

Ezekiel
Week 11
A Parable and Warning
Chapter 17-18

Chapter 17

riddle ... parable. The two nouns are similar in meaning, but not entirely synonyms. A riddle implies any saying or story that requires interpretation. A parable implies a comparison of one thing with another. ¹

Lebanon. Greater Canaan, the northward, coastal extension of traditional Israelite territory. That name is chosen because of its prized species of cedar trees. ²

city of traders. Although the Phoenicians are more often associated with trade, their role was actually more as “middlemen,” while the bankers and merchants who supplied the goods for transport were based in the cities of Mesopotamia (see Is 23:8).³

vine parables. The initial efforts of the gardener to care for his vine, planting it near abundant water in fertile soil, are rewarded by lush growth. However, at the appearance of the second eagle, the vine seems to reject the gardener’s attentions and loses its purpose. It sends out tendrils toward the second bird as if seeking another, unnecessary, water source. This failure to respond as expected makes the parable similar to the “Song of the Vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1–7.⁴

deportation of king and nobles. The interpretation of the parable of the eagle and the vine is the taking of Jehoiachin and his royal court as hostages by Nebuchadnezzar after the city of Jerusalem was captured in 597 b.c. (2 Kings 24:6–17). Like the well-cultivated vine, Jehoiachin is treated with dignity, and the ration lists from Nebuchadnezzar’s official records prove that he was well fed. If the model of Daniel and his three friends could be used here, it seems likely that Jehoiachin and his advisers were being assimilated into Babylonian culture so that they could eventually be restored to Jerusalem to serve as the king’s loyal administrators (Dan 1:3–5).⁵

member of royal family. After capturing Jerusalem in 597 b.c., the Babylonian Chronicle records that Nebuchadnezzar took King Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, as his hostage. Nebuchadnezzar then installed Jehoiachin’s uncle, the third son of Josiah, on the throne of Judah. His name was originally Mattaniah, but the Babylonian king renamed him Zedekiah as a gesture demonstrating his puppet status (2 Kings 24:17).⁶

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) (p. 1336). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

² Engelbrecht. 1336

³ Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament](#) (electronic ed., Eze 17:4). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Matthews & Walton. 17:6-7

⁵ Matthews & Walton: 17:12

⁶ Matthews & Walton. 17:13

Zedekiah's rebellion and deal with Egypt. Despite the example of 597 and the deportation of Jehoiachin, Zedekiah entertained ideas of rebellion against the Babylonians. He met with envoys from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon early in his reign (Jer 27:3) and apparently had dealings with Pharaoh Psammeticus II (see the comment on Jer 34:21). See the comment on Jeremiah 37:5–8 for discussion of the troop movements of the Egyptians. Pharaoh Apries made at least a brief response to Zedekiah's plea for help, but it did not prevent the fall of Jerusalem.⁷

and he made with him a covenant. The agreement between Zedekiah and Nebuchadnezzar is described as an oath and a covenant. Suzerain-vassal treaties in the ancient Near East were ratified by invoking the native deities of both parties as witnesses. Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar resulted in breaking an oath he had called on Yahweh to guarantee (see 2 Chr 36:13). This explains Yahweh's role in bringing judgment against Zedekiah for rebelling against Babylon (see Ezek 17:19–20).⁸

planting a cedar sprig. Just as the great eagle first plucked the topmost shoot from the cedar in verse 4, now Yahweh (identified as the eagle) will take a tender sprig and plant it on a high mountain. Following this line of reasoning, the Davidic house will be allowed to continue through the line of Jehoiachin. Similar horticultural metaphors for the revival of the Davidic House are found in Isaiah 11:1 and Jeremiah 23:5.⁹

high and lofty mountain. Cf v 24. Zion (Jerusalem) was situated on a small mountain, but this messianic abode far transcends earthly geography. Cf Ps 48:1–2; Is 11:9; 25:6–8. It can scarcely be accidental that high mountains figure so prominently in the NT (e.g., the scene of our Lord's temptations [Mt 4:1–11], the unnamed mount of transfiguration [Mt 17:1–13], and the new Jerusalem [Rv 21:2, 10]). Ezekiel will also describe the new temple of a restored Israel on "a very high mountain" (Ezk 40:2).¹⁰

a noble cedar. See note, v 3. *every kind of bird.* Symbolizing people of all nations. *shade ... nest.* Symbols of shelter, which the Lord provides to those who take refuge in His chosen servant.

bring low ... make high. Christ and the sinner changing places, as it were, so that none may boast but confess that it was all pure grace (cf Lk 1:46–55; 1Co 1–2).¹¹

Throughout the fable there are slightly discordant notes that do not fit with the straightforward, surface analysis. These remind us that the fable is a riddle as well as a parable; it conceals a deeper truth as well as reveals an obvious lesson. For instance, Lebanon is not only the proverbial home of all cedars but also the name of one of Solomon's

⁷ Matthews & Walton. 17:15

⁸ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Eze 17:13). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁹ Matthews & Walton. 17:22

¹⁰ Engelbrecht. 1337

¹¹ Engelbrecht. 1337

palaces (cf. 1 Kings 7:2; Jer. 22:23). So the discerning reader is invited to consider who planted “the cedar in Lebanon” in the first place. Who established the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem? Further back still, who was it who had brought them “to the land of Canaan,” just as Nebuchadnezzar brought Jehoiachin “to the land of merchants”?

Moreover, the vine planted in conditions suitable for growth is a classic picture of the Lord’s provision for Israel (Isa. 5:1–7); indeed, the imagery of “no effort spared,” which seems more than a little overdone with reference to Nebuchadnezzar, fits perfectly for the Lord’s care. He is the One who, according to Psalm 80, brought a vine out of Egypt and cleared the ground in order to plant it in the Promised Land (Ps. 80:8–11). Likewise, Ezekiel’s address to Judah as “this rebellious house” describes the history of their relationship with the Lord much better than their history (to date) with Babylon.¹²

Just as Nebuchadnezzar once installed Zedekiah, so Yahweh will install his own vassal on Mount Zion. In contrast to the vine that rebelled and would soon wither (17:7–10), the cedar of Yahweh’s planting will thrive and bear fruit (17:23).¹³

Chapter 18

Theologically, this chapter ranks as one of the most important in the Book. Its overall theme is individual accountability before God. A person’s ultimate judgment comes when he must face the heavenly Judge at death. Ezekiel addresses the issue through three examples or case studies (vv 5–9; 10–13; 14–17). Ch 18 has affinities with chs 3; 33.¹⁴

The proverb runs: “The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (18:2), thus affirming that sometimes children suffer for their parent’s actions rather than the parents themselves. The application to which the people of Ezekiel’s time had put the proverb is not hard to discern: “Our fathers sinned against God, but we their children (the generation of the Exile) are the ones paying the price; that’s the way the world is and nothing can be done about it.” A similar thought is expressed in Lamentations 5:7: “Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.” Jeremiah also confronted the same proverb (Jer. 31:29–30), which suggests that the idea had considerable currency around the time of the Exile.¹⁵

The person sinning will die. The statement here (and a similar remark in Jer 31:30) offers a contrast to Exod. 20:5, which declares that Yahweh will punish sin across generations, sometimes delaying judgment for future generations. The idea of punishment across generations was well-established in the culture of the biblical world. This concept corresponds with Yahweh’s great patience as He withholds punishment and hopes for Israel and Judah to repent. A delay in full-blown judgment, however, did not imply that earlier generations went unpunished or that the current generation is without guilt.¹⁶

¹² Duguid, I. M. (1999). [Ezekiel](#) (p. 224). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

¹³ Duguid. 225-226

¹⁴ Engelbrecht. 1337

¹⁵ Duguid. 234-235

¹⁶ Barry, et al. 18:4

The first part of that disputation is a case study covering three successive generations, presented in the form of priestly case law. The formula “If a man ...” followed by the judicial verdict is comparable to that found in Leviticus 20:9–21. The three generations described are a righteous man who is succeeded by a wicked son, who is in turn followed by a repentant, righteous son. The behavior of each is assessed against a “checklist” of righteous behaviors, a kind of miniature Ten Commandments.¹⁷

idols of the house of Israel. It would appear that Ezekiel is using a stock phrase coined during the late monarchy or perhaps during the exile to refer to the extreme impurity associated with idol worship. The Hebrew word used for idols, *gillulim*, is an intentionally crude word emphasizing the extreme ritual impurity of idols—they are best likened to feces or stools of excrement.¹⁸

The third case study involves a righteous grandson. An example of this sequence (righteous grandfather, unrighteous father, and righteous son/grandson) is seen in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah (2Ki 15:32–17:5; 18:1–20:21).¹⁹

None ... shall be remembered. Our righteousness consists in the fact that the Lord has not kept a record of our sins and does not impute them against us, as is explicitly stated in other passages of Scripture.²⁰

The people still protest that the Lord’s ways are not fair, but arbitrary or unpredictable. It is the other way around—God acts consistently according to His rules of justice, while people are fickle and reject God’s revelation.²¹

18:31 make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Hbr idiom is involved, which may be translated “get/acquire for yourselves” (cf 28:4; Dt 8:17; 2Sm 15:1; 1Ki 1:5). Sinners do not have a free will or ability to make their hearts new (see note, Ex 35:29).²²

Yahweh, the object of their rebellion, is the one who, through the prophet, graciously calls on the exiles to empty their lives of such subversive activity (contrast 20:7–8). God has something better for them. In contrast to the destiny of death that reinforced the appeal in v 30, an alternative prospect of eschatological blessing is now presented to support this appeal. It refers to a promise of permanent moral renewal that was to be God’s gift along with return to the land (11:17, 19–20; 36:24, 26; cf. Hos 2:15, 19[17, 21] reb; Jer 31:23, 33). Who, faced with such a choice, would choose the death that had featured in both countertheses?²³

¹⁷ Duguid. 235

¹⁸ Matthews & Walton. 18:6

¹⁹ Engelbrecht. 1338

²⁰ Chemnitz, Martin. *Loci Theologici*. Edited by J. A. O. Preus. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 1989.

²¹ Engelbrecht. 1339

²² Engelbrecht. 1339

²³ Allen, L. C. (1998). [Ezekiel 1–19](#) (Vol. 28, p. 280). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.