

eDevotions for Growing Christians

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Ezekiel 18:1-4 What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son-both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.

Ezekiel 18:7-8 He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man.

Ezekiel 18:22-23 None of the offenses he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?

Read all of Ezekiel 18

Two Eagles and Three Kings

Background:

In 586BC, Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of the Babylonian empire conquered the kingdom of Judah and carried off many of the Jewish people as captives to Babylon. Jerusalem was burned and the beautiful Temple of the Lord, built by King Solomon, was completely destroyed. God allowed this terrible judgment to come upon His people Israel because of their sins of idolatry and rebellion. This judgment fulfilled God's multiple warnings to Israel over many centuries through His prophets. In fact, in the ten years prior to the final fall of Jerusalem, God spoke to His people both from Jerusalem through the prophet Jeremiah, and from Babylon through the prophet Ezekiel.

Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah actually occurred in three phases and spanned about 20 years. In 605BC the Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem and removed the Temple treasures and many of the promising young men of royal and noble birth. Taking royal hostages was typical strategy in ancient warfare, and limited any threat of a rebellious uprising by the tribute-paying, conquered nation. In this first phase of the Babylonian conquest,

Daniel was one of the young men who were taken as captives to Babylon (see Daniel 1).

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 (see Ezekiel 1). So 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.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points:

In Ezekiel 15-17, the prophet Ezekiel gave three parables to the captives in Babylon to illustrate God's dealings with

the nation of Judah. In chapter 15 we find the parable of the fruitless vine: Israel had failed to bear fruit for the Lord. In chapter 16 we see 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. Ezekiel 17 gives us the parable of two eagles and three kings. The two eagles (vs1-10) represent Babylon and Egypt, and the parable portrays the political dealings of the last two kings of Judah with these powerful empires. Verses 11-21 help us interpret the first part of the parable. In the remainder of the chapter a future kingdom, the kingdom of the Messiah, is predicted.

King Jehoiachin of Judah is the "top of the cedar tree" (v4) 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, and made a covenant with him under oath (vs13-14). In the parable, Zedekiah is the royal seed of the land that is planted in fertile soil (v5). The vine (v6) 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, in accordance with King Zedekiah’s covenant with Babylon. But in verse 7 the second great eagle appeared on the scene, and the vine turned towards him. Breaking his solemn covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah turned towards Egypt, hoping that an Egyptian alliance would help Judah gain her freedom from Babylonian tyranny.

Zedekiah’s treachery was a serious sin in God’s eyes. In this parable, God predicted that Pharaoh and his great Egyptian army would not intervene on Judah’s behalf, and Judah would be completely conquered by the Babylonians. Furthermore, Zedekiah would be taken as a prisoner to Babylon and would die in exile there.

When Ezekiel wrote this parable, part of the parable had already taken place. King Jehoiachin was already a captive in Babylon and Zedekiah was the puppet king in Jerusalem. However, 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. All of this took place (the historical account can be read in Jeremiah 52:3-14), and this emphasizes the great truth that God’s Word is both historically and prophetically accurate. The prophecy of Ezekiel’s parable of two eagles and three kings did not end with the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC. In the concluding verses of the chapter the parable is extended. God Himself takes a tender sprig from the highest branches of the cedar and plants it on a high and prominent mountain in Israel.

This is a messianic prophecy—and a message of hope. The “shoot from the cedar tree” is the Lord Himself, from the royal line of David—the third King of Ezekiel 17. He is the “shoot out of the stump of Jesse” and the “branch that will bear fruit” of Isaiah 11:1. In the future, 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. The church is not the fulfillment of this prophecy. This prophecy is not being fulfilled at the present time, while our Lord is rejected by this world. The fulfillment will come when the Lord returns and literally reigns from Jerusalem. Then all the nations, represented by all the trees (v24), 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.

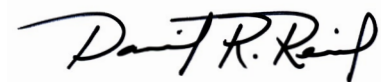
What a blessing to personally know the third King of Ezekiel’s parable right now—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! We can look forward with joy to the future time when all the people of the earth will finally bow before Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as Lord, and we will reign with Him in His future majestic and glorious kingdom.

Practical Application:

Do you keep your promises? Giving your word and then failing to keep your commitment is a sin! King Zedekiah may have thought that he had good reasons for breaking his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. He may have rationalized his actions by thinking, “Maybe I can gain independence for God’s people with the help of Egypt! And Nebuchadnezzar is a pagan. I don’t have to keep a promise made to an

unbeliever!” But God doesn’t approve of excuses for breaking a commitment. Zedekiah had taken an oath before God that he would submit to Nebuchadnezzar in exchange for being made king and given a kingdom. Notice what God says about Zedekiah’s treacherous actions in verses 18-20. The Lord considered that Zedekiah had despised God’s oath and broken God’s covenant, and had committed treason against God! Why? Because he had made a promise, and promises are to be kept. Breaking a promise is a serious sin. Don’t make promises if you don’t intend to keep your word!

Have you promised to pay back a loan? Have you promised to give back something you borrowed? Have you committed to helping someone with a worthwhile project, or teaching Sunday school, or assisting with a youth program? Have you promised financial support to a local church or missions in other lands? Have you promised to encourage and pray for a friend who is going through tough times? Have you promised to love your spouse? Have you made excuses for your sin when you failed to keep your commitments and promises? It is critically important for us, as Christians, to faithfully represent our God, who always keeps His promises! There should be no credibility gaps between our words and our behavior. We should stand out as shining lights in an unscrupulous and selfish society (Philippians 2:15). Let’s be people who honor our commitments. Let’s be people whose word can be trusted. Let’s keep our promises!



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Further Study:

If you would like to hear more about the fulfillment of prophecy, go to this page on our website: <http://www.growingchristians.org/cfgc/herm/herm11a.html>. If you would like information on how to purchase the set of tapes or CDs containing this teaching in audio or purchase other GCM material, please go to our web store (<http://www.growingchristians.org/cgi-bin/store/agora.cgi>).

Future Tour

Our 2005 Holy Land tour will be April 7-17. It will include an overnight stay and tour of Istanbul, Turkey, where there is much to see in reference to historic Christianity. Brochures should be available sometime in September.

Write to us at:

gcm@growingchristians.org if you are interested.

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Feedback from the ministry:

From the Netherlands:

“Thank you for making this site available on the internet. It is a great help and encouragement for making Bible studies and sermons here in the Netherlands. Can I use the outlines for Dutch translation...?”

From South Carolina:

“I started a new job and had to drive every morning around 5:30AM to 6:45AM. The first day I scanned the radio stations and found 91.7FM. “Dr. Dave” was starting the final study on Nehemiah. I am a relatively new Christian and I felt that I was stagnating, but your studies have opened up a yearning to study God's Word and apply it to my life...”

From Russia:

“THANK YOU again...for the discs that you sent to me in Russia...”

From Ohio:

“I've been totally blessed by this ministry. Thank you for making all this available and also very affordable.”

Family News:

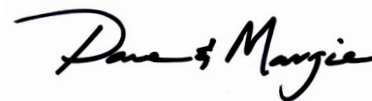
Update on our grandchildren:

Little Dave (18 months) is now talking a mile a minute, but not English! It's his “own tongue” and gradually turning into English—a word per week!

John (5 years) has become an excellent Bocce Ball player and keeps everyone's score in his head.

Ingrid (8 years) and Kirsten (6 years) are now both proficient swimmers because of summer camp. Maybe 8 years from now we'll report about Olympic tryouts!

Callie (12 years) and Connor (9 years) are enjoying the water sports, crafts and summer program for kids at Camp-of-the-Woods in Speculator, NY. We're looking forward to the whole family gathering there for a week in August.



“So then, just as you received Christ as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” - Colossians 2:6-7

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