

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“The Eagles Have Landed”

17:1-24

The eagle is a very popular bird when it comes to national symbols!

It has been or is being used by the following nations: Albania, Austria, Egypt, Germany, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Ghana, Russia, Serbia, Armenia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, the Philippines, and Romania.

In previous history the eagle was used by: the Roman Empire, Napoleon, the Persians, and the Babylonians.

We should have listened to Ben Franklin who strongly urged we choose the turkey, not the eagle, for our national bird!

The eagle represents two ancient nations in our text, first Babylon, then Egypt.

We're at a point in Ezekiel where a little review might be helpful.

- In 605BC the Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem and removed the Temple treasures and many of the young men of royal and noble birth. Daniel was one of the young men who were taken as captives to Babylon.
- In 597BC Nebuchadnezzar's army again invaded Judah because of a broken covenant and more prisoners were taken away to Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel was included in this group. With the rest of the captives, Ezekiel was settled by the River Chebar in Babylon. While Jeremiah

continued to prophesy in Jerusalem, Ezekiel prophesied as a captive in Babylon. Both prophets continued to warn the people that the worst was yet to come for Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah because of their blatant sin of forsaking the Lord their God.

- The final phase of the fall of Judah came in 587-586BC when the defenses of Jerusalem were breached after a siege that lasted more than a year. The Temple was destroyed, the city was devastated, and most of the Jews who were not killed were taken as captives to Babylon.

In chapters fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen of Ezekiel, the prophet gave three parables to the captives in Babylon to illustrate God's dealings with the nation of Judah.

- In chapter fifteen we found the parable of the fruitless vine. Israel had failed to bear fruit for the Lord.
- In chapter sixteen we saw the parable of the adulterous wife. Jerusalem, as the capital and leader of the nation, had committed spiritual adultery with the surrounding nations and their gods.

Now, in chapter seventeen, Ezekiel gives us the parable of the two eagles. The two eagles represent Babylon and Egypt. The parable portrays the political dealings of the last two kings of Judah with these powerful empires.

Ezekiel 17:1 And the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
Ezekiel 17:2 "Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel,

It's called both a "parable" and a "riddle." It's a riddle-like parable. In a normal parable the subjects are people and their everyday activities. This one features animals and plants which represent nations. It's thus a different type of parable.

Ezekiel 17:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, Came to Lebanon And took from the cedar the highest branch.

Ezekiel 17:4 He cropped off its topmost young twig And carried it to a land of trade; He set it in a city of merchants.

Ezekiel 17:5 Then he took some of the seed of the land And planted it in a fertile field;
He placed it by abundant waters And set it like a willow tree.

Ezekiel 17:6 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.

Ezekiel 17:7 "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.

Ezekiel 17:8 It was planted in good soil by many waters, To bring forth branches, bear
fruit, And become a majestic vine." ' '

Ezekiel 17:9 "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.

Ezekiel 17:10 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." ' ' "

The major details will be interpreted for us in the next set of verses. Let me
make just a few observations:

- As I said, the two “eagles” are Babylon and Egypt respectively.
- Israel is referred to as “Lebanon” because her palace and her Temple were constructed from the cedars of Lebanon.
- King Jehoiachin of Judah is the “top of the cedar tree” that was taken captive by the great eagle of Babylon.
- After removing Jehoiachin, King Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah from the royal line of Judah, set him up as a puppet king in Jerusalem. In the parable Zedekiah is the royal seed of the land that is planted in fertile soil.
- The vine represents the Jews of Judah who were not taken captive in the second phase of the Babylonian conquest but remained in the land under the puppet king Zedekiah. At first “the vine” turned towards the eagle of Babylon and was subject to Nebuchadnezzar.
- The second great eagle appeared on the scene, and the vine turned towards him. Zedekiah turned towards Egypt, hoping that an Egyptian alliance would help Judah gain her freedom from Babylonian tyranny.

Ezekiel 17:11 Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 17:12 "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.

Ezekiel 17:13 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,

Ezekiel 17:14 that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand.

Ezekiel 17:15 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?

Ezekiel 17:16 '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.

Ezekiel 17:17 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.

Ezekiel 17:18 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.' "

When Ezekiel wrote, part of the parable had already taken place. King Jehoiachin was already a captive in Babylon and Zedekiah was the puppet king in Jerusalem. The second part of the parable was yet to be fulfilled, so the second part is really a prophetic warning.

Zedekiah's political dealings with Egypt would fail and Nebuchadnezzar would return in anger and deliver the final blow to Jerusalem and Judah.

Notice something more. There is an emphasis on the "covenant" Zedekiah made with Nebuchadnezzar. The word "covenant" is used five times and the word "oath" three times.

You and I might think it a light thing for Zedekiah to break a covenant after giving his oath to a foreign tyrant. But God considered it a serious matter. We see why in verse nineteen.

Ezekiel 17:19 Therefore thus says the Lord God: "As I live, surely My oath which he despised, and My covenant which he broke, I will recompense on his own head.

True, Zedekiah had been set-up by Nebuchadnezzar, but it was God's desire for him to remain subservient to Babylon. Jeremiah urged Zedekiah to avoid making an alliance with Egypt. If Zedekiah had kept the agreement, the kingdom of Judah would have continued to prosper as a tributary to Babylon.

God called Zedekiah's agreement with Nebuchadnezzar "My oath" and "My covenant." That's because Zedekiah had used the name of the Lord in his oath and probably even offered a sacrifice to the Lord when making the covenant.

At the very least, Zedekiah misrepresented God to the Babylonians as Someone not trustworthy.

Even in captivity, the Jews represented the Lord. They were God's witness to the nations.

We represent the Lord! We are called "living epistles," living letters, in the New Testament. It's been said that we are the only 'Bible' some people will ever read.

Are people reading Thessalonians or Flesh-alonians?

Ezekiel 17:20 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. Ezekiel 17:21 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."

Wow. As far as the Lord was concerned, He was the one in charge. He, not Nebuchadnezzar, would capture and convict Zedekiah.

Here are three lessons we can glean from this riddle-parable.

First, things are not always what they seem. God is working behind the scenes, using even pagan nations to accomplish His providence in the world. In your 'world' He is using even pagan bosses or neighbors. That being the case, we cannot always know exactly what is going on. We must continue to walk by faith. Respond biblically; represent the Lord where He's put you.

Second, we ought to take all of our words seriously. Jesus, in Matthew 5:37, said,

Matthew 5:37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

Later James would write,

James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

The simplest understanding of this is that you should only say what you mean and always mean what you say. J. Vernon McGee said,

It ought to be as if you were in a courtroom and had taken an oath to tell the truth. All your conversation ought to be like that.

Third, in my difficulties I must not look to the world for help when God wants to be my help. Looking to Egypt was wrong and Zedekiah was warned about it. Even though it meant remaining subject to a tyrant, he should not have looked to Egypt.

Christians love to borrow methods and messages from the world. When Christian psychology was first making its appearance it was described by one of its proponents as "spoiling the Egyptians." He was referring to the way the Israelites took treasure from the Egyptians when God brought them out of Egypt.

Trouble is, the psychoanalytical techniques and theories of men like Freud and Jung and Rogers and Maslow are no treasure! They are not spoils, but things that will spoil the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God.

Ezekiel prophesied about what was about to occur. In the final verses he looked further into the future of Israel - past even our own time.

Ezekiel 17:22 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.

Ezekiel 17:23 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.

Ezekiel 17:24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the Lord, have spoken and have done it."

God Himself takes a tender sprig from the highest branches of the cedar and plants it on a high and prominent mountain in Israel. The "shoot from the cedar tree" is the Lord Himself, from the royal line of David.

The kingdom of our Lord will be planted on this earth with His capital in the mountain city of Jerusalem. His kingdom will thrive and prosper, bear fruit and become like a splendid, majestic cedar tree.

- Then all the nations, represented by all the trees will acknowledge the Lord and submit to Him as the rightful King.
- Then all the inhabitants of the earth will find provision and peace under the branches of the mighty and majestic cedar tree.

God is just as much involved in the processes of history today as He was in the sixth century. He is aligning nations against Israel just as prophesied later in the Book of Ezekiel. History will unfold just as it is prewritten in the Bible.

Is that fatalism? No, because along the way Christians are being 'read' by men and many are being saved.