

# Pentwater Bible Church

*Book of Ezekiel*

*Message 31*

*April 10, 2016*



The Eagle in Peterborough Parish Church Northampton, UK Artist Unknown

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The Book of Ezekiel  
Message Thirty-One

## The Parable and Riddle of The Two Eagles

April 10, 2016

Daniel E. Woodhead

### THE PARABLE AND RIDDLE OF THE TWO EAGLES

Ezekiel 17:1-10

*And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, <sup>2</sup>Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; <sup>3</sup>and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, full of feathers, which had divers colors, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedar: <sup>4</sup>he cropped off the topmost of the young twigs thereof, and carried it unto a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. <sup>5</sup>He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil; he placed it beside many waters; he set it as a willow-tree. <sup>6</sup>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.*

*<sup>7</sup>There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it. <sup>8</sup>It was planted in a good soil by many waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. <sup>9</sup>Say thou, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it may wither; that all its fresh springing leaves may wither? and not by a strong arm or much people can it be raised from the roots thereof. <sup>10</sup>Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the beds where it grew (ASV, 1901).*

### GOD INSTRUCTS EZEKIEL IN COMMUNICATION

Ezekiel 17:1-2

*And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, <sup>2</sup>Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel (ASV, 1901);*

Now God adds to the parabolic form of communication for Ezekiel to communicate with the Jewish prisoners of war in Babylon. He introduces the riddle (Hebrew *czeedah*) to Ezekiel and has him speak a riddle within a parable. Riddles are generally known as word puzzles. The whole point of a riddle is for the listener to analyze the circumstances brought forth in the riddle to discover a hidden meaning. It is a test of wisdom, which requires careful thought in order to be interpreted or understood. The parable already contains no names or specific places and is used to make an impression upon the memory

to recall personally related events or circumstances. By adding to this a riddle God is trying to get the Jews to understand for themselves what has happened to them, why and by whom. He wants them to realize that they have sinned against Him.

#### THE FIRST GREAT EAGLE

Ezekiel 17:3

*<sup>3</sup>And say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, full of feathers, which had divers colors, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedar (ASV, 1901).*

God is going to compare Nebuchadnezzar to an eagle and the kings of Judah to the lofty tops of cedar trees in Lebanon. In the parable form one set of actual circumstances is compared to an imaginary set of circumstances. With the riddle added into the parable it makes it enigmatic and thought provoking. Nebuchadnezzar was given authority to rule over the whole world. God chose Nebuchadnezzar, in spite of all his wickedness, to rule over Israel and all the earth as stated by the prophet Daniel.

Daniel 2:37-38

*<sup>37</sup>Thou, O king, art king of kings, unto whom the God of heaven hath given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory; <sup>38</sup>and wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens hath he given into thy hand, and hath made thee to rule over them all: thou art the head of gold (ASV, 1901).*

Therefore he is called great because of his great wingspan (pinions), which represent many people under his rule and those whom he could rule if he chose to move beyond the Mid-East. The parable provides imagery reminiscent of the vine, which symbolized Judah. Now Israel is represented by the cedar of Lebanon as well as a vine. The eagle has visible characteristics similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar.

#### Greatness

In general eagles fly higher than any other bird. Nebuchadnezzar had lofty goals of dominating many empires and in fact became the first of the world empires in the chain of the Times of the Gentiles cited by the Lord Jesus (Luke 21:24). The eagle is the greatest bird and the Scriptures compare him to an eagle (Jeremiah 48:40; 49:22; Ezekiel 17:3).

#### Long Wings

The long wings are symbolic of the span of control exercised by Nebuchadnezzar as he conquered in various battles in the Mid-East.

#### Full of Feathers

The wings were also full of feathers. This affirmed the eagle's beauty and its great flying ability as well as the many nations and people groups under Nebuchadnezzar's control.

#### Variety of Colors in The Feathers

The various colors represent the diverse people who are subordinate to the king including the common people, and merchant classes as well as the royalty.

### He came to Lebanon

Lebanon represents Israel because the mighty forest of Lebanon was there just to the north. Just as the city of Jerusalem is the highest of places in the world so too is the cedar the tallest of trees in the region.

### He took the Highest Branch of the Cedar

Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem to conquer it. The lofty top of the tree represents Mount Zion which is the name for Israel and the Mountain of Jerusalem. Mount Zion is a hill in Jerusalem just outside the walls of the Old City. The term Mount Zion has been used in the Hebrew Bible first for the City of David and later for the Temple Mount. In a broader sense it is used to refer to the entire country of Israel.



Jerusalem, Mount Zion from the Mount of Olives, Public Domain from Wikipedia

### NEBUCHADNEZZAR TAKES THE ROYALTY OF ISRAEL CAPTIVE

Ezekiel 17:4

*<sup>4</sup> he cropped off the topmost of the young twigs thereof, and carried it unto a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants (ASV, 1901).*

This makes reference to the third, Jehoiakim and second, to the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin was a very young man of eighteen when he occupied the throne and he is represented within the cedar tree as the topmost (king and royal family) part and young twigs (a boy of eighteen). Now Nebuchadnezzar carried the Royalty off to Babylon starting in 605 B.C. He took the choicest individuals with the most promise including Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

## Daniel 1:2-4

<sup>2</sup>*And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure-house of his god.*  
<sup>3</sup>*And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring in certain of the children of Israel, even of the seed royal and of the nobles; <sup>4</sup>youths in whom was no blemish, but well-favored, and skilful in all wisdom, and endued with knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace; and that he should teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans (ASV, 1901).*

Babylon was known as the world's center of commerce (land of traffic). Babylon was famous for its transport traffic on the Tigris and Euphrates. Also, by its connection with the Persian Gulf, it carried on much commerce with India. For nearly 2,000 years Babylon was the most important commercial city in the world. It was a commercial and financial center of Mesopotamia. The arts of divination, astronomy, astrology, accounting, mathematics and private and commercial law all sprang up from Babylon. In short many of our world systems came from that region. The ancient city of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, must have been a wonder to the traveler's eyes. "In addition to its size," wrote Herodotus, a historian in 450 BC, "Babylon surpasses in splendor any city in the known world." Herodotus claimed the outer walls were 56 miles in length, 80 feet thick and 320 feet high. Wide enough, he said, to allow a four-horse chariot to turn. The river Euphrates went through the middle of the city under the walls and linked with a moat surrounding the walls. The river Euphrates entered and exited through two spiked gates whose bars reached down to the riverbed. When these double doors were shut and all other entrances were closed, Babylon was impregnable.

## THE VASSAL KING

### Ezekiel 17:5

<sup>5</sup>*He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil; he placed it beside many waters; he set it as a willow-tree (ASV, 1901).*

The eagle was not a total tyrant. He took some of the seeds (relatives of the deposed kings) and made one a king. This was Zedekiah who was of the royal seed. He was the son of Josiah and the brother of Jehoiakim. Here in Jerusalem which is described as *fruitful soil* Nebuchadnezzar planted Zedekiah. He did not appoint a foreigner to rule over Jerusalem but a "seed of the land." Zedekiah was given the fertile Jerusalem and could have grown it. The imagery of *a fruitful soil; he placed it beside many waters; he set it as a willow-tree* is imagery of the new start of Zedekiah with Nebuchadnezzar's blessing to grow and develop Jerusalem. Just as a willow tree set in fertile soil with an abundance of water will flourish so too would have Zedekiah had he behaved properly.

## ZEDEKIAH INITIALLY HAS PROSPERITY

Ezekiel 17:6

*<sup>6</sup>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 (ASV, 1901).*

Before Zedekiah rebelled against the suzerainty of Nebuchadnezzar he prospered in his affairs. In the fourth year of his reign Jeremiah says, “*he went out to meet the king who crowned him*” (Jeremiah 27:3). Zedekiah was given additional responsibilities to govern over the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Zidon. There is no mention of fruit on this vine because Zedekiah’s children were slaughtered before he was blinded. Jerusalem was no going to be a cedar any more because of its previous evil especially under Manasseh who promoted idolatry. Now it became a vine of low stature with its tendrils facing the eagle who wanted it to prosper but not to be elevated above Babylon or the king Nebuchadnezzar. The stability of Judah depended on Babylon. The repetition “branches” and “springs” is used in the parable to identify the lack of gratitude of Zedekiah, who, was not content with moderate prosperity. He revolted from him to whom he had sworn allegiance and accepted his crown.

## THE SECOND EAGLE

Ezekiel 17:7-8

*<sup>7</sup>There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it. <sup>8</sup>It was planted in a good soil by many waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine (ASV, 1901).*

The second eagle was Egypt. This was Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) who was on the throne of Egypt. This eagle was not great like the first one, Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah bent his roots toward Egypt and sent forth branches that they might be watered and nourished by Hophra (Apries). However as the verse says Zedekiah was already planted on good soil with much nourishment so as to bear fruit. The one who did the planting was the first Great Eagle. Zedekiah was ignoring his promises to Nebuchadnezzar and looking for an increase in his rule from the Egyptian king. He had received military help from Babylon and never the less turned against Babylon toward Egypt for aid in throwing off the yoke of Babylon. There was no good reason for doing this as the nourishment from Babylon was leaving Zedekiah well off. If he had followed the commands of Nebuchadnezzar then he would have grown branches and born fruit. This means he would have thrived and his children would have lived.

## THE SECOND EAGLE WILL FAIL

Ezekiel 17:9-10

*<sup>9</sup>Say thou, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it may wither; that all its*

*fresh springing leaves may wither? and not by a strong arm or much people can it be raised from the roots thereof. <sup>10</sup>Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind toucheth it? it shall wither in the beds where it grew (ASV, 1901).*

God asks a rhetorical question, “*Shall it prosper?*” The obvious answer is no! The first great eagle will surely come to uproot the disloyal vine and it will dry up (*wither*). Cutting off the fruit is surely the execution of Zedekiah’s children. The second eagle which is pharaoh Hophra (Apries) will not come to Zedekiah’s aid which is characterized by the text of the riddle saying, “*and not by a strong arm or much people can it be raised from the roots thereof.*” Verse nine has every letter in the Hebrew alphabet which is a strange occurrence in the Bible since it is very rare and has importance.

This is a Hebrew method of referring to the completeness of the nature of a verse or chapter. It summarized the complete futility of Zedekiah’s turning from the Great Eagle and going for aid against him from a weak eagle which cannot help him. The message here is that the Lord is omnipotent and Israel or anyone who knows Him should not seek any salvation either spiritual or temporal from any earthly powers. This section ends with another rhetorical question, Shall it prosper? Despite the prophet Jeremiah admonitions to Zedekiah he did to wish to leave the city. How did he expect to prosper when he violated the oath he made to Nebuchadnezzar?

God compares the king of Babylon to the east wind because Babylon is northeast of Israel and the east wind is hot and dries up whatever it blows upon. The vine is located beside the irrigation furrows (*beds*) that would bring it water but the vine will dry up because nothing can withstand the east wind’s drying power. The second eagle has no water source to irrigate the vine. So what then is the value of reliance on pharaoh? This is the riddle within the parable. How can the second eagle help the vine when the first eagle is so great as to over power any others?

NEXT MESSAGE: KING ZEDEKIAH DEFIES KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

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