Ezekiel 15

The Useless Vine: Wood Fit Only for the Fire

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

A vine has one purpose — fruit. Its wood is too soft and crooked for anything else. When Israel stopped bearing fruit, the very thing they were proud of, being God's vine, left them good for nothing but the fire. Privilege without fruit is not safety.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

Scripture in the text and key-verse cards: King James Version (public domain). Quotations in the notes: New American Standard Bible® (NASB 1995), © The Lockman Foundation; used by permission. Commentary sources: David Guzik, Enduring Word.

00 The Text

EZEKIEL 15 (KJV), MARKED

Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
Sky Key repeated word
Rose Sin / warning
Violet Promise / blessing
Amber Time / place / contrast

[1]And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

[2]Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?

[3]Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?

[4]Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?

[5]Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less shall it be meet yet for any work, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned?

[6]Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

[7]And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them.

[8]And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord GOD.

Marked in the text

- **v2** What is the vine tree more than any tree
- **v2** vine tree *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** among the trees of the forest
- **v3** Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work?
- **v3** will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon?
- **v4** it is cast into the fire for fuel
- **v4** fire *(every occurrence)*
- **v4** the fire devoureth both the ends of it
- **v4** the midst of it is burned
- **v4** Is it meet for any work?
- **v5** when it was whole, it was meet for no work
- **v5** how much less shall it be meet yet for any work
- **v6** which I have given to the fire for fuel
- **v6** so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem
- **v7** I will set my face against them
- **v7** they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them
- **v7** ye shall know that I am the LORD
- **v8** I will make the land desolate
- **v8** because they have committed a trespass

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 15:4 (KJV)

4 Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?

Setting

Ezekiel is among the exiles in Babylon, still in the undated stretch between the sixth year (8:1, about 592 BC) and the seventh (20:1, about 591 BC). Jerusalem has already been through the fire twice — Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation (605 BC) and the one that took Ezekiel and King Jehoiachin (597 BC). Zedekiah reigns over what's left, and the people tell themselves that God's chosen vine could never be cut down. This short parable answers that.

Structure

- vv1–3 — **what is vine wood good for?** "How is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?" (v2). "Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?" (v3).
- vv4–5 — **charred wood:** "If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?" (v4). "Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less" after the fire has consumed it (v5).
- vv6–7 — **the meaning — Jerusalem:** "As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (v6). "I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD" (v7).
- v8 — **the reason:** "I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully" (v8).

Repeated words

fire (vv4, 5, 6, 7); wood (vv2, 3, 6); anything (vv3, 4, 5); trees of the forest (vv2, 6); set My face against them (v7, twice).

Contrasts

the vine ⟷ the other trees of the forest (v2). Intact ⟷ charred (vv4–5). Useless before the fire ⟷ how much less after it (v5). Out of one fire ⟷ into another (v7). God's chosen vine ⟷ fuel for the fire (v6).

Chapter theme (my words)

A vine has one purpose — fruit. Its wood is too soft and crooked for anything else. When Israel stopped bearing fruit, the very thing they were proud of, being God's vine, left them good for nothing but the fire. Privilege without fruit is not safety.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 15:7 (KJV)

7 And ▲ I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one ⇄ fire, and another ⇄ fire shall devour them; and ⇄ ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them.

The vine and its people (vv1–2)

All through Scripture the vine stands for Israel — brought out of Egypt and planted by God (Ps 80:8–16), tended and expected to bear good grapes (Isa 5:1–7), "a choice vine" that turned wild (Jer 2:21; Hos 10:1). Ezekiel will use the vine again in chapters 17 and 19. Guzik suggests Ezekiel is answering a protest: surely God would spare His own vine? His answer is that Israel's privileged status brought greater accountability, not less. Block, in Guzik: "Grace places high demands on its recipients."

Good for nothing but fruit (vv2–3)

Notice what the parable never mentions — fruit. Morgan, in Guzik: "He makes no allusion to that which is always the chief idea in the use of that figure, its fruit." Guzik reads the silence as deliberate: Israel had no fruit to show. Without fruit, a vine is worse than an ordinary tree. Its wood can't frame a house, shape a tool, or even make a peg to hang a pot on. A vine exists for one thing.

Charred at both ends (vv4–5)

Throw vine wood into the fire and it's fuel. Pull it out half burned — ends gone, middle charred — and it's worth even less. Block, in Guzik: "Unlike metal, firing wood does not enhance its intrinsic value." Many see the burned ends as the judgments Judah had already suffered — the deportations of 605 and 597 BC — and the charred middle as Jerusalem itself, still standing but scorched. Wright, in Guzik: "God, the Divine Carpenter, has not been able to make anything out of the vine nation."

From one fire to another (vv6–7)

God now makes the point plain: the inhabitants of Jerusalem are that vine wood, given to the fire. "Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them" — the survivors of the earlier invasions will not escape the final one in 586 BC. Guzik notes that the warning came in advance, so that when judgment fell the people would know the LORD had spoken. "I set My face against them" appears twice in one verse — the same phrase used against idolaters in 14:8.

Persistent unfaithfulness (v8)

The reason is given in one word-pair: they "acted unfaithfully" (Hebrew *maal maal*, literally "trespassed a trespass"). Guzik: "It wasn't only the sin of Israel that brought God's judgment, but their *persistent* sin." The land would be made desolate because the people had broken faith again and again.

The True Vine

Guzik links this chapter to Jesus' words in John 15:1–6: "I am the true vine." Where Israel failed to bear fruit, Christ does not fail. Morgan, in Guzik: "There can be no failure in Him Who is the True Vine."

Branches that abide in Him bear fruit; branches that don't are gathered and burned (John 15:6). Christians differ on how far John 15:6 speaks of losing salvation, of judgment on false professors, or of a fruitless believer's loss of reward — but all agree the call is to abide.

Word study (Hebrew)

- **vine — *gephen* (H1612):** a vine, grapevine.
- **wood — *ets* (H6086):** tree, wood, timber.
- **branch — *zemorah* (H2156):** a branch, twig, vine shoot.
- **forest — *yaar* (H3293):** a thicket, wood, forest.
- **make anything — *melakah* (H4399):** work, craftsmanship, useful labor.
- **peg — *yathed* (H3489):** a peg, tent pin, nail.
- **vessel — *keli* (H3627):** a utensil, pot, implement.
- **fuel — *oklah* (H402):** food — what the fire "eats."
- **consumed — *akal* (H398):** to eat, devour, burn up.
- **charred — *charar* (H2787):** to be scorched, burned.
- **intact — *tamim* (H8549):** whole, complete, sound.
- **inhabitants — *yashab* (H3427):** to sit, dwell, live.
- **desolate — *shemamah* (H8077):** a waste, devastation.
- **acted unfaithfully — *maal* (H4603):** to act treacherously, break faith.

Cross-references

Deut 32:32; Ps 80:8–16; Isa 5:1–7; Isa 27:2–6; Jer 2:21; Hos 10:1; Ezek 17:5–10; Ezek 19:10–14; Matt 3:10; Matt 21:33–43; Luke 13:6–9; John 15:1–8; Gal 5:22–23; Heb 6:7–8.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 15:2 (KJV)

2 Son of man, ⇄ What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is ◷ among the trees of the forest?

Command to obey — abide and bear fruit

Ezekiel's vine was useless without fruit, and Jesus says, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). My job isn't to impress God with how sturdy my wood is. It's to stay connected to Christ — in the Word, in prayer, in obedience — and let Him produce the fruit (Gal 5:22–23).

Sin to confess — leaning on privilege

Israel said, "We're God's vine — He won't burn us." I can say, "I was raised in church," "I've written books," "I lead a Bible study." I confess the times I've trusted my position instead of walking in faithfulness. Being chosen is a call to fruit, not a shield against discipline.

Warning to heed — out of one fire and into another

Some men walk out of one fire — an overdose, an arrest, a prison sentence — and think the danger is past, so they go right back to the same life. Ezekiel warns: if nothing changes, another fire is coming (v7). Surviving the first fire is a gift meant to turn me around, not permission to keep going.

Promise to trust — the True Vine never fails

Jesus is the vine Israel couldn't be. For the man who feels like charred, worthless wood — burned at both ends, good for nothing — Christ can graft him in and make him fruitful (John 15:5, 16). Usefulness doesn't depend on what the fire left of me; it depends on whom I'm connected to.

Example to follow — the vinedresser's patience

God gave Israel centuries of warning before the fire, and Jesus told of a vineyard owner who gave a fruitless tree one more year (Luke 13:6–9). I want to be patient with the men I disciple — digging around the roots, giving time — while still telling them the truth about the fire.

Worship

The LORD planted His vine and tended it with care. He is patient, but He is not mocked. He speaks before He acts, so that we may know He is the LORD. And in Christ He has given us a Vine that never fails.

Prayer

Lord GOD, I don't want to be wood without fruit. Keep me abiding in Jesus, the True Vine. Forgive me for trusting in my privileges instead of walking with You. Use the fires I've already come through to turn me, not harden me. And make my life — and the lives of the men I serve — fruitful for Your glory. Amen.