Ezekiel 17

Two Eagles and a Vine: The Broken Oath and the Tender Shoot

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

Zedekiah gave his word under God's name and broke it, reaching for Egypt instead of trusting God. God says a broken oath is broken with Him, and no one escapes by it. But where human kings fail, God Himself will plant a tender shoot from David's line on His mountain — and it will become a cedar that shelters all kinds of people.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 17 (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, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel;

3 And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; ◷ A great eagle with great wings, longwinged , full of feathers, which had divers colours, came unto Lebanon, and ◷ took the highest branch of the cedar:

4 He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffick; he set it in a city of merchants.

5 He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree.

6 And it grew, and became ◷ a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs.

7 There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, ⚠ this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation.

8 ★ It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine.

9 Say thou, Thus saith the Lord GOD; ⚠ Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof.

10 Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, ◷ when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew.

11 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,

12 ⚠ Say now to the rebellious house, Know ye not what these things mean? tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon is come to Jerusalem, and hath taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon;

13 And hath taken of the king's seed, and made a ⇄ covenant with him, and hath taken an ⇄ oath of him: he hath also taken the mighty of the land:

14 That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his ⇄ covenant it might stand.

15 But ⚠ he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the ⇄ covenant, and be delivered?

16 ▲ As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose ⇄ oath he despised, and whose ⇄ covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die.

17 Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons:

18 Seeing he despised the ⇄ oath by breaking the ⇄ covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape.

19 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; As I live, surely mine ⇄ oath that he hath despised, and my ⇄ covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head.

20 And ▲ I will spread my net upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare, and I will bring him to Babylon, and will plead with him there for his trespass that he hath trespassed against me.

21 And all his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds: and ▲ ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it.

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs ★ a tender one, and ★ will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent:

23 In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and ★ under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.

24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD ▲ have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and ★ have made the dry tree to flourish: ▲ I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

Marked in the text

- **v2** put forth a riddle, and speak a parable
- **v3** A great eagle with great wings
- **v3** took the highest branch of the cedar
- **v6** a spreading vine of low stature
- **v7** this vine did bend her roots toward him
- **v8** ★ It was planted in a good soil by great waters
- **v9** Shall it prosper?
- **v10** when the east wind toucheth it
- **v12** Say now to the rebellious house
- **v13** ⇄ covenant *(every occurrence)*
- **v13** ⇄ oath *(every occurrence)*
- **v14** by keeping of his covenant it might stand
- **v15** he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt
- **v15** shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?
- **v16** ▲ As I live, saith the Lord GOD
- **v18** he despised the oath by breaking the covenant
- **v19** ▲ mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken
- **v20** ▲ I will spread my net upon him
- **v21** ▲ ye shall know that I the LORD have spoken it
- **v22** ★ a tender one
- **v22** ★ will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent
- **v23** ★ under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing
- **v24** ▲ have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree
- **v24** ★ have made the dry tree to flourish
- **v24** ▲ I the LORD have spoken and have done it

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 17:24 (KJV)

24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD ▲ have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and ★ have made the dry tree to flourish: ▲ I the LORD have spoken and have done it.

Setting

Like chapter 16, this oracle has no date of its own; it sits between 592 BC (8:1) and 591 BC (20:1). In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar had taken King Jehoiachin, the royal family and Judah's leading men to Babylon — Ezekiel among them (2 Kgs 24:10–16). He set Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah on the throne, renamed him Zedekiah, and made him swear loyalty (2 Kgs 24:17; 2 Chr 36:13). Now Zedekiah is leaning toward Egypt. God tells Ezekiel to "propound a riddle and speak a parable" (v2) about two eagles and a vine — then explains it plainly to "the rebellious house" (v12).

Structure

- vv1–6 — **the first eagle:** a great eagle "came to Lebanon and took away the top of the cedar" (v3), carried it to "a land of merchants" and set it "in a city of traders" (v4). He took "some of the seed of the land" (v5) and planted it by abundant water, and it became "a low, spreading vine" (v6) with its branches turned toward him.
- vv7–10 — **the second eagle:** "another great eagle" appears, and "this vine bent its roots toward him" (v7), hoping he would water it — though it was already planted in good soil by abundant water (v8). "Will it thrive?" (v9). It will be pulled up by the roots, and it will wither "as soon as the east wind strikes it" — "wither on the beds where it grew" (v10).
- vv11–15 — **the riddle explained:** "Do you not know what these things mean?" (v12). The king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and took her king and princes to Babylon (v12). He took one of the royal family and "made a covenant with him, putting him under oath" (v13), "that the kingdom might be in subjection" and that by "keeping his covenant … it might continue" (v14). "But he rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt" for horses and troops (v15). "Will he succeed? … Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?" (v15).
- vv16–21 — **the oath-breaker's end:** "As I live," Zedekiah will die in Babylon, in the land of the king "whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke" (v16). "Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war" (v17). "Now he despised the oath by breaking the covenant" — after "he pledged his allegiance" (v18). God calls it "My oath which he despised and My covenant which he broke" (v19). "I will spread My net over him" (v20); his troops will fall by the sword or be scattered, "and you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken" (v21).
- vv22–24 — **God's own planting:** God Himself will take a sprig from the top of the cedar — "a tender one" — and "plant it on a high and lofty mountain" (v22), on the mountain heights of Israel. It will "become a stately cedar," and "birds of every kind will nest under it" (v23). "All the trees of the field

will know that I am the LORD; I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it" (v24).

Repeated words

eagle (vv3, 7); vine (vv6, 7, 8); thrive / succeed (vv9, 10, 15); wither (vv9, 10); cedar (vv3, 22, 23); Babylon (vv12, 16, 20); covenant (vv13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19); oath (vv13, 16, 18, 19); As I live (vv16, 19); I, the LORD / I am the LORD (vv21, 24).

Contrasts

a vine planted in good soil by abundant water (v8) ⟷ a vine reaching for another eagle (v7). Kept covenant, the kingdom continues (v14) ⟷ broken covenant, no escape (vv15, 18). Pharaoh's "mighty army" (v17) ⟷ God's net (v20). Nebuchadnezzar's planting, a low vine (vv5–6) ⟷ God's planting, a stately cedar (vv22–23). The high tree brought down ⟷ the low tree exalted (v24). A man's broken oath (v18) ⟷ God's word: "I have spoken, and I will perform it" (v24).

Chapter theme (my words)

Zedekiah gave his word under God's name and broke it, reaching for Egypt instead of trusting God. God says a broken oath is broken with Him, and no one escapes by it. But where human kings fail, God Himself will plant a tender shoot from David's line on His mountain — and it will become a cedar that shelters all kinds of people.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 17:16 (KJV)

16 ▲ As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose ⇄ oath he despised, and whose ⇄ covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die.

A riddle and a parable (vv1–2)

Guzik explains that it was a riddle because its meaning needed explaining, and a parable because it told a story illustrating spiritual and material truth. Trapp, in Guzik: "Riddles exercise the wit, and parables help the memory, and excite both attention and affection." God explains the picture (vv11–21) so that the rebellious house has no excuse.

The first eagle (vv3–6)

Guzik identifies the great eagle as Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Lebanon's cedar stands for the house of David in Jerusalem — Solomon's palace was even called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kgs 7:2). The top twig is Jehoiachin, carried off in 597 BC to Babylon, "a city of traders" (v4). The "seed of the land" is Zedekiah, a native prince. Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Judah; he made it a "low, spreading vine" — humbled, but alive and well watered — as long as it stayed turned toward him.

The second eagle (vv7–10)

Guzik identifies the second eagle as Egypt; Feinberg, in Guzik, names Pharaoh Hophra, who came to the throne in 588 BC. Block, in Guzik, notes that the second eagle does nothing — the vine does all the reaching — and "the audience is left to reflect on the vine's ingratitude and stupidity." The vine had everything it needed (v8) and threw it away. The "east wind" (v10) is the hot desert wind off the east — Babylon would come from that direction, and the vine would wither where it stood.

The riddle explained (vv11–15)

In plain words: Nebuchadnezzar took the king and princes (v12), made a covenant with Zedekiah under oath (v13), and set terms that would keep Judah humble but alive (v14). Jeremiah urged the same course — submit to Babylon and live (Jer 27:12–17; 38:17–18). But Zedekiah sent envoys to Egypt for horses and troops (v15), against God's long-standing warning not to trust Egypt's horses (Deut 17:16; Isa 31:1). Guzik: "Fundamentally, Zedekiah was a covenant breaker, who ignored the promises of loyalty and submission."

"My oath which he despised" (vv16–21)

Zedekiah had sworn by the LORD's name (2 Chr 36:13). So when he broke his word to a pagan king, he broke it to God: "My oath … My covenant" (v19). God holds people to their word even when it is given to an unbeliever (compare Josh 9:15–20; Ps 15:4). The history played out exactly. Hophra's army marched out, drew the Babylonians away briefly, and went home (Jer 37:5–11). Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. Zedekiah fled by night, was caught near Jericho, watched his sons killed at Riblah, had his eyes put out, and was taken in chains to Babylon, where he died (2 Kgs 25:4–7; Jer 52:11). He died in Babylon without seeing it — as Ezekiel had said (12:13). Morgan, in Guzik: "God is governing, and there is no escape from Him."

The tender twig (vv22–24)

Now God, not Nebuchadnezzar, takes a sprig from the cedar's top. Guzik reads the "tender one" as the Messiah; Feinberg, in Guzik: "The 'tender one' is the Messiah, the Son of David." The picture matches the "shoot" and "branch" from Jesse's stump (Isa 11:1; 53:2; Jer 23:5; Zech 6:12). Guzik: "Out of what was thought to be dead, God promised to bring wonderful and productive growth." Christians agree the passage points to Christ, but differ on the timing of the "stately cedar." Many see it in the growth of Christ's kingdom now — Jesus used the same picture of birds nesting in the branches (Matt 13:31–32). Others see its full fulfillment in a future reign on Mount Zion; Guzik quotes Wiersbe: "The 'high mountain' Ezekiel wrote about is probably Mount Zion, where Messiah will reign over His people." Both agree the kingdom shelters "birds of every kind" — people from every nation. Verse 24 echoes Hannah and Mary: God brings down the proud and lifts the lowly (1 Sam 2:7–8; Luke 1:52). Feinberg, in Guzik: "The chapter began with judgment and punishment; it ends with mercy and grace."

Word study (Hebrew)

- **riddle — *chidah* (H2420):** an enigma, a puzzling saying.
- **parable — *mashal* (H4912):** a proverb, comparison, allegory.
- **eagle — *nesher* (H5404):** an eagle or large bird of prey.
- **cedar — *ʾerez* (H730):** the cedar, especially of Lebanon.
- **treetop — *tsammereth* (H6788):** the top, crown of a tree.

- **young shoots — *yoneqeth* (H3127):** a sucker, young shoot.
- **vine — *gephen* (H1612):** a vine.
- **thrive — *tsalach* (H6743):** to prosper, succeed.
- **wither — *yabesh* (H3001):** to dry up, wither.
- **rebellious — *meri* (H4805):** rebellion, rebellious.
- **oath — *ʾalah* (H423):** an oath, a curse invoked on oneself.
- **despised — *bazah* (H959):** to despise, treat as worthless.
- **covenant — *berith* (H1285):** a treaty, binding agreement.
- **net — *resheth* (H7568):** a net for catching.
- **tender — *rak* (H7390):** tender, soft, young.
- **lofty — *talul* (H8524):** exalted, lofty.
- **stately — *ʾaddir* (H117):** majestic, noble, mighty.
- **flourish — *parach* (H6524):** to bud, sprout, bloom.

Cross-references

Deut 17:16; Josh 9:15–20; 1 Sam 2:7–8; 2 Kgs 24:10–20; 2 Kgs 25:4–7; 2 Chr 36:11–13; Ps 15:4; Ps 92:12–13; Isa 2:2–3; Isa 11:1; Isa 31:1; Isa 53:2; Jer 23:5–6; Jer 27:12–17; Jer 37:5–11; Jer 52:11; Ezek 12:13; Ezek 34:23–24; Dan 4:10–12; Zech 6:12; Matt 5:37; Matt 13:31–32; Luke 1:52; Jas 5:12.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 17:22 (KJV)

22 Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs ★ a tender one, and ★ will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent:

Command to obey — keep your word (vv16–19)

Zedekiah swore in God's name and broke it when a better deal seemed to come along. Jesus says to let my yes be yes and my no be no (Matt 5:37). God hears every promise I make — to my wife, my clients, the men I meet with — as made before Him. I'll keep my word even when it costs me (Ps 15:4).

Sin to confess — reaching for Egypt

The vine was planted in good soil by abundant water and still bent its roots toward another eagle (vv7–8). I do that when I run to my own schemes, connections or money instead of trusting God in a hard place. I'll confess where I've been sending envoys to Egypt.

Warning to heed — the deal that doesn't save you

"Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?" (v15). For a man in recovery, Egypt looks like the old connection, the quick fix, the lie that gets him through the week. For a man inside, it's the shortcut

that seems smarter than doing his time with integrity. Pharaoh's mighty army didn't help Zedekiah (v17). The way out is not around God's word, but through it.

Promise to trust — the tender shoot

When David's line looked like a stump, God promised to plant a tender twig that would become a cedar (vv22–23) — and He did, in Jesus. "I bring down the high tree, exalt the low tree … and make the dry tree flourish" (v24). For the man who feels like dead, dry wood: God specializes in making the dry tree flourish.

Example to follow — the God who keeps His word

Zedekiah's word failed; God's never does: "I have spoken, and I will perform it" (v24). I want my words — in my writing, my business and my discipling — to reflect His faithfulness, not Zedekiah's.

Worship

He governs the eagles and the kings. Pharaoh's armies and Babylon's empire answer to Him. And He takes a tender shoot and makes it a cedar where people of every kind find shelter. I am one of those birds nesting in the branches of Christ.

Prayer

Lord, You keep every word You speak. Forgive me for the promises I've broken and for every time I've reached for Egypt instead of You. Make my yes mean yes. Thank You for Jesus, the tender shoot You planted on Your mountain. Bring down what is proud in me and make the dry places flourish. Amen.