

Verses 15:1-8 Jerusalem As a Useless, Burned Vine Branch:

“15:1 And YHWH’s word was / came to me, saying: 15:2 Son of Adam / humanity, how will wood of the grapevine differ from all other wood, the branch which was in the trees of the forest? 15:3 Will wood be taken from it to make (a tool) to work with? Or will they take it (to make) a peg from it, to hang upon it any vessel? 15:4 Look—to the fire it is given, for fuel / eating. Its two ends the fire burned / ate; and its middle was scorched, will it be useful as a tool / for work? 15:5 Look—when it was complete / whole, it was not used for a tool / work. Much less when fire has devoured it and it is scorched--and (will it)be used again for a tool / work? 15:6 Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: just like wood of the vine with wood of the forest, which I gave for the fire for fuel / eating, in this way I gave Jerusalem’s inhabitants (to the fiery destruction). 15:7 And I will place My face(s) against them. From the fire they went forth, and the fire will devour / consume them. And they will know that I (am) YHWH, when I place My face(s) against them! 15:8 And I will make the land a devastation / waste, because they have certainly acted faithlessly. It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!

15:1⁵⁴⁶

546

Isaiah (5:1-7) and **Jeremiah (2:21)** have both used the figure of the vine for Israel, and accuse her of having failed to produce good fruit; but Ezekiel's use of the metaphor is much stronger--the nation is as useless as the wood from the vine-branch, which can neither be used to construct anything useful, nor is it good for burning!

Rabbi Fisch comments that “In this brief chapter, Ezekiel seeks to justify the pending national catastrophe. True, Israel is God’s vine which He hoped would bear precious fruit, but it has degenerated into a wild vine and become valueless. It does not bear fruit nor has its thin wood any material value. Like a log both ends of which are consumed by fire and the middle section charred, Israel is weakened by the loss of the Ten Tribes and by the threat of his hostile neighbors. The remaining singed wood is only fit for fuel, and similarly destruction is the people’s fate...

“The parable gives the answer to the complacent thought that Israel, God’s elect, must ipso facto [by that very fact] be imperishable. The covenant relationship between Him and the nation only remains valid if Israel is loyal to Divine sovereignty. Treachery dissolves it.” (P. 81)

Yes, but by the time we come to the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, and hear the message of second **Isaiah (chapters 40-55)**, we will see that although treachery dissolves the covenant relationship, YHWH’s steadfast-love and forgiveness renews that relationship!

(continued...)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's word was / came to me, saying:

15:2 בֶּן־אָדָם מִה־יִהְיֶה עֵץ־הַגֶּפֶן מִכָּל־עֵץ

Son of Adam / humanity, how will wood of the grapevine differ from all other

⁵⁴⁶(...continued)

Reimer entitles **15:1-8** “The Useless Vine.” He comments that “This ‘parable of the vine’ is very different from **John 15**!...The metaphor of the vine for Israel is common in the **Old Testament** (e.g., **Psalm 80:8-16**; **Jeremiah 2:21**; **Hosea 10:1**), which explains Jesus’ claim in **John 15:1** (‘I am the true vine’) to embody the people of God. (On Israel as a vineyard, compare **Isaiah 5:1-7**; **Jeremiah 12:10**; as an olive tree, compare **Jeremiah 11:16**; **Romans 11:17-24**)...

“The juxtaposition of vine and harlotry themes in **Jeremiah 2:20-21** is exactly what one finds on a different scale in **Ezekiel 15-16**. Ezekiel himself further develops the vine metaphor in **chapter 17** (compare **19:10-14**)...

“Here, the point is simple: the wood of a vine is fit only for burning—and so it is with the inhabitants of Jerusalem (**Ezekiel 15:6**). Such a pessimistic evaluation is not only consistent with Ezekiel’s oracles up to this point, it also marks his evaluation of the whole of Israelite history in **chapter 20**.” (P. 1518)

Darr comments that “Like the preceding oracle, these verses consist of two parts. The first section (**verses 1-5**) contains Yahweh’s didactic [educational] reflection on the vine branch. The second (**verses 6-8**), applies that reflection to Jerusalem’s inhabitants with devastating consequences...

“Ezekiel is addressing his fellow exiles concerning the fate of their compatriots in Judah...His decision to focus upon the vine is not benign [gentle and kindly]. While his initial reflections appear banal—general observations on a common object—his readers know well that the vine is a conventional, recurring metaphor for Israel / Judah / the Davidic dynasty...

“Elsewhere in his scroll, Ezekiel invites readers to perceive Judah’s royal dynasty as a well-watered, fertile vine with many branches (**19:10-14**). With the notice that its strongest stem towers above the thick boughs of other trees (**19:11**), however, inappropriate human pride enters the picture. In the blink of an eye, Yahweh plucks the vine from its soil, casts it to the ground, and transplants it in the desert, where its fruit is desiccated and fire consumes it...Ezekiel takes up an image that all would agree is appropriate to the topic at hand. But in his treatment of it, he highlights previously ignored, little-explored, and / or unanticipated associations with that image in order to make a point.” (Pp. 112-114)

wood,⁵⁴⁷

הַזְמוּרָה אֲשֶׁר הִיָּה בְּעֵצֵי הַיַּעַר:

the branch which was in the trees of the forest?

15:3 הֲיִקָּח מִמֶּנּוּ עֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת לְמִלְאָכָה

Will wood be taken from it to make (a tool) to work with?

אִם-יִקָּחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ יִתֵּד

Or will they take it (to make) a peg from it,

547

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The interpretation of the Jewish commentators is: how inferior is the vine-tree to any other tree! The tree spoken of is not the fruit-bearing species, but a wild vine which grows in the forest. It is inferior to ordinary trees because it is fruitless and its wood useless as timber.” (P. 81)

Reimer’s translation has “how does the wood...surpass?” He comments that “The Hebrew is difficult to translate. The question may also be rendered, ‘Son of man, of any wood, what happens to the wood of a vine...?’”

Darr comments that “The opening line of Ezekiel’s expostulation [the act of reasoning with a person in opposition to some impropriety of conduct; earnest and kindly protest] (**verse 2**) invites readers to reflect on ‘the wood of the vine.’” She thinks the translation should be, “Man, what, of all trees, becomes of the vinestock, the vine branch, that belongs among the trees of the forest?” She states that “This initial, interest-engaging query is followed by a pair of rhetorical questions that point to the uselessness of vine boughs. No, the reader would respond, wood taken from the vineyard cannot be made into something useful. No, one cannot take (make) from it so much as a peg upon which to hang a vessel. Its only benefit is as fuel for the fire. And when it has been burned—both ends consumed, its middle charred—how much less can it serve any useful purpose (**verses 4-5**)? [We ask, if a vine branch was thrown into a fire, how could it have only been burned at both ends, but not in the middle?]

“The prophet focuses on negative associations with vine branches, thereby paving the way for the judgement oracle to follow...Just as Yahweh has given up the wood of the vine as fuel for the fire, so also the Lord will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem...Although they, like vine branches, may initially emerge from the flames with some semblance of their former shape, in the end, they will be utterly reduced to ashes.” (P. 113-114)

לְתַלּוֹת עָלָיו כָּל-כְּלִי:

to hang upon it any vessel?⁵⁴⁸

15:4 הִנֵּה לְאֵשׁ נָתַן לְאֲכָלָהּ

Look—to the fire it is given, for fuel / eating.⁵⁴⁹

אֵת שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו אֲכָלָהּ הָאֵשׁ

Its two ends the fire burned / ate;

וְתוֹכוֹ נִחְרָה

and its middle was scorched,

הֲיִצְלַח לְמַלְאכָהּ:

will it be useful as a tool / for work?

15:5 הִנֵּה בְּהֵיוֹתוֹ תָּמִים

Look—when it was complete / whole,

548

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Nobody would think of using the branch as material for making an article of furniture...The wood is too thin and pliable even to fashion into a peg.” (Pp. 81-82)

549

Rabbi Fisch observes that “The wild vine is only fit for fuel, and should a part of the branch (which is probably bent on account of its length) be thrown into a fire and taken out after the ends had been consumed, what is rescued from the flames is quite useless...

“The meaning of the parable is: Israel, numerically smaller than other peoples, is compared to a vine (**Isaiah 5:1ff.**) which has thinner branches than other trees. ‘By failing to produce the spiritual fruits for which he is destined, Israel becomes comparable to the wild vine and is therefore only fit for the fire of Divine punishment. This process of judgment has already begun. Its ends are already consumed in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom and the Judean captivity in 597 B.C.E. What remains, Jerusalem, is like the singed wood from which nothing can be made.’ (P. 82)

לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה לְמִלְאָכָה

it was not used for a tool / work.

אֶף כִּי־אֵשׁ אֶכְלָתְהוּ וַיִּחַר

Much less when fire has devoured it and it is scorched--

וְנַעֲשֶׂה עוֹד לְמִלְאָכָה:

and (will it) be used again for a tool / work?

15:6⁵⁵⁰ לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

כַּאֲשֶׁר עֵץ־הַגֶּפֶן בְּעֵץ הַיַּעַר

just like wood of the vine with wood of the forest,

אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּיו לְאֵשׁ לְאֲכֹלָהּ

which I gave for the fire for fuel / eating,

כֵּן נָתַתִּי אֶת־יְשֻׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם:

in this way I gave Jerusalem's inhabitants (to the fiery destruction).⁵⁵¹

15:7 וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־פָּנָי בְּהֵם

And I will place My face(s) against them.

550

Matties comments on **15:6-8** that “Jerusalem, horrifying though the thought may be, has been given up by [YHWH]. Like the vine, the city, its inhabitants, and those who escape will be consumed by fire. [YHWH’s] face, usually a beneficent Divine Presence, is pictured here as a destructive Presence.” (P. 1174)

551

Rabbi Fisch states that here Ezekiel uses the “prophetic perfect,” which “vividly describes an action as performed although its fulfilment has yet to take place.” (P. 82) Yes!

מִזֶּה אֵשׁ יֵצְאוּ

From the fire they went forth,⁵⁵²

552

Hilmer states that this is “a reference to the siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E., which resulted in the exile of which Ezekiel was a part.” (P. 1244) See

Ezekiel 1:2,

בַּחֲמִשָּׁה לַחֹדֶשׁ

On the fifth (day) to / of the month--

הִיא הַשָּׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁית

it (was) the fifth year

לְגָלוּת הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹאֲחִיָּן:

to / of exile of the king Yoyakhiyn,

2 Kings 24:10-16,

10 בָּעֵת הַהִיא (עָלָה) [עָלוּ] עַבְדֵי נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם

At that time, servants of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came up (to) Jerusalem;

וַתָּבֵא הָעִיר בְּמָצוֹר:

and the city came into / under the siege.

11 וַיָּבֹא נְבוּכַדְנֶאֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל עַל-הָעִיר

And Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to the city;

וַעֲבָדָיו צָרִים עָלֶיהָ:

and his servants / slaves (were) besieging it / confining it in.

12 וַיֵּצֵא יְהוֹיָכִין מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה עַל-מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל

And Jehoiachin, king of Judah, went out before / to Babylon's king,

הוּא וְאִמּוֹ וְעַבְדָּיו

he and his mother and his servants,

וְשָׂרָיו וְסָרִיסָיו

and his officials and his eunuchs.

וַיִּקַּח אֹתוֹ מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל

And Babylon's king took him,

בְּשָׁנָת שְׁמֹנֶה לְמַלְכוֹ:

in (the) eighth year to / of his reign as king.

13 וַיּוֹצֵא מִשָּׁם אֶת-כָּל-אֲזָרוֹת בַּיִת יְהוָה

(continued...)

⁵⁵²(...continued)

And he brought out from there all (the) treasures of / from YHWH's house,

וְאוֹצְרוֹת בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ

and (the) treasures of the king's house.

וַיִּקְצֹץ אֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵי הַזָּהָב

And he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold

אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה שְׁלֹמֹה מֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהִיכַל יְהוָה

which Solomon king of Israel made in YHWH's temple,

כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:

just as YHWH said.

14 וְהִגִּילָה אֶת־כָּל־יְרוּשָׁלַם

And he led into exile all Jerusalem,

וְאֶת־כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים

and all the princes,

וְאֶת־כָּל־גִּבּוֹרֵי הַחַיִל

and all the army's mighty men,

(עֶשְׂרֵה) [עֶשְׂרֵת] אֲלָפִים גּוֹלָה

ten thousand, being exiled.

וְכָל־הַחָרָשׁ וְהַמְסַנֵּר לֹא נִשְׁאַר

And none of the craftsmen and the workers with metal were left remaining--

זוֹלַת דָּלַת עַם־הָאָרֶץ:

only (the) poor people of the land.

15 וַיִּגַּל אֶת־יְהוֹיָכִין בַּבֶּלָה

And he led away into exile Jehoiachin into Babylon,

וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת־נְשֵׁי הַמֶּלֶךְ

and the king's mother, and the king's wives;

וְאֶת־סָרִיסָיו וְאֶת־[אֵילָן] הָאָרֶץ

and his eunuchs and chief men of the land,

הוֹלִיךְ גּוֹלָה מִירוּשָׁלַם בַּבֶּלָה:

he led (into) exile from Jerusalem into Babylon.

16 וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲנָשֵׁי הַחַיִל שִׁבְעַת אֲלָפִים

And all men of the army, seven thousand;

וְהַחָרָשׁ וְהַמְסַנֵּר אֶלֶף

and the craftsmen and the metal-workers, a thousand--

(continued...)

וְהָאֵשׁ תֹּאכְלֵם

and the fire will devour / consume them.⁵⁵³

וַיִּדְעוּתֶם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה

And they will know that I (am) YHWH,

בְּשׁוּמִי אֶת־פְּנֵי בְהֵם:

when I place My face(s) against them!

15:8 וַנְּתַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ שְׂמִמָּה

And I will make the land a devastation / waste,

יַעַן מַעַלּוֹ מַעַל

because they have certainly acted faithlessly.

נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!

⁵⁵²(...continued)

הַכֹּל גְּבוּרִים עֹשֵׂי מְלַחְמָה

the whole–mighty men making war–

וַיְבִיֵאֵם מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל גּוֹלָה בְּבִלְהָ:

and Babylon’s king brought them (into) exile in the Babylon.

553

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Jerusalem passed through the fire of the earlier Babylonian invasion and came through it *singed* but not consumed. That is no proof that the city is inviolable; in the next fire it will be devoured by the flames...When this doom overtakes the city, the inhabitants will know that it has not happened by chance, but that it is the decree of God.” (P. 83)

Hilmer states that the last phrase, “fire will yet consume them,” is a “prophecy threatening another and more devastating siege–Ezekiel’s main message before 586 B.C.E. [see **5:2, 4; 10:2, 7**].” (P.1244)