EZEKIEL 17

Two Eagles, a Vine and a Tender Shoot

> *"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."*
> EZEKIEL 17:24

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Like chapter 16, this oracle has no date of its own; it sits between 592 BC (8:1) and 591 BC (20:1).

2. Now Zedekiah is leaning toward Egypt.

The First Eagle Plucks the Cedar

Babylon carries off Judah's king and plants a low, spreading vine

EZEKIEL 17:2

"Son of man, propound a riddle and speak a parable to the house of Israel,

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik identifies the great eagle as Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon — the empire with great wings and long pinions that swooped onto Jerusalem.

WHAT IT MEANS

The story opens with a magnificent eagle landing on Lebanon and taking away the top of the cedar (v3). The topmost twig is King Jehoiachin, carried in 597 BC to Babylon, "a city of traders" (v4).

ʾerez (אֶרֶז)

ʾEREZ · "CEDAR"

The cedar, especially of Lebanon — the tallest, noblest tree Israel knew.

The Vine Reaches for Another Eagle

Planted by abundant waters, the vine still bends its roots toward Egypt

EZEKIEL 17:7

"But there was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage; and behold, this vine bent its roots toward him and sent out its branches toward him from the beds where it was planted, that he might water it.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik identifies the second eagle as Egypt, and passes on Feinberg's identification of the king behind it: Pharaoh Hophra, who came to the throne in 588 BC.

WHAT IT MEANS

Another great eagle appears, and "this vine bent its roots toward him" (v7), hoping he would water it. But it was already "planted in good soil beside abundant waters" (v8)!

tsālach (צָלַח)
TSALACH · "THRIVE"

To prosper, to succeed. The question rings through the chapter: "Will it thrive?" (v9), again in v10, and as "Will he succeed?"

The Riddle Explained

Nebuchadnezzar's covenant would keep Judah low but alive — and Zedekiah rebels

EZEKIEL 17:12

"Say now to the rebellious house, 'Do you not know what these things mean?' Say, 'Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, took its king and princes and brought them to him in Babylon.

DAVID GUZIK

The explanation in vv12–15 names the players plainly: the king of Babylon, Jerusalem's king and princes, and "one of the royal family" put under oath — Zedekiah. The terms would keep Judah humble but alive.

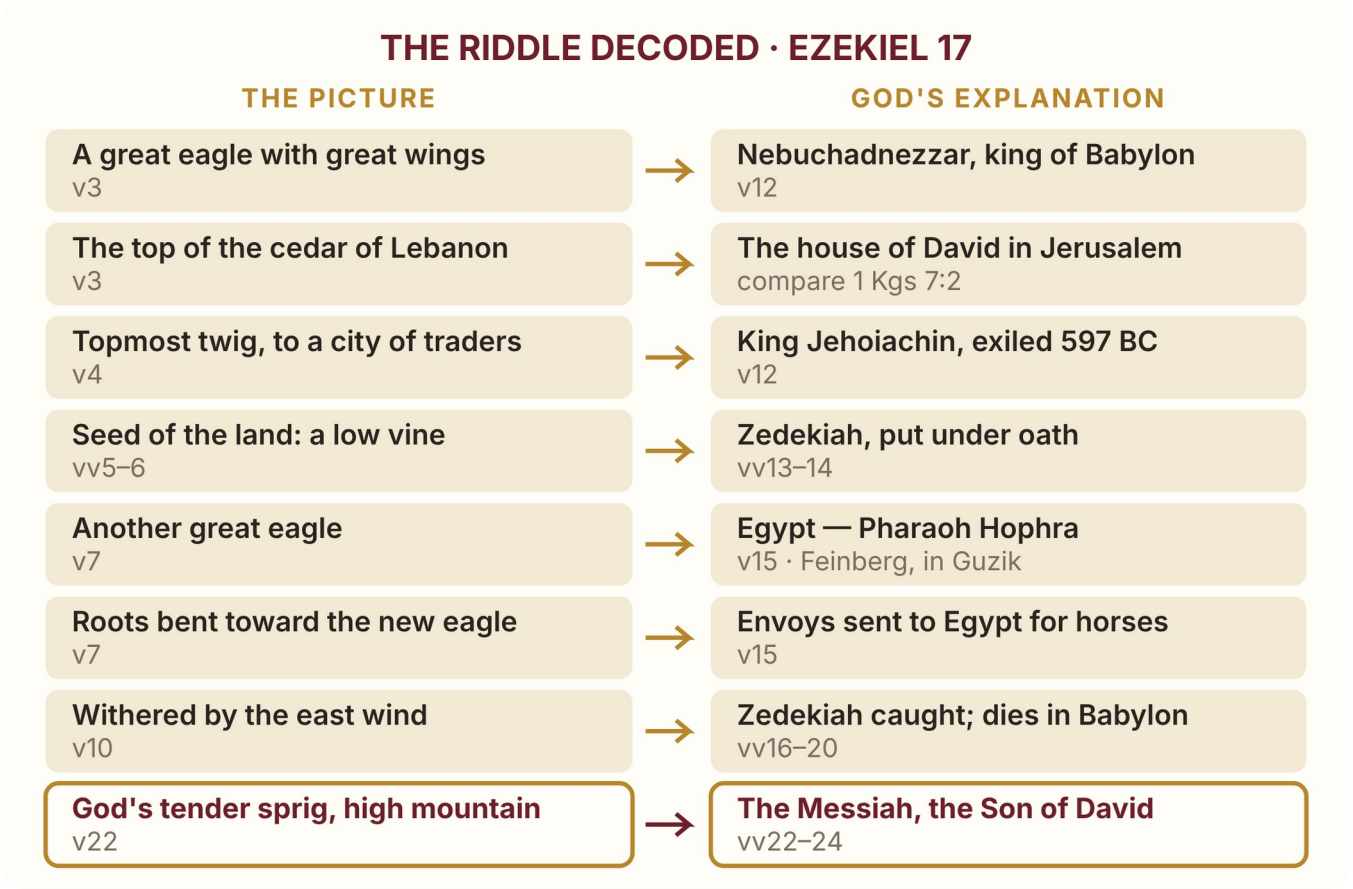
WHAT IT MEANS

God stops the story and asks the rebellious house, "Do you not know what these things mean?"

bərît (בְּרִית)
BERITH · "COVENANT"

A treaty, a binding agreement. The word appears six times in this chapter (vv13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19).

The Riddle Decoded



Each picture in the parable (vv3–10, 22) matches a person or event in God's own explanation.

My Oath Which He Despised

A promise sworn in God's name is a promise made to God

EZEKIEL 17:16

'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die.

WHAT IT MEANS

"As I live," God swears (v16): Zedekiah will die in Babylon, in the land of the king "whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke." Pharaoh's mighty army will not help him (v17).

ʾālāh (אָלָה)

ʾALAH · "OATH"

An oath — a curse invoked on oneself. To swear an ʾalah was to call judgment down on your own head if you broke your word.

The Broken Oath, 597–586 BC



From Jehoiachin's exile to Zedekiah's end, history unfolded exactly as the parable said — and God's promise reached beyond it.

God Plants a Tender Shoot

From David's line God raises a cedar where birds of every kind find shelter

EZEKIEL 17:22

Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I will pluck from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik reads the "tender one" as the Messiah, and Feinberg, in Guzik, says plainly that it 'is the Messiah, the Son of David.'

WHAT IT MEANS

Now God, not Nebuchadnezzar, takes a sprig from the top of the cedar. Where human kings failed, God Himself will plant a shoot from David's line on the high mountain of Israel, and it will "become a stately cedar" (v23).

rak (רַךְ)

RAK · "TENDER"

Tender, soft, young. God plucks from the topmost young twigs (yoneqeth, H3127, a young shoot) "a tender one" and plants it "on a high and lofty mountain" (v22). The word stresses weakness and youth — not a mighty trunk but a fragile sprig.

What to carry from this chapter

1

A riddle and a parable.

Guzik: a riddle because its meaning needed explaining, a parable because it told a story illustrating spiritual and material truth.

2

The vine did all the reaching.

Block, in Guzik, notes the second eagle does nothing — the vine bends its roots toward Egypt all on its own (v7).

3

It already had enough.

Verse 8 says the vine was planted in good soil by abundant waters, able to “bear fruit and become a splendid vine.”

4

An oath invokes a curse.

ʾalah (H423) is an oath that calls a curse down on oneself — and God brought it on Zedekiah's head (v19).

More to carry

5

“My oath ... My covenant.”

A promise made in God's name to a pagan king was still a promise made before God (v19).

6

No escape from God.

Morgan, in Guzik: ‘God is governing, and there is no escape from Him.’

7

A tender one.

rak (H7390) means tender, soft, young — God's King begins as a fragile sprig and becomes a stately cedar (vv22–23).

8

Judgment ends in grace.

Feinberg, in Guzik: ‘The chapter began with judgment and punishment; it ends with mercy and grace.’

Talk it through

1. The vine was planted by abundant waters, yet it bent its roots toward another eagle. Where are you tempted to reach for your own “Egypt” instead of trusting God where He planted you?

2. Zedekiah's oath was sworn to a pagan king, yet God called it “My oath.” Which promises you have made does God hear as made before Him?

3. “Can he indeed break the covenant and escape?” What shortcut or side deal looks like a way out for you right now?

4. How does the tender sprig that becomes a stately cedar point to Jesus — and what does it mean to you to be one of the birds nesting in His branches?

5. God says He will “make the dry tree flourish.” Where in your life do you need to believe that?

CLOSING

Zedekiah's word failed; God's never does. He brings down the high tree, exalts the low tree, and has planted His tender shoot, Jesus, on His mountain. "I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will perform it."

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.