

# EZEKIEL

## *Cry Me a River*

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,  
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion  
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 17:1-24

Topic

The Lord presents Judah with a riddle about their interactions with two eagles: One sent by Him, the other pursued by them.

Title

***“Riddle Me This, Riddle Me That, The Eagle You Picked Does Not Have Your Back”***

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**What do they call pastors in Germany?  
*German shepherds***

**What kind of lighting did Noah use on the Ark? *Floodlights***

**Before Boaz married, what kind of man was he?  
*He was Ruth-less***

**I am taken from a mine, and shut up in a wooden case, from which I am never released, and yet I am used by almost everybody.  
What am I? *Pencil Lead***

The LORD tells Ezekiel to pose a rare riddle to the nation of Judah. He had tried many other methods to communicate that their idolatry was ruining them. Maybe this would be their “Aha!” moment.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Babylon Is Not So Bad When The Lord Wants You Disciplined There**, and **#2 Egypt Is Always Bad Because The Lord Delivered You From There**.

## **#1 Babylon Is Not So Bad When The Lord Wants You Discipled There (v1-21)**

If I said that I went to the University of Babylon, what would you think? Besides Iraq, there's a Babylon in Illinois, and two in New York.

Ah, but I'm a Christian trying to be clever. What I mean to convey by saying 'Babylon' is that my university is not Christian, but worldly.

- Historically, Babylon is the ancient city and world empire that conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem in 586BC.
- Biblically, Babylon is synonymous with human pride, idolatry, and the pursuit of power apart from God.
- Spiritually, Babylon is often used as a metaphor for all worldly systems, e.g., its religions, politics, philosophies, psychologies, etc.

**Anywhere a believer finds him or herself this side of eternity is Babylon.**

Alistair Begg writes we must *"realize that the place we are living is less and less like Jerusalem, and more and more like Babylon."*

To understand why Ezekiel's message isn't so dire, we look back to the prophet Habakkuk. He recognized Israel's idolatry and cried out for God's discipline. God's response - that He would use the Babylonians to punish Judah - stunned him.

Discipline was well underway when Ezekiel wrote. King Nebuchadnezzar had come twice already to Jerusalem, taking captives.

With that brief background we can 'riddle me this.'

Ezk 17:1 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 17:2 "Son of man, pose a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel,

The Bible contains many genres: Historical narrative, law, wisdom literature, poetry, songs, prophecy, sermons, speeches, epistles (letters), Gospels, genealogies, covenants, etc. *Add to that parables and add to that riddle parables!*

Why so many types of literature?

**The Creator and Sustainer of life desires to converse with you in every way that might draw you deeper in a relationship with Him.**

If singing isn't your preference, explore historical narratives in the Bible. If Proverbs are challenging, perhaps delve into prophecy. While we should engage with the whole of God's Word, it's natural to have personal preferences for certain sections.

A riddle must be heard or read all at once.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

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

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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 legend of characters is thus:

- The first eagle is Babylon, "the city of merchants" (v4).
- The cedar tree and the vine represent the nation of Judah.
- The top of the cedar represents Judah's king, Jeconiah.
- The seed the first eagle plants is Zedekiah. He was put in charge when King Jeconiah was deposed.
- The second eagle is Egypt.

The first eagle takes the top of the cedar tree and plants it in a foreign land. Babylon exiled Judah's King Jehoiachin.

The first eagle plants a seed in fertile soil. Nebuchadnezzar replaced King Jehoiachin with his uncle, Zedekiah.

The vine grows but later seeks help from another eagle. Zedekiah secretly approached Egypt to form an alliance against Babylon.

This disloyalty enraged Nebuchadnezzar. He conquered Egypt, then came the third time to Jerusalem, leveling it.

In verses eleven through twenty-one, the LORD reveals the decision that amped-up His discipline.

Listen for two words, one repeated four times and the other six times.

Ezk 17:11 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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,

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

Ezk 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?

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.' "

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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."

"Covenant" (6x) & "oath" (4x) dominate these verses. Zedekiah swore in God's name to serve Babylon in peace. He "despised the oath" he had made. He broke it.

The LORD called it "My **oath** which he despised, and My **covenant** which he broke..." God rules over the nations. He gives nations delegated authority to act freely. Nebuchadnezzar was appointed by God. He had the authority to depose Jehoiachin and to appoint Zedekiah. It was wrong to break the covenant.

Nebuchadnezzar "took away the mighty of the land, that the kingdom might be brought low and not lift itself up, but that by keeping His covenant it might stand."

The 6<sup>th</sup> century Jews were in danger of extinction. They would not stop sinning without an intervention. God intervened. As a vassal to Babylon they would enjoy its protection. They would learn humility. They would repent and ultimately return. Despite his cruelty and temper, King Nebuchadnezzar appointed a Jew, Zedekiah, as governor over Judah, intending to maintain peace with the region.

Zedekiah broke the oath, driven to do so only by a desire to maintain their independence from God.

The Jerusalem Jews were supposed to submit to Babylon, even to exile, as an appropriate and deserved discipline. It was the LORD's way of preserving them. They instead added oath breaking to their rebellion by seeking an alliance with Egypt.

In Jeremiah 29:1-8, Jeremiah urged them to settle down, build homes, marry, and seek the welfare of the city where they've been exiled.

We live in Babylon. Another Jeremiah, David Jeremiah, said, "We live in a world that is becoming more like Babylon every day - a world that is self-absorbed, materialistic, and hostile to the ways of God."

The Church will live in spiritual Babylon until the resurrection and rapture, after which our forever home, the New Jerusalem, will appear.

Living in Babylon means being thrown into fiery furnaces and spending nights with lions, but also experiencing the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

We all know enough about Daniel to know that he bore abundant fruit for the Lord. He was taken captive in the first of Babylon's incursions. When we first meet him, *Daniel is in his teen years.*

We don't see him demanding his rights, wanting to be transferred to another group of Magi, or taking advantage of situations for his own advancement. He makes no escape attempts. Babylon was where the LORD had placed him. It was God's will.

Remember what we learned in Ezekiel 16. The spiritual fruit of love requires adversity. You will never know self control unless you are in situations where you might lose control. That's Babylon.

Kirk Lazarus wisely warned, "You never go full idolater." God protected His nation. Don't argue with where God places you - it may be to save you from sin.

## **#2 Egypt Is Always Bad Because The Lord Delivered You From There (v22-24)**

Egypt illustrates the flesh. The "flesh" refers to the inherent human inclination toward sin and opposition to God's will. When you believe Jesus for your salvation, you receive a new spirit and the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. However, your new spirit and the Holy Spirit dwell within your earthly physical body. You quickly find that "the good that [you] will *to do*, [you] do not do; but the evil [you] will not *to do*, that [you] practice."

We will struggle with the flesh daily until the Lord takes us home or returns to give us new, heavenly bodies and end sin forever.

The closing verses give us a glimpse of future glory.

Ezk 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.

Ezk 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.

In the riddle, the highest branch represents the king, and the “prominent mountain” refers to the hill where Jerusalem stands. This is the future reign of the Messiah, who we know is Jesus.

Ezk 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.”

It reminds me of the Christmas story, *The Three Trees*. Though humbled when they were not crafted into anything grand, they were later exalted as the wood for the manger, the fishing boat of Galilee, and the Cross.

Humility is a theme running all through the story of Jesus:

- He humbled Himself in the Garden of Eden, promising to be the Seed of the woman who would redeem Creation & Created.
- He humbled Himself in coming as a man who will remain fully God and fully man for all eternity.
- Ultimately He humbled Himself by dying on the Cross for our sins.

From eternity to eternity, Jesus is humble. When I’m not humble, I’m not like Jesus. When something or someone lacks humility, *that’s not Jesus*.

Egypt beckons. It’s like the sirens in mythology whose enchanting singing lured sailors to shipwreck & death.

We are always on the verge of “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like...” (Galatians 5:19-21).

### **Christian recording artist Keith Green asked, “So you wanna go back to Egypt?”**

We all do from time-to-time. There is no religion, or psychology, or politics, or philosophy, that is at all helpful in your Christian walk. Our help comes from the Lord. He goes to great lengths to design our circumstances so that we might be planted there and bear fruit by abiding there. Not so we can turn aside and become shipwrecked.

We can finish with this quote from Edwin Lutzer:

*“Christians today are faced with at least three ways to respond: (1) Assimilate the secular culture, (2) Isolate from the secular culture, or (3) Engage the secular culture. In light of the Gospel, the only choice for the Christ follower is to engage.”*

**Substitute the word abide for engage and get to bearing fruit where you’re planted.**