Ezekiel: When the Glory of God Departs
HaDavar
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It’s StoryTime
Ezekiel 15:1-17:1-24

The Story of the Unfruitful Vineyard (15:1-8)

The analogies of trees or vines representing Israel... There are 5 different ways Israel is illustrated by a tree or plant: The fig tree, speaks of Israel, not in covenant with God, but as a nation (Mark 11:12-14); the olive tree speaks of Israel in covenant with God (Romans 11:24); the bramble bush speaks of Israel under divine judgment (Judges 9:8-15; Luke 6:44); in our text Ezekiel speaks of Israel as a vine which symbolizes Israel’s relationship with God (Ezekiel 15:1-8); and as a cedar tree symbolizing Israel during the Millennium when Christ the BRANCH will rule from the throne of David and rule from Jerusalem (Ezekiel 17:22-24).

The acknowledgment that the fruitless wood of the vine is worthless (15:2-7a)... The vine had one purpose, to produce plump grapes; if the vine refuses to perform its only God given purpose then God will use it as fuel for fire; the Jews had but one purpose: they were God’s chosen and they were to live in a right relationship with Him; they were like a vine that produced no fruit; Israel’s vine produced “grapes of gall” (Deuteronomy 32:32), or “wild grapes” (Isaiah 5:4), or they were “an empty vine” (Hosea 10:1); so God will use them as fuel for the fiery judgment to come on Jerusalem.

To abide on the Vine is necessary for fruit bearing and being a true disciple (John 15:6)...Christ is the Vine and His disciples are the branches; the one thing expected is to produce fruit; the fruit of loving obedience, righteousness, and justice (Isaiah 5:1-7); pruning involves cutting back; it can be painful but sometimes God allows us to go through painful experiences, but in doing so He is preparing us to use those painful experiences for His glory.
When the vinedresser finds a branch that produces no fruit he cuts it off; it is a dead branch; it is no longer drawing its life from the vine; Jesus wants us to glorify His Father by bearing much fruit (John 15:1-8).

The key to fruit bearing is abiding (John 15:4); the word “abide” (*meno*) is the key word in John’s theology; it occurs 11 times in John 15, 40 times in his entire gospel, 27 times in his epistles; we must abide in Christ if we are to bear the fruit which is the evidence of our salvation (Ephesians 2: 8-10); to abide means to remain in Christ, to continue to persevere in the faith (Matthew 10:22).

In Ezekiel’s parable, Israel was a vine that was to produce fruit as evidence of her relationship with God; but she did not abide; she became worthless wood that was fuel for a quick burning fire.

**The Story of the Poor Little Rich Girl (16:1-63)**

*The compassion for a little girl (16)*... Jerusalem is portrayed as a harlot; a little girl is born in Canaan of mixed ethnic backgrounds; the father was an Amorite and the mother a Hittite; the child was not wanted and not loved; the child is abandoned and left to die; she was stained with blood and her navel cord was left uncut.

A passerby saw the child and moved by love commanded her to “live” (16:6); he took the child and raised her to full maturity; when she was old enough to be on her own the foster father left town; after a time he returned to see the child that he had raised; when he saw her he was moved with compassion and struck by her beauty; he proposed marriage and lavished her with gifts; this once rejected baby becomes queen and her fame is worldwide (16:1-14).

*The clarification of the characters*... The unwanted child is Israel; the passerby who raised the child is God who formed a covenant relationship with Israel.
The commitment of God’s love...

1. We see the greatness of God’s love (16:6)... God chose to love Israel; the child was unwanted, of mixed background, and not loved by those who should have been loved by parental bonds (Deuteronomy 7:7-9).

2. We see the grace of God’s love (16:7a)... there was nothing this girl did to deserve the treatment she received.

3. We see the glory of God’s love (16:7b)... He washed her in water, anointed her with oil, adorned her with ornaments, put a jewel in her nose, earrings on her ears and a crown on her head; adorned her with gold and silver and fine linen and called her beautiful (16: 9-14).

That is exactly what happens when we abide in God’s love; we grow more and more into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6).

4. We see the gain from God’s love (16:8b)... The word “covenant” is used of marriage; God and Israel were married; not so of the Church and Christ; we are engaged through the Holy Spirit who is the “guarantee” (arábon) or engagement which assures us of our eternal redemption (Ephesians 1:13b-14); the wedding will take place when Christ comes for His bride in the air (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-18) and we will sit down with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9).

The catastrophe for rejecting God’s love... The story begins well but ends up badly; the mature girl married to her foster father begins to engage in prostitution with her neighbors; the foster father realizes he has lost her; he only knows grief (16:15-34); there are four truths we can learn from her behavior; let’s state them with the acronym FACE.

1. Forgetfulness (16:22; see Deuteronomy 8:2-20).

2. Arrogance (16:15; see Proverbs 16:18).

3. Corruption (16:20-21); she was involved in Molech worship which is child sacrificing.

4. Estrangement (16:32; Romans 6:23).
The cloths of the prostitute stripped from her body (16:35-43)... God is going to gather all her lovers together and strip her naked before them.

The comparison of the prostitute with her mother and two sisters (16:44-52)... Ezekiel quotes a proverb,”Like mother, like daughter;”the Israelites had intermingled with the Canaanites and the mother of Israel was a Hittite (16:3,45); they were idolatrous and so were her children; her sisters were Samaria and Sodom (16:46) who were immoral idolaters (16:47); what an indictment on the Jewish people; they looked on the city of Jerusalem as “the holy city” and lived like their residence was Sodom and Samaria; Peter Cragie wrote: “We are more acute at seeing the moral failings of others than we are in perceiving them in ourselves.”

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah will be restored (16:53-59)... The inhabitants of these cities will not be raised up (Jude 7) but God will raise from the ashes those cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and populate them with regenerated people who will worship Christ during the Millennium.

The covenant relationship with the prostitute will be restored (16:60-63)... God is faithful; He will remember the covenant He made with Israel in the days of her youth; God never forgets the “forever” promises He makes to His people; “If we are faithless, He will remain faithful for He cannot disown Himself” (2 Timothy 2:3).

The Story of Two Eagles (17:1-24)

The parable of two eagles (17:1-10)...

The flight of the first eagle (17:1-6)... A great eagle came to Lebanon and lands on the upper branch of a cedar tree; breaks off the branch and carries it off and plants it in Babylon; the eagle takes some vine seed from a fertile field in Babylon and plants the seed at the Mediterranean coast where there was abundant water and it became a spreading vine of low stature; its branches turned upward toward the eagle.

Ezekiel is describing a political cartoon depicting the events of the day; the eagle is Babylon; the cedar branch represents the royal palace in Jerusalem built of cedar wood from Lebanon as well as King Jehoiachin who lived in the cedar palace; the vine seed from Babylon carried back by the eagle
represented the regent King Zedekiah who was made ruler by King Nebuchadnezzar; the branch turned upward means that Zedekiah made an oath to Nebuchadnezzar to be loyal to him (2 Kings 24:10-17).

The flight of the second great eagle (17:7-10)... This giant eagle flies to Jerusalem and the vine bent its roots and branches toward the eagle; the vine appeared healthy and well rooted.

Here’s the riddle: What will happen to the vine? Will the eagle pull it up by its roots, cut off its fruit and cause it to wither? Will the vine thrive? Will it wither from the east wind?

The second eagle speaks of Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt; King Zedekiah was trying to make a treaty with the Pharaoh to overthrow the yoke of Babylon; when the vine turns to the second eagle Egypt, Zedekiah was asking for their help in the hope of setting the two eagles against each other-- Egypt against Babylon; that was Zedekiah’s foreign policy; when Pharaoh’s army came up from Egypt, Jerusalem was already under siege so he turned his chariot’s around and went back to Egypt (Jeremiah 37:5); it was Zedekiah’s rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar that brought the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The riddle was to tell the exiles that their homeland in Judah was nothing more than a scrap of food plucked and pulled at between two scrapping eagles.

*The principles of the parable made applicable (17:11-21)*...

In terms of the intent of King Zedekiah (17:15a)... Zedekiah sought liberation from Babylon by turning to Egypt instead of calling the nation to repentance.

In terms of the integrity of King Zedekiah (17:15b)... There is no place in God’s scheme for a broken covenant; you cannot break a covenant and be delivered; in the Old Testament when one made an oath in the name of the Lord, they were inviting God as a guarantor into the agreement; there was a covenant drawn up between King Nebuchadnezzar and King Zedekiah; Zedekiah was to submit to Nebuchadnezzar but he proved unfaithful to the covenant.
God told Moses if they want a king to rule over them, he was not to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17:15-26); Zedekiah was turning to Egypt to multiply horses; the bottom line for Zedekiah in breaking that covenant is seen in verses 19-21 where God says that because Zedekiah broke the oath he will be taken to Babylon for he committed treason against God.

Egypt is seen in Scripture as a synonym for the world; even Jerusalem is referred to as “Sodom and Egypt” (Revelation 11:8); when trouble comes knocking at your door where do you turn for help—Egypt or the Lord God?

The Story of the Cedar Tree Planter (17:22-24)

*The parable of the cedar tree...* God promises to take one of the highest branches of a cedar tree, crop it off and plant it on one of Israel’s highest mountains; it will grow to become majestic and bear fruit; birds will rest on its branches; all other trees God will cut down and this one alone will flourish (17:22-24); God is coming to Judah; He will set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem where He will reign on the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:16-17).

*The prophecy of the Messiah in the cedar tree...* The cedar twig that God planted was Jesus as the BRANCH (Isaiah 11:1a; 53:2; Zechariah 6:12-13; Revelation 22:16); Christ is the twig cut from the cedar and planted in Judah; the day will come when that tree will cover the whole world as Jesus will reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen!