. 19), and consequently was to die in Babylon with no aid from Pharaoh. 21. And all the pick (i.e., choice men) of his (Zedekiah's) troops (RSV, following the Targum and the Syriac) shall fall before the Babylonian armies.³⁵

Constable 15-16: However, the vine rebelled against the eagle. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and sent to Egypt for arms and troops to resist the Babylonians. Pharaoh Hophra (Gr. Apries, 589-570 B.C.) is the second strong eagle in the riddle to which the vine sent out its roots and branches for sustenance, probably in 588 B.C. (v. 7). If this prophecy is in chronological order, as seems likely, Ezekiel gave it between 592 (8:1) and 591 B.C. (20:1). This means that he predicted Zedekiah's revolt about three years before it happened. For years the pro-Egyptian faction in Jerusalem had advocated seeking help from that direction. Obviously Zedekiah could not escape Nebuchadnezzar's wrath since he had broken the covenant under which he served him, a covenant that he had sworn in God's name (cf. 5:7; 2 Chron. 36:13).

When Zedekiah made his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord's name was invoked as a guarantor of the treaty (see 2 Chron 36:13). Consequently when Zedekiah broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, he in effect broke a treaty with God.

An oath was a sacred thing in the ancient Near East, and even oaths made by fraud were normally honored (cf. Josh. 9; 2 Sam. 21:1-2). The Lord swore that Zedekiah would die in Babylon for breaking his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (cf. v. 19).

After judgment became inevitable, God's will for Judah was submission to their foreign conquerors as a sign of their submission to him (Jer 38:17-23).

Ezekiel 17:16

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely in the place *where* the king *dwelleth* that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, *even* with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die.

Zedekiah shall die. Zedekiah would die in the land that he despised, and under the king whose covenant he broke. In Ezekiel 12:13 we discover the prophet said he would never see the Babylonian captivity. Of course, that is exactly the way Zedekiah did get to Babylon; he was first blinded, and then carried off to Babylon where he died.

³⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:13). Chicago: Moody Press.

In the midst of Babylon he shall die—His eyes were put out; he was carried to Babylon, and never returned.

Ezekiel 17:17

Neither shall Pharaoh with *his* mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons:

Missler: The Pharaoh here was Apries of the Greeks, successor to Pharaoh-necho. For more than a thousand years, from 1600 B.C. onward, the Egyptians led in terms of exploitation by chariots, horses, cavalry and so forth. They were the prime bunch in that field, which was one of the appeals which caused Judah to turn to them for an alliance in the hope of getting out from under their commitments to Babylon. It didn't work.

God laid a heavy trip on Zedekiah over the business of making a vow and taking an oath. We also get the impression from Scripture that international contracts carry heavy responsibilities. Zedekiah was brutally judged for his treachery in that matter.

Constable 17-18: Pharaoh would not come to Zedekiah's aid when Nebuchadnezzar invaded and besieged Jerusalem and slew many of the people. There was no way that Zedekiah could escape Nebuchadnezzar's wrath since he had broken the covenant in which he had pledged his allegiance to the Babylonian king.

Ezekiel 17:18

Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these *things*, he shall not escape.

Clarke: **Seeing he despised the oath**—This God particularly resents. He had bound himself by oath, in the presence of Jehovah, to be faithful to the covenant that he made with Nebuchadnezzar, and he took the first opportunity to break it; therefore he shall not escape.

God says, "I intend that Zedekiah be judged for this." My friend, I sure would hate to be some Christians who are someday going to be taken to the woodshed for the lives they have lived down here. God will certainly judge.³⁶

Chuck Smith: And this is a prophecy that goes on now concerning Jesus Christ. As He was the root out of the stem of Jesse, or the rod out of the stem of Jesse. So, again, the highest branch from David, the high cedar.

³⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The theological interpretation of the historical events 17:19-21

Ezekiel 17:19

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head.

The implication was that there had been a sacrifice with his oath, so that it was no longer just a little commitment on the part of Zedekiah; with sacrifice it had become the Lord's covenant.

[surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head] God considered the oath made to Nebuchadnezzar as one made to Him; it was no doubt made in the name of Jehovah and He expected Zedekiah to keep it as one made with Him. God was lowered in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar when the oath made in His name was broken. Man is expected to keep his oaths even to his own hurt (Psalm 15:4).³⁷

19–21 The Parable Interpreted: The “natural,” political explanation does not exhaust the meaning of the parable. Zedekiah's political covenant is now termed my covenant by God (v. 19). God takes full responsibility for the disaster to come (return ... spread ... bring ... enter, all first-person verbs), now seen not as military defeat but as divine judgment.³⁸

Constable 19-21: The Lord also promised that because Zedekiah had broken Israel's covenant with Yahweh he would pay the penalty. The Lord would capture him like an animal in a net, bring him to Babylon, and judge him there for his covenant unfaithfulness to Yahweh. His best soldiers would die, and the survivors of the siege would scatter. When this happened everyone would know that Yahweh had ordained Jerusalem's destruction.

Ezekiel 17:20

And I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me.

³⁷ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

³⁸ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Ezekiel 17:21

And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken *it*.

The first 10 verses were this parable and riddle. God, speaking through Ezekiel, on the treachery of trying to allure an alliance with Egypt, shows it will fail. And verses 11-21 give the explanation of that, being the Lord's own reaffirmation.

Clarke: All his fugitives—All who attempted to escape with him, and all that ran to Egypt, etc., shall fall by the sword.

The theological epilogue to the riddle 17:22-24

Ezekiel 17:22

Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set *it*; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* upon an high mountain and eminent:

Like the preceding parable, this one also ends with a promise of hope (cf. 16:60-63).

The King of the Davidic Line: Ezekiel 17 - 18 are two chapters dealing with the ending of the Dynasty of David, the succession of kings in Judah. But in the middle are three verses, 17:22-24, that deals with the most important King of the Davidic line, namely the Messiah.

[highest branch of the high cedar] "The highest branch" stands for the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and of David in the Messiah who will come again to rebuild the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, to set it up and rule over the kingdom of David and the house of Jacob forever (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:4-5; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 14:13-18; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 20:1-10). Christ is called "the Branch of the Lord" (Isaiah 4:2; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Jeremiah 33:15; Zech. 3:8; Zech. 6:12).³⁹

[a tender one] Christ (not Zedekiah's daughter) is the tender One, the offshoot from the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1; Isaiah 53:1-2). It is the Messiah's kingdom which will be in the height of Israel. See The Anglo-Saxon Theory.

[high mountain] This refers to the mountain of the house of the Lord into which all nations will flow during the Millennium (Isaiah 2:1-4; Isaiah 54:1-17; Micah 4).

Clarke: I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar—I will raise up another monarchy, which shall come in the line of David, namely, the Messiah; who shall

³⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

appear as a tender plant, as to his incarnation; but he shall be high and eminent; his Church, the royal city, the highest and purest ever seen on the face of the earth.

22-23 Ezekiel's prophecy of judgment ends in hope. When the people put their hope in foreign alliances, they were disappointed. Only God could give them true hope. God said he would plant a tender sprig, the Messiah, whose kingdom would grow and become a shelter for all who come to him (see Isaiah 11:1-5). This prophecy was fulfilled at the coming of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

The Lord makes clear that he will not permit his kingdom to be annihilated, but will fulfill his promise to the seed of David.

Nebuchadnezzar broke off a twig from the cedar and brought it to Babylon, and the shoot he planted died. The Lord declares that he himself will pluck off a shoot from the top of the high cedar (the Davidic house; vv. 2, 3; Isa 53:2) and plant it on a high mountain, that all may see it (cf. Isa 2:2; 11:10) and find protection under it (Ezk 17:23; cf. Mt 13:31, 32). The establishment of this new and universal kingdom by Jehovah will lead the world to recognize him as the Lord of human life and the Controller of Israel's destiny.

Other kingdoms are likewise called trees. See 31:5, 8, 14, 16, 18. For passages in Ezekiel concerning God's kingdom, see 21:27; 34:24ff.; 37:24ff. See also Lk 1:51-55. The lineage of Christ is traced through Jehoiachin (Mt 1:11, 12).⁴¹

22-24. Lest the people get overly discouraged about God's coming judgment, Ezekiel added an "addendum" to his prophecy against Jerusalem. Though not specifically calling God an "eagle," Ezekiel compared God's future actions to those of the two eagles (Babylon and Egypt) already mentioned. Neither of those eagles had been able to provide the security and prosperity Israel desperately longed for, but God would succeed where they had failed.

God said He (I Myself) will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it. The "shoot" was the Davidic line (cf. v. 4 with v. 12). God will replant a king from the line of David on the mountain heights of Israel. The kingdom will not be destroyed for God will restore it to the land of Israel. That kingdom will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. That is, it will prosper as it has never done before. Instead of plucking branches from it, birds of every kind will nest in it. This suggests that Israel will protect surrounding nations rather than being their pawn.

God's purpose in restoring Israel is to reveal His glory and plan for Israel to all nations. All the trees ... will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. Israel's rise to prominence will be a catalyst to turn other nations to the Lord.

This prophecy was not fulfilled when Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian Captivity. The fulfillment of verses 22-24 awaits God's establishment of Israel in the

⁴⁰ Life Application Bible Notes

⁴¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 17:22). Chicago: Moody Press.

Millennium under the Messiah, Jesus Christ. At that time God's kingdom will rule the world (cf. Dan. 2:44-45; Zech. 14:3-9, 16-17).⁴²

22–24 Ezekiel compared the Davidic family again to a cedar. That royal family would not cease to exist with the deportation of Zedekiah. God himself would take a tender twig from the top of that cedar and set it out “on a high and lofty mountain,” i.e., in Israel. The twig would grow to maturity, bring forth boughs, bear fruit, and become a “stately cedar.” The tender twig was a symbol for Messiah. Birds of every kind, i.e., all races and nations of people, would nest in the shade of its branches. These events would have an impact on other trees, i.e., royal houses. They would see the lowly and withered tree (David's family) flourish. They would see the green and high trees (proud kingdoms) dry up. When this occurred the other trees would be forced to acknowledge that Yahweh is the God who announces the future and then brings it to pass. He is sovereign over all the trees of the forest.⁴³

22–24 A New Parable: God's action continues as the terms of the parable are used to sketch not a flawed present but an ideal messianic future. The eagles are absent. God chooses a new sprig from the topmost part of the cedar (v. 22) and plants it himself (v. 23). The terms asserting God's sovereignty in v. 24 resonate with 1 Sam. 2:1–10 and Luke 1:46–55.⁴⁴

After destruction comes a new beginning, symbolizing the kingdom of Christ and its growth to fill the nations (see Isa. 11:1).

Jesus Christ, Foretold—Ezekiel saw the Babylonian kingdom spreading its branches over the known world, choking out all growth. He saw King Zedekiah plotting with Egypt against Babylon to no avail. He saw something mysterious and great—hope coming out of the exiled Jewish community in Babylon. God would restore His people and establish His kingdom. Present historical conditions made deliverance appear impossible, but God could still accomplish His purposes. Similarly, Jesus' ministry and death did not appear to be the foundation of a universal kingdom to human eyes, but He knew how God's kingdom grows (Mt 13:31-32). Compare Jer 33:15-17; Eze 31:6; Da 4:12.⁴⁵

Constable 22-23: The Lord Himself would also snip a tender twig from the top of the tall cedar tree that represented the Davidic line of kings. (The eagle is no longer Nebuchadnezzar but Yahweh in this parable.) Yahweh would plant this twig on a high mountain in Israel so that it would grow there, produce sheltering boughs, and bear fruit. Birds of every kind would come and take refuge in its shady branches. People would

⁴² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 17:22–24). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴³ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 17:22–24). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

⁴⁴ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (1523). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁴⁵ Disciple's Study Bible

dwell securely under the protection of this great kingdom (cf. Hos. 14:5-7; Dan. 4:12, 21; Matt. 13:32; Mark 4:32).

Israel will protect surrounding nations rather than being their pawn. . . .

Ezekiel compared God's future actions to those of the two eagles (Babylon and Egypt) already mentioned. Neither of those eagles had been able to provide the security and prosperity Israel desperately longed for, but God would succeed where they had failed.

The tender twig seems clearly to be a messianic reference (cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-16; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13). The high mountain is probably Mount Zion, the place where Messiah will set up His throne in the Millennium (cf. Ps. 2:6). Then the cedar tree (messianic kingdom) will be very stately and fruitful.

Ezekiel 17:23

In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.

[In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it] In the highest mountain of Israel this kingdom will be placed. This does not mean that it will be some present high mountain in Israel; it refers to the highest one in Israel at the second coming of Christ. The Mount of Olives will be removed and great changes in the physical surface of Palestine will be made (Zech. 14:1-5). Even the Dead Sea will be raised, and it will become fresh water for fish (Ezekiel 47). The deserts will blossom as a rose and many other changes will take place at that time (Isaiah 35).⁴⁶

[it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing] This tender Branch will grow to become a great tree, "bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar." Under it will be sheltered all the birds and other creatures of earth (Ezekiel 17:23-24). Thus the eternal kingdom of the Messiah is likened to a great tree. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is also spoken of as a tree sheltering all creatures (Daniel 2:37-38; Daniel 4:1-37).

In the mountain of the height of Israel—He shall make his appearance at the temple, and found his Church at Jerusalem.

Shalt bring forth boughs—Apostles, evangelists, and their successors in the Gospel ministry.

And bear fruit—Multitudes of souls shall be converted by their preaching.

And under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing—All the nations of the earth shall receive his Gospel.

In the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell—Trust in him alone for salvation, and be saved in their trusting.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Ezekiel 17:24

And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

[all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish] If the one tree is symbolic of the kingdom of Messiah, then all the other trees refer to the other kingdoms of the world. They shall know four works of Jehovah:

1. Jehovah has brought down the high tree (Ezekiel 17:24; Daniel 4; Luke 1:52).
2. Jehovah exalted the low tree (Ezekiel 17:24). This no doubt refers to the tree of Ezekiel 17:23.
3. Jehovah dried up the green tree (the present kingdom of Babylon, Ezekiel 17:24).
4. Jehovah made the dry tree to flourish (again referring to the kingdom of the Messiah of Ezekiel 17:23-24).⁴⁸

All the trees of the field shall know—All the people of Israel and of Chaldea.

I the Lord have brought down the high tree—Have dethroned Jehoiachin.

Have exalted the low tree—Put Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiachin, in his place.

Have dried up the green tree—Zedekiah, who had numerous children, but who were all slain before his eyes at Riblah.

And have made the dry tree to flourish—Have raised up a rod out of the stem of Jesse, the family of David being then apparently dried up and extinct. This was the promised Messiah, of the increase and government of whose kingdom and peace there shall be no end; upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order and establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth, even for ever. **THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL PERFORM THIS.**

The high and green tree, says Newcome, refers to Nebuchadnezzar; the low and the dry tree, to the Jews.⁴⁹

Sometimes God allows a godless nation to harass and actually destroy a people who claim to be God's people but have departed from Him. There has been a great breakdown in morals in America, and apostasy is in earnest. We have not had much peace in this world, either internally or externally. There is trouble everywhere. God says that we will not get by with our sin—there will be a judgment.⁵⁰

Constable: done this was Israel's God. He would cut down the high tree (Babylon?) and exalt the low tree (Israel). He would dry up the presently green tree (Egypt?) and make the presently dry tree (Israel) flourish. The one who promised this was Yahweh, and He would also perform it.

⁴⁸ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁵⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 17:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Although some have understood it to have been fulfilled in the restoration of Judah under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the language goes beyond such limited scope (cf. Ezra 9:8-9) to a time yet future when Israel will have its perfect King, the Messiah, reigning on the earth in righteousness.

These concluding verses without question introduce a Messianic prophecy (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4).

Missler: Cf. Isa 53:1-2. Isaiah 53, “The Holy of Holies of the Old Testament” goes on to talk about the Man who bears our griefs and our sorrows.

The lofty top is in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar. This passage is also sort of an echo Psalm 89, the essence of which is that the Covenant with David would never be made void or annulled.

While Ezekiel was prophesying here, let us peek at what Jeremiah had to say a bit earlier. See Jer 22:24-30. Note that Jehoiakim is the father; Jehoiachin is the son (also known as Coniah or Jeconiah). Jehoiachin took the throne at 18, and ruled for 3 months. He got cast into prison where he remained until he was 55. There is a subtlety here that is one of the most interesting dimensions to the way that God operates. God had promised that the royal line was to be that of David. From the time of Genesis 3:15 on through history, God gives us more clarity. It was not only going to be of the seed of the woman, Eve, but he was going to be of the seed of Abraham. Then Isaac, then of Jacob... it finally got down to the Tribe of Judah, the royal line, and of the House of David.

After David there were all kinds of bad kings, declining and getting worse spiritually and into idolatry. In Jechoniah (Coniah, Jechoniachin) we see the end. Zedekiah was never called a king by Ezekiel. Jechoniah was not only cursed, God pronounced upon him a blood curse, and said none of his seed would rule any more in Judah.

Throughout history we see that Satan would focus his attacks on the line specified to be the Messiah’s heritage. He attacked the babes in Egypt and in Bethlehem, all trying to prevent the Messiah. Satan’s ambition and purpose all along has been to break the Messianic chain. Here with Jeconiah, it is a blood curse on the line.

Matthew’s genealogy goes down through David, then Solomon and down through the **Legal** line, ending up at Joseph, the husband of Mary. Jesus Christ had **Legal** claim to the throne through Matthew’s genealogy. But He was not subject to the blood curse of Jechoniah because He was not of Joseph’s blood. Luke takes his genealogy down through David but then he goes through Nathan (not Solomon) and takes the **Blood** line down through Mary to Jesus Christ.

God promised that He would be of the House and lineage of David:

House of David ... Joseph and the Legal line

Lineage of David ... Mary and the Blood line

Thus, the virgin birth.

The “Seed of the woman” was a hint, even there, of the virgin birth. God saw the end from the beginning. Messiah would be immune to the blood curse upon Jechoniah.

You can paint the chronicle from Genesis to Revelation in terms of Satan’s attempt to undo the promises of God, a futile undertaking at best. And it is interesting to see how these treasures are hidden away in the genealogies and other things.

“I the Lord have spoken and have done it,” concludes Ezekiel 17:24. God speaks about things yet future as if they were done, because He ordained them.

Luke	Matthew & Luke	Luke	Matthew
Adam		Nathan	Solomon
Seth		Mattatha	Rehoboam
Enosh		Menan	Abijah
Kenan		Melea	Asa
Mahalalel		Eliakim	Jehoshaphat
Jared		Jonan	Jehoram
Enoch		Joseph	Ahaziah*
Methuselah		Juda	Joash*
Lamech		Simeon	Amaziah*
Noah		Levi	Uzziah
Shem		Matthat	Jotham
Arphaxad		Jorim	Ahaz
Salah		Eliezer	Hezekiah
Eber		Jose	Manasseh
Peleg		Er	Amon
Reu		Elmodam	Josiah
Serug		Cosam	Jehoiakim*
Nahor		Addi	Jehoiachin*
Terah		Melchi	Salatheil
	↓	Neri	Zerubbabel
	Abraham	Salathiel	Abiud
	Isaac	Zerubbabel	Eliakim
	Jacob	Rhesa	Azor
	Judah	Joanna	Sadoc
	Pharez	Juda	Achim
	Hezron	Joseph	Eliud
	Ram	Semei	Eleazar
	Amminadab	Mattathias	Matthan
	Nahshon	Maath	Jacob
	Salmon	Nagge	Joseph
	Boaz	Esli	
	Obed	Naum	
	Jesse	Amos	
	David	Mattathias	
		Joseph	
		Janna	
		Melchi	
		Levi	
		Matthat	
		Heli	
		(Mary)	

* Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah all died violent deaths; God thus dealing with idolatry literally "to the 3rd and 4th generations" (Ex 20:4-5); their names are therefore "blotted out" according to the Law (Deut 29:20). Jehoiakim and Jechoniah likewise, since the kingdom ended as an independent kingdom with Josiah's death at Megiddo. Thus these were "blotted out" of the groups of "14 generations" in Matthew's account. [E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, Appendix 99.]