

Vision-Story–Allegorizing Jerusalem's Kings

in the Parable of the Griffon-Vultures / Eagles and the Vine:

Ezekiel 17:1-21

“17:1 And YHWH’s word was / came to me, saying: 17:2 Son of Adam / Humanity, Riddle a riddle / propound a riddle / enigma, and parable a parable / proverb a proverb / design a parable / proverbial saying for (the) house of Israel. 17:3 And you shall say, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: The griffon-vulture / eagle, the great one–great (are) the wings; long (are) the outer (flight) feathers; full the plumage / body feathers which it has of various colors. It came to the Lebanon [mountain-range], and it took a top (from) the cedar-tree. 17:4 It plucked off a head / top of its young shoots, and brought it to (the) land of Canaan. In a city of traveling traders he set it / planted it. 17:5 And he took some seed of the land, and he placed it in a field of seed(s), placing it beside many waters--*Tsaphtsaphah* he placed it. 17:6 And it sprouted, and it became a (grape-) vine--spreading low; (its) height turning its branches towards him, and its roots were beneath him. And it became a (grape-)vine--and it made separate parts, and sent forth boughs. 17:7 And there was one great griffon-vulture / eagle, great of wings, and abundant plumage. And look–this (grape-) vine stretched its roots hungrily towards him, and its branches it shot forth to him, to water it from (the) garden-bed of its planting. 17:8 To a field, a good one, to many waters, it was transplanted to produce branch(es) / bough(s), and to bear fruit--to become a (grape-)vine of glory / magnificence. 17:9 Speak in this way, My Lord YHWH said: Will it prosper / thrive? Will he not pull up its roots? And strip off its fruit? And it will dry up / wither; all of its fresh-picked growth will dry up / wither--and not by a great arm and / or by a numerous people--to pull it up by its roots! 17:10 And look–it was transplanted–will it prosper / thrive? When an east wind touches it, will it not dry up / wither? It will dry up / wither! Upon a garden-bed, its sprout / growth will dry up / wither! 17:11 And YHWH’s word was / came to me saying: 17:12 Say now / please to the rebellious house [of Israel]: Did you (plural) not know what these (things are / mean)? Say: Look, Babylon’s king came (to) Jerusalem; and he took her king and her officials, and he brought them to himself, to Babylon. 17:13 And he took from (the) royal descendants; and he cut with him a covenant; and he brought him into an oath. And the land’s leaders he took (away), 17:14 so that it would be a lowly kingdom, so that it might not raise itself up; so that (the) covenant would be kept, for its standing. 17:15 And he rebelled against him, to / by sending his messengers (to) Egypt, to give to him horses, and a large people / army. Will he prosper / thrive? Will the one doing these things escape? And he broke a covenant–and will he escape? 17:16 As I live--(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH--He will not, in the king’s place, the one who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, with him, in Babylon’s midst, he will die! 17:17 And not with a great army, and / or with a numerous assembly will Pharaoh act / work with him in the war--when mound(s) (are) poured out, and siege-wall(s) (are) built to cut off many innermost-beings / lives. 17:18 And he despised an oath, to break a covenant. And look–he gave his hand! And all these (things) he did. He will not escape! 17:19 Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: As I live surely it was My oath that he despised, and My covenant that he broke! And I will place it on his head! 17:20

And I will spread over him My net, and he will be seized in My stronghold / encircling net. And I will bring him to Babylon, and I will enter into judgment with him there--for) his faithlessness by which he acted faithlessly against Me. 17:21 And all his fugitives in all his troops, will fall by the sword. And the ones remaining will be scattered.

17:1⁶⁹⁹

699

Rabbi Fisch comments on **chapter 17** that “After his condemnation of the people, Ezekiel censures king Zedekiah’s act of treachery towards Nebuchadnezzar in breaking his solemn oath of loyalty and in seeking military aid from Egypt. The prophet predicts the extinction of Zedekiah’s dynasty and the fall of Jerusalem...This oracle was delivered shortly before the disaster in 586 B.C.E. In an easily understood allegory Ezekiel likens Babylon and Egypt to two great eagles. One, Babylon, broke off the top of the cedar, i.e. carried off king Jehoiachin to Babylon and replaced him by the inferior Zedekiah...But this *vine of low stature*, who owed his kingship to Nebuchadnezzar, revolted and turned to Egypt, the other great eagle, for help...In conclusion, the prophet speaks of the Messianic age when the Davidic dynasty will be re-established and exercise world-wide rule.” (P. 100)

Reimer entitles **chapter 17** “The Parable of the Eagles and the Vine.” We can change the title to “The Vision-Story for Street Theatre: The Eagles and the Vine.” Reimer comments that The predominantly theological viewpoint of **chapter 16** now gives way to a predominantly political one. It bears the hallmarks of a ‘fable,’ a story form in which flora and fauna take the lead roles in order to teach some lesson (e.g., **Judges 9:8-15**)...Here, two eagles [our ‘griffon vultures’] a cedar, and a vine are the main protagonists, and the story turns on the fortunes of the vine (compare **Ezekiel 19:10-14; Isaiah 5:1-7**)...The whole is meant to illustrate the current and imminent state of Judah’s political fortunes, and ultimately its future under [YHWH]. The fable is narrated in **Ezekiel 17:1-12** and successively unpacked, first on the natural plane (**verses 11-18**) and then in theological terms (**verses 19-21**). Finally, the terms of the fable return to articulate an ideal future (**verses 22-24**).” (P. 1522)

Matties comments that “Several fables, or political caricatures, that focus on the king and political events, can be interpreted on several levels. The allegory (Hebrew, *mashal*) elsewhere in **Ezekiel** is a proverb (**12:23; 16:44; 18:2**); here it is an extended metaphor. The chapter includes the analogy (**verses 1-10**), historical and theological interpretation (**verses 11-21**), and a revised analogy for the future (**verses 22-24**). Among the exiles, the oracle may deny any prospect of hope in Zedekiah’s revolt against Babylon.” (P. 1178)

Reimer entitles **17:1-10** “The Parable Narrated.” He comments that “Although the story is easily followed, it still puzzles the hearer. It proceeds in two phases. A great [griffon-vulture] (**verse 3**) transplants a twig from a cedar, then plants a seed, which becomes a flourishing vine. But then a second, lesser [griffon-vulture] (**verse 7**) attracts the vine’s attention and draws it away from the first.” (P. 1522)

(continued...)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

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

17:2 בֶּן־אָדָם

Son of Adam / Humanity,

חִידָה חִידָה

Riddle a riddle / propound a riddle / enigma,

וּמִשְׁלַּל מִשְׁלַּל

and parable a parable / proverb a proverb / design a parable / proverbial saying!⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹⁹(...continued)

Eichrodt states that “In obedience to a command from [YHWH] Ezekiel is to propound a riddle under the form of a parable...The one can easily change over into the other, if the parable deliberately requires deeper reflection on the part of the audience and, in order to secure this, employs images not intelligible at first sight. So an interpretation may be added at the end, as the solution is to a riddle...

“The story of the cedar shoot and the two great eagles takes the form of a plant and animal fable, which makes no attempt to reflect nature, but treats plants and animals like persons, making them behave like human beings even when such behavior is not in consonance with their own natural characteristics.” (P. 223) See the next footnote for a survey of words used in this connection in the **Hebrew Bible**.

700

The Hebrew phrase here is חִידָה חִידָה, **chudh chiydhah**, literally “make a riddle, a riddle.” The root חִידָה, **chudh**, is said by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** to mean “propound a riddle.” It occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** only four times, at: **Judges 14:12-18**,

12 And Samson said to them,

I will now propound for you (plural) a riddle.
If you indeed declare it to me,
(during / within the) seven days of the drinking-banquet
and you (plural) have found (it out)--
then / and I will give to you thirty linen garments,
and thirty changes of garments.

13 And if you are not able to declare (it) to me,

then / and you will give to me thirty linen garments,
and thirty changes of garments.

(continued...)

⁷⁰⁰(...continued)

- And they said to him, Propound your riddle, and let us hear it!
- 14 And he said to them,
From the one eating went forth food;
and from one strong went forth sweet.
And they were not able to declare the riddle (for) three days.
- 15 And it happened on the seventh day--
and they said to Samson's wife,
Entice your man / husband,
and declare to us the riddle,
or else we will burn you and your father's house down with the fire!
Is it not to dispossess / impoverish us (the) you called to / invited us?
- 16 And Samson's wife wept upon him,
and she said, Surely you hated me and didn't love me!
You propounded your riddle to (the) sons of my people;
and to me you did not declare it!
And he said to her,
Look—to my father and to my mother, I did not declare (it);
and to you, should / will I declare (it)?
- 17 And she wept upon him (for the) seven days;
which was for them the drinking-banquet.
And it happened on the seventh day—and he declared (it) to her,
because she constrained him.
And she declared the riddle to (the) sons of her people.
- 18 and (the) men of the city said to him, on the seventh day,
before the sun goes down,
What (is) sweet(er) than honey?
And what (is) strong(er) than a lion?
And he said to them, If you hadn't plowed with my heifer,
you wouldn't have found out my riddle!

The Hebrew noun חִידָה, **chiydah** means “riddle,” “enigmatic, perplexing saying or question.” It occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** with the following usages:

1. *riddle* = dark, obscure, enigmatic utterance, characterizing the prophetic message in distinction from the message of Moses, **Numbers 12:8**, the opposite of פֶּה-אֶל-פֶּה, “mouth to mouth,” מְרֵאָה, “vision.” Of something put indirectly and needing interpretation; an allegory חִידָה חֹרֵר, “propound a riddle,” **Ezekiel 17:2** (here); (as a parallel to מְשָׁל (continued...))

⁷⁰⁰(...continued)

- מִשָּׁל, “to make a parable”); allegorical and figurative sayings **Proverbs 1:6** (parallel to מִשָּׁל, “parable, proverbial saying”; מְלִיצָה, “satire, mocking poem” and דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים, “wise sayings”); enigmatic sentences and comparisons, declaring fate of Chaldeans **Habakkuk 2:6** (+ מְלִיצָה, “satire, mocking poem”); parallel to מִשָּׁל, “parable”), perplexing moral problem **Psalms 49:5** (with פֶּתַח open, propound; parallel to מִשָּׁל, a lesson taught indirectly **Psalms 78:2**
2. *riddle, enigma*, to be guessed, in **Judges 14**:
 - a. with verb חִיד, “propound”--**Judges 14:12, 13, 16** *propound a riddle*.
 - b. with verb הִגִּיד “tell (give answer to) a riddle **Judges 14:14, 15, 17, 19**.
 - c. with verb מִצָּא “find out a riddle **Judges 14:18**.
 - d. with verb הִבִּין “one understanding riddles,” **Daniel 8:23**.
 3. *perplexing questions* by which queen of Sheba put Solomon to the test (נִסָּה) **1 Kings 10:1 = 2 Chronicles 9:1**.

For the noun מִשָּׁל, “proverb / parable” in the **Hebrew Bible**:

1. “proverbial saying,” brief terse sentence of popular sagacity **1 Samuel 10:12, Ezekiel 12:22, 23; 18:2, 3; מִשָּׁל הַקְּדָמוֹנִי 1 Samuel 24:14** *proverb of the ancients*.
2. “by-word” **Psalms 44:15, 69:12; וְלִשְׁנֵינָה לְמִשָּׁל**, “and for a sharp, cutting word and for a parable, **Deuteronomy 28:37, 1 Kings 9:7; 2 Chronicles 7:20, Jeremiah 24:9; לְאֹת וְלְמִשָּׁל**, for a sign and for a parable, **Ezekiel 14:8**
3. prophetic figurative discourse: **נִשָּׂא מִשָּׁל** *lift up, utter a* מִשָּׁל, “parable,” **Numbers 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23** (all of Balaam); **Isaiah 14:4, Micah 2:4** (parallel to נִהַי, “mourning song”) | **Habakkuk 2:6** (parallel to חִידָה, “riddle”), (compare **Job 27:1, 29:1** for same phrase under 6).
4. *similitude / resemblance / parable, allegory* **Ezekiel 17:2** (here, our ‘vision-story’) **21:5, 24:3**.
5. *poem*, of various kinds: the ode (lyrical stanza) (**Numbers 21:27-30**), the 3,000 pieces traditionally ascribed to Solomon **1 Kings 5:12**, didactic psalms **Psalms 49:5, 78:2**.

(continued...)

אֶל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

to / for (the) house of Israel.⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰(...continued)

6. *sentences of ethical wisdom* מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה, “words, wise ones,” collected in the מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה, “proverbs of Solomon,” **Proverbs 10:1, 25:1 (10:1-24:16** consisting of 376 couplets chiefly antithetical; **25-29** chiefly couplets of an emblematic type, but also occasional tristichs, tetrastichs, pentastichs, and decastichs. To these are appended מִשְׁלֵי אֲחֵרִים, words or sayings of a more mixed character as to size and content **22:7-24:22; 24:23-34; 30:1-14; 15-33; 31:1-9; 10-31**; the Praise of Wisdom **1:8-9** is prefixed, and an introduction to the whole **1:1-7**, in which the whole contents are represented as מִשְׁלֵי, “proverbs” **Proverbs 1:1**, compare **1:6**. The references in **Job 13:12, 27:1, 29:1; Proverbs 26:7, 26:9, Ecclesiastes 12:9** are to the same type of wisdom.

Hilmer states that “The allegory is in **verses 3-10**, the explanation [of the allegory] is in **verses 11-21**.” (P. 1247)

And we say, Most allegories and their explanations are not easily understood or explained. They are oftentimes “enigmatic / puzzling,” especially in their use of pronouns! Here in this passage, the allegory is unusually easy to understand and interpret.

701

This section contains a thinly veiled allegory concerning two large griffon-vultures (standing for Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and Pharaoh of Egypt) and a shoot from the top of a cedar tree (standing for King Jehoiachin of Judah) The seed of that cedar shoot stands for King Zedekiah, who violated his covenant with Babylon, and attempted to form a new relationship of dependence upon Egypt--either Pharaoh Psammetichus (595-589 B.C.E.) or Pharaoh Hophra (589-570 B.C.E.). YHWH demands truthfulness and faithfulness to covenants made with human rulers, and he will punish those who violate those covenants! Nonetheless, YHWH still has a future for his people!

Translations of **verse 2** vary, and many different possibilities for translation exist:

King James, “Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel”;

Tanakh, “O mortal, propound a riddle and relate an allegory to the House of Israel.”

New Revised Standard, “O mortal, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the house of Israel.”

New International, “Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell it to the Israelites as a parable.”

New Jerusalem, “Son of man, put a riddle, propound a parable to the House of Israel.”

Rahlfs, υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου διήγησαι διήγημα καὶ εἰπὸν παραβολὴν πρὸς τὸν οἶκον τοῦ

Ἰσραηλ, “Son of a man / person, relate fully a narrative / tale, and speak a parable to the house of
(continued...)

17:3 וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹּה-אָמַר | אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

And you shall say, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

⁷⁰¹(...continued)
the Israel.”

Notice the words contained in these translations—riddle, parable, allegory, narrative, tale. We are not to expect Ezekiel to come up with exact, letter for letter statements, to be understood literally. Rather, we are to expect puzzle, enigma, symbolism, explanatory story. Again and again in our study of the prophets, especially **Isaiah**, we have become accustomed to “vision,” and “dream,” materials that are not intended to be taken literally and exactly, but rather as containing puzzles, enigmas, symbols that challenge our imagination, and that sometimes leave us puzzled, wondering what is meant.

Allegory is defined as “a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.” “As a literary device, an allegory is a narrative in which a character, place, or event is used to deliver a broader message about real-world issues and occurrences. Authors have used allegory throughout history in all forms of art to illustrate or convey complex ideas and concepts in ways that are comprehensible or striking to its viewers, readers, or listeners.” (Wikipedia, 5/21/2020)

Among the most well known allegories is Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” found in his **Republic**, chapter 7 (514a–520a). It has had a profound influence on philosophical thought ever since his time (he died in 347 B.C.E.). Ezekiel is, we think, the **Hebrew Bible’s** most accomplished “allegorist,” and we are indebted to Ezekiel for his unique “vision-stories / vignettes / street-theater stories.” Ezekiel made full use of this story-telling technique, evidently acting the stories out himself, undoubtedly with the help of others, to proclaim a message of condemnation to Judah and his fellow exiles in Babylonia—a message that could have well cost him his life, and that proved his calling from YHWH. Once that message got across, and he realized that the fall of Jerusalem was certain, he continued to use his story-telling technique, to depict restoration and renewal after the fall, in uniquely telling ways.

For **New Testament** studies, it is important to read the writings of Philo of Alexandria, who constantly used the allegorical method in his interpretations of the **Hebrew Bible**. We think that the author of the **Scroll of Hebrews** was an Alexandrian Jewish Rabbi, a convert to Christ, who had been influenced by Philo’s allegorical method, and who used that method in his interpretation of the **Hebrew Bible** for Christian believers—but not in the extreme way that Philo used it. See, for one example among many, his treatment of Melchizedek in **Hebrews 7**.

תְּנִשֶׁר הַגְּדֹרִיל

The griffon-vulture, the great one—⁷⁰²

702

For the griffon-vulture, see the many pictures and articles on the Internet and videos on YouTube. From **Wikipedia** we quote: “The griffon vulture is 37–48 inches long with a 7.5–9.2 feet wingspan...It typically weighs 14 to 23 pounds. Hatched naked, it is a typical Old World vulture in appearance, with a very white head, very broad wings and short tail feathers. It has a white neck ruff and yellow bill. The buff body and wing coverts [sets of feathers that cover others] contrast with the dark flight feathers.

“Like other vultures, it is a scavenger, feeding mostly from carcasses of dead animals which it finds by soaring over open areas, often moving in flocks. It establishes nesting colonies in cliffs that are undisturbed by humans while coverage of open areas and availability of dead animals within dozens of kilometres of these cliffs is high. It grunts and hisses at roosts or when feeding on carrion. The maximum recorded lifespan of the griffon vulture is 41.4 years for an individual in captivity. It breeds on crags in mountains in southern Europe, north Africa, and Asia, laying one egg. Griffon vultures may form loose colonies. The population is mostly resident...In Israel colonies of griffon vultures can be found in northern Israel and in the Golan Heights, where a large colony breeds in the Carmel Mountains, the Negev desert and especially at Gamla, where reintroduction projects are being carried out at breeding centers in the Carmel and Negev.” (7/6/2020)

Eichrodt states that “As the eagle [our ‘griffon-vulture’] is the embodiment of strength and swiftness, it makes a very suitable symbol for a conqueror, and is thus used by Deutero-Isaiah as well (**Isaiah 46:11** [‘bird of prey from the east’]. It served well to represent the activity of the great Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar, while a tree as proverbially regal in its pomp as the cedar of Lebanon offered a fine symbol for the house of David. This identification must have been obvious to the hearer as he followed the course of the fable [allegory], which described the replacement of the exiled ruler by a usurper not belonging to the reigning line, and his ungrateful and disloyal desertion to the rival of the above-named conqueror. If we assume that Zedekiah’s plans for shaking off the Babylonian yoke with Egyptian help were known to the exiles, we can see how the apt characterization of the personages in this drama must have dawned on the exiles, too...

“The passive parts played by the top of the cedar and the vine not only characterize the complete dependence of the little principedom of Judah upon the great powers, but also serve to express what Nebuchadrezzar was about when he led Jehoiachin into captivity to Babylon, that ‘city of shopkeepers’ (the predominant influence of economic dealings in the Metropolis of the empire is well expressed thus, as is also the disgust of the Israelite at a life wholly yielded to the God Mammon).” (Pp. 224-25)

גְּדוֹל הַכְּנָפַיִם

great (are) the wings;⁷⁰³

אָרְךְ הָאָבֵר

long (are) the outer (flight) feathers;⁷⁰⁴

מִלֵּא הַנוֹצָה

full the plumage / body feathers

אֲשֶׁר-לּוֹ הַרְקָמָה

which it has of various colors.⁷⁰⁵

בָּא אֶל-הַלְּבָנוֹן

It came to the Lebanon [mountain-range],

703

Rabbi Fisch comments concerning the bird's great wings that like its "wings enable it to fly long distances, so Nebuchadnezzar's power extends over a wide area." (P. 100)

704

Take a look at the pictures of griffon vultures with their long wings. The wings have large, tough feathers, which spread out when their wings are extended, and make their wings much like the wings of our modern airplanes. The vultures, nested high on cliffs, "sleep in," not getting up until the sun has arisen, and thermal waves begin to rise from the heated rocks beneath them. The vultures spread out their wings, and are lifted by those thermal waves, soaring high into the sky, with hardly a beat of their wings. Beneath their wings, and surrounding their body, are much smaller feathers, the "plumage," of varying colors, which provide warmth for the vulture in the cold, higher atmosphere.

705

Over fifty years ago, when I first visited Israel, I was impressed with the numerous griffon vultures that I saw, especially in Jericho, nesting in the mountain cliffs to the west of Jericho, making their flights over Jordan and the Arabian desert. In our most recent trip to Israel I do not recall seeing one griffon vulture.

And I wonder, What has happened? The answer is that hunters have shot down the vultures; and insecticides on plants, eaten by the animals that die from them, and then devoured by the vultures—the desert's "garbage patrol," have almost caused their extinction, to the point that now estimates are that there are less than 200 remaining in Israel.

וַיִּקַּח אֶת-צִמְרֵת הָאֲרִז:

and it took a top (from) the cedar-tree.⁷⁰⁶

17:4 אֶת רֹאשׁ יְנִיקוֹתָיו קָטַף

It plucked off a head / top of its young shoots,

וַיְבִיֵּאֵהוּ אֶל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן

and brought it to (the) land of Canaan.⁷⁰⁷

706

On the Internet, go to “Cedars of Lebanon in the Bible,” and see the numerous photographs of cedar trees, many of them very tall, with huge trunks. Near Eastern literature oftentimes mentions the kings of Assyria and Babylon (and others) going on expeditions to the mountains of Lebanon, to cut down cedar trees, for building purposes in their homeland—which had no such source of timber / lumber.

I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where my father owned “Liberty Coal and Wood Yard,” and where I worked for my father. We purchased cedar trees hauled by ranchers into Albuquerque from the nearby mountains. I can remember our purchasing some fairly large cedar trees—but nothing comparable to the size of many of the cedars of Lebanon!

Hilmer states that the cedar here means “David’s dynasty; his royal family.” (P. 1247)

707

The Hebrew name אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, **erets kena(an)**, which we translate by “land of Canaan,” has also been translated “land of traders.” However, we find no indication that the noun **kena(an)** actually had this meaning. This has probably developed from the fact that the powerful sea-trading cities of Tyre and Sidon gave this meaning to the name by their world-wide trading activities. See the next line, which mentions a עִיר רְכָלִים, “city of traders.”

Rabbi Fisch holds that the “city of traders” meant is Babylon—compare **Ezekiel 16:29**.” (P. 101) And indeed, Babylon was a huge trading-center for the ancient Near East. Hilmer likewise states that the “land of merchants” is “the country of Babylonia,” and the “city of traders” is “Babylon.” (P. 1247)

Wikipedia states: “Babylon was the capital city of Babylonia, a kingdom in ancient Mesopotamia, between the 18th and 6th centuries B.C.E. It was built along the left and right banks of the Euphrates river with steep embankments to contain the river's seasonal floods. Babylon was originally a small Akkadian town dating from the period of the Akkadian Empire about 2300 B.C.E.

(continued...)

בְּעִיר הַכְּלִיִּים שָׁמוּ:

In a city of traveling traders he set it / planted it.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁷(...continued)

“The town became part of a small independent city-state with the rise of the First Babylonian dynasty in the 19th century B.C.E. The Amorite king Hammurabi created a short-lived empire in the 18th century B.C.E. He built Babylon into a major city and declared himself its king. Southern Mesopotamia became known as Babylonia and Babylon eclipsed Nippur as its holy city. The empire waned under Hammurabi's son Samsuiluna and Babylon spent long periods under Assyrian, Kassite and Elamite domination. After being destroyed and then rebuilt by the Assyrians, Babylon became the capital of the short-lived Neo-Babylonian Empire from 609 to 539 B.C.E. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. After the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the city came under the rule of the Achaemenid, Seleucid, Parthian, Roman, and Sassanid empires.

“It has been estimated that Babylon was the largest city in the world from about 1770 to about 670 B.C.E., and again from about 612 to about 320 B.C.E. It was perhaps the first city to reach a population above 200,000. Estimates for the maximum extent of its area range from 890 to 900 hectares (approximately 2,200 acres).” (7/7/2020)

Babylon was an important trading center during antiquity partly due to its prime location on the Euphrates River—located in the heart of the main travel routes from the far east to the near east. King Nebuchadnezzar led numerous pro-trade civil planning projects including the construction of roads leading to and from Babylon.

Rabbi Fisch's translation has “a land of traffic,” and “a city of merchants,” with no mention of Kenaan. Normally, we would think the reference is to either Tyre or Sidon, but in the application of Ezekiel's vision-story, it is the City of Babylon that is meant. The story is meant to depict the princes of the house of David as “the head or top of the cedar tree's young shoots,” and Rabbi Fisch states that “The allusion is to the young king, Jehoiachin, carried off by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in the year 597 B.C.E. (compare **2 Kings 16:29**).” (P. 101)

⁷⁰⁸

And we wonder, is this possible? Can you take a shoot from a cedar tree, then plant it, and it will grow into a cedar tree? Our Oklahoma kinsman, who runs a local nursery, answers our question. Yes, it is entirely possible—but the shoot must be treated with extreme care! So Ezekiel is not just making up his story out of something impossible. It would be very unusual, but nonetheless possible—for a person, not for a griffon vulture!

17:5 וַיִּקַּח מִזֶּרַע הָאָרֶץ

And he took some seed of the land,⁷⁰⁹

וַיִּתְּנֶהּ בְּשָׂדֵה-זֶרַע

and he placed it in a field of seed(s),⁷¹⁰

קָח עַל-מַיִם רַבִּים

placing it⁷¹¹ beside many waters--⁷¹²

709

Rabbi Fisch holds that by “the seed of the land” is meant “a member of the royal family. After deposing Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, his uncle, as king (**2 Kings 24:17**).” (P. 101)

Hilmer agrees, stating that Zedekiah was the “son of Josiah; the brother of Jehoahaz and Jehoiaqim and the uncle of Jehoiachin (see **2 Kings 23-24**).” (P. 1247)

Eichrodt explains that “Zedekiah, appointed to succeed Jehoiachin, did not originate from the reigning branch of the royal family but from a collateral line, so the prophet presents him as a mere ‘shoot out of the ground,’ and not as a lawful representative of the dynasty...Compare **2 Kings 23:30-31, 34, 36; 24:6, 17-18**. He therefore had to make sure of being on good terms with his overlord if he was to have any hope of enforcing his rule in face of legitimate opposition.” (P. 225)

710

Eichrodt notes that “It may be true that eagles [our ‘griffon vultures’] and other large birds have a bad habit of tearing the top shoots off trees. But for them to insert the broken-off shoot in a well-irrigated seed-bed is part of the arbitrary elaboration of the fable.” (P. 223)

Rabbi Fisch also holds that the phrase “*planted it in a fruitful soil* [**Tanakh’s** translation; our ‘placed it in a field of seed(s)’]” means that “Nebuchadnezzar permitted Zedekiah to exercise his kingship in the homeland of Judea.” (P. 101)

711

The Hebrew word קָח, **qach**, presumably meaning “taking,” occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, meaning that there is no way to determine its meaning. There is no word for it in the Greek translation (**Rahfs**).

Rabbi Fisch states that “Hebrew *kach*, which the English versions construe as an unusual form of *lakach*, in Rabbinic Hebrew signifies ‘stalk, shoot’ which gives the required parallel to the noun in the
(continued...)

צַפְצַפָּה שָׁמוּ:

*Tsaphtsaphah*⁷¹³ he placed it.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹¹(...continued)

next clause. It is then to be understood as also governed by *he set it.*” (P. 101)

712

Rabbi Fisch states that the phrase “beside many waters” is doubtless a reference to Babylon; compare **Jeremiah 51:13**, where Babylon is addressed:

שְׁכַנְתִּי (שְׁכַנְתִּי) [שְׁכַנְתִּי] עַל-מַיִם רַבִּים

O you (feminine singular) who dwells upon / beside many waters,

רַבַּת אוֹצְרוֹת

great (in) treasures--

בֵּא קֵצְךָ

your end is coming / has come,

אִמַּת בְּצַעֲדְךָ:

(the) measure of your unjust gain!

Rabbi Fisch holds that “The meaning is that although Nebuchadnezzar set Zedekiah upon the throne, the Judean king was to feel himself dependent upon Babylon like a stalk which draws its sustenance from near-by water.” (P. 101) Perhaps so—but the allegory is not that clear, or easily understood. It takes a lot of interpreting to reach this conclusion.

Eichrodt similarly states that “As a vine [Zedekiah] could not claim to possess the proud independence of the cedar, but had to be content with a lower growth, i.e. with a subordinate position. Yet his being planted beside abundant waters shows concern that he should flourish: it is his patron’s wish that he should possess all the requirements needed for the growth of a prosperous state.” (P. 225)

713

The Hebrew name צַפְצַפָּה, *tsaphtsaphah* occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, meaning that there is no way of knowing its meaning. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** speculates that it may mean “Willow,” since the sound of the word may refer to “rustling” in the wind. And Rabbi Fisch notes that “In Rabbinic Hebrew it denotes a species of willow.” (P. 101) The Greek (**Rahlfs**) has ἐπιβλεπόμενον ἕταξεν αὐτό, “being looked upon he set it.”

714

English translations commonly have something like “he set / planted it like a willow tree.” We think it far better to simply acknowledge our ignorance as to what Ezekiel means by this language—the
(continued...)

17:6 וַיִּצְמַח

And it sprouted,

וַיְהִי לְגֶפֶן

and it became a (grape-)vine--

סִרְחַת שְׁפֹלַת

spreading low;⁷¹⁵

קוֹמָה לְפָנָיו דְּלִיּוּתָיו אֵלָיו

(its) height turning its branches towards him,⁷¹⁶

וּשְׂרָשָׁיו תַּחְתָּיו יִהְיוּ

and its (masculine singular suffix) roots were beneath him / it (masculine singular).⁷¹⁷

וַתְּהִי לְגֶפֶן

And it (feminine singular) became a (grape-)vine--

⁷¹⁴(...continued)

language is obscure, enigmatic.

⁷¹⁵

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "a spreading vine of low stature." He comments that "Though Judea still continued as a kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar's policy was to keep it in the condition of vassal states dependent upon Babylon (compare **verse 14** ['a lowly kingdom'])." (P. 101) Hilmer's translation has "low, spreading vine," and he comments that "No longer a tall cedar, because thousands of Judah's leading citizens had been deported (see **2 Kings 24:15-16**; also **Jeremiah 52:28**)." (P. 1248)

⁷¹⁶

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "whose tendrils might turn toward him." In botany, a tendril is a specialized stem with a threadlike shape that is used by climbing plants for support, attachment, generally by twining around suitable hosts found by touch. He comments that the low spreading vine's tendrils turned "toward the eagle, i.e. Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah occupied the throne, but he was to serve the Babylonian king." (P. 102)

⁷¹⁷

Rabbi Fisch states this means "under Nebuchadnezzar." He adds that "Kimchi renders: 'under it': the roots were intended to remain under the trunk and not spread abroad. This means, Zedekiah was only granted a local authority; his foreign policy had to be subservient to Babylon." (P. 102)

וַתַּעַשׂ בְּיָדַי

and it (feminine singular) made separate parts,

וַתִּשְׁלַח פְּאוֹרוֹת:

and sent forth boughs.⁷¹⁸

17:7⁷¹⁹ וַיְהִי נֶשֶׁר־אַחַד גָּדוֹל

And there was one great griffon-vulture / eagle--⁷²⁰

718

Rabbi Fisch says, “No mention is made of fruit being produced by the vine, because Zedekiah’s children were all put to death by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:7).” (P. 102)

719

Compare this description of a second griffon-vulture / eagle with the description of the first one in **verse 3**.

720

The Hebrew text has נֶשֶׁר־אַחַד גָּדוֹל, “griffon-vulture / eagle-one, a great (one).” But all of our English translations interpolate the word “another” into this line, following the Greek translation (Rahlfs), which has ἄτερος ἕτερος μέγας, “a vulture, another one, a great one.” Rabbi Fisch comments that “The Hebrew for *another* is literally ‘one.’ This eagle, described as less powerful than the other, is Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt to whom Zedekiah appealed for help in contravention of his covenant with Babylon. Pharaoh himself later fell victim to Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 102) See **Jeremiah 44:30**,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

In this way YHWH spoke:

הֲנִי נָתַן אֶת־פְּרִיעַ חֲפָרַע מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם

Look at Me, giving Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt,

בְּיַד אֹיְבָיו

into (the) hand of his enemies,

וּבְיַד מִבְקְשֵׁי נַפְשׁוֹ

and into (the) hand of those seeking his innermost-being / life,

כַּאֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי אֶת־צִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה

Just as I gave Tsidhqiyyahu / Zedekiah, king of Judah,

בְּיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל אֹיְבוֹ

into (the) hand of Nebhukhadretsar, king of Bablon, his enemy

(continued...)

גְּדוֹל כְּנָפַיִם

great of wings,

וְרֵב-נוֹצָה

and abundant plumage.

וְהִנֵּה הַגֶּפֶן הַזֹּאת

And look–this (grape-) vine

כִּפְנָה שֶׁרָשִׁיָּה עָלָיו

stretched its roots hungrily upon / towards him [the second griffon-vulture],⁷²¹

⁷²⁰(...continued)

וּמִבְקֵשׁ נַפְשׁוֹ:

and one seeking his innermost-being / life!

Hilmer states that this other great eagle [griffon-vulture] was “an Egyptian pharaoh, either Psammetichus II (595-589 B.C.E.) or Hophra (589-570 B.C.E.). Hophra, mentioned in **Jeremiah 44:30**, is probably the pharaoh who offered help to Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (see **Jeremiah 37:5**). If the fact that **chapter 17** is located between **chapter 8** (dated 592 B.C.E.) and **chapter 20** (dated 591 B.C.E.) is chronologically meaningful, Psammetichus is meant.” (P. 1248)

721

Rabbi Fisch comments that the grape-vine’s turning toward the second great griffon-vulture means that “Zedekiah turned to Egypt to aid him in his attempt to free himself from the Babylonian yoke.” (P. 102)

Reimer likewise states that “The new orientation of the vine to the second [griffon-vulture] threatens its choice location and flourishing state.” (P. 1522)

Hilmer states that “Zedekiah appealed to Egypt for military aid (**verse 15**), an act of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 1248) See **2 Kings 24:20**,

כִּי עַל-אַף יְהוָה

Because over / on account of YHWH’s anger–

הִיְתָה בִירוּשָׁלַם וּבִיהוּדָה

it was against Jerusalem and against Judah–

(continued...)

וְדָלִיּוֹתָיו שְׁלַחָה-לּוֹ

and its branches it sent / shot forth to him,

לְהַשְׁקוֹת אוֹתָהּ

to water it

מִמַּעַרְגוֹת מִטְעָהּ:

from (the) garden-bed of its planting.⁷²²

17:8 אֶל-שָׂדֵה טוֹב

To a field, a good one,

אֶל-מֵיִם רַבִּים

to many waters,

הִיא שְׁתוּלָה

it was transplanted

לַעֲשׂוֹת עֵנָף

to make / produce branch(es) / bough(s),

וְלִשְׂאת פְּרִי

and to bear fruit--

⁷²¹(...continued)

עַד-הִשְׁלַכּוּ אֹתָם מִעַל פְּנֵיו

until his throwing them out from before His face(s) / presence.

וַיִּמְרֹד צִדְקִיָּהוּ בְּמֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:

And Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon's king.

722

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "from the beds of its plantation," and he comments that this means "from Judea where the nation ruled by Zedekiah was dwelling." (P. 102)

לְהִיֹּת לְגִפְּן אֲדָרֶת:

to become a (grape-)vine of glory / magnificence.⁷²³

17:9 אָמַר כֹּה

Speak in this way,

אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

My Lord YHWH said:⁷²⁴

תִּצְלַח

Will it prosper / thrive?⁷²⁵

הֲלוֹא אֶת־שָׂרְשֵׁיהָ יִנְתֵּק

Will he not pull up its roots?⁷²⁶

723

Rabbi Fisch comments on **verse 8** that “Zedekiah, whose throne was safe and protected by Babylon, would have succeeded in strengthening his kingdom and securing the throne for his children. He had, therefore, no need to look to Egypt for support.” (P. 102)

724

Rabbi Fisch comments that this line is “addressed to Ezekiel.” (P. 103)

725

This line can be translated as an affirmation: “It will prosper / thrive.” But the continuation of the verse indicates that rather, it is meant as a question, “Will it prosper / thrive?” There is no indication of the interrogative in the Hebrew.

Reimer notes concerning **verses 9-10** that “The provocative questions clearly require a judgment on the part of the hearers and implicate them in that judgment—the function of all good parables.” (P. 1522) Yes, and is this not the function of Ezekiel’s acted out vision-stories / vignettes? They raise questions in the minds of those watching / hearing, questions that can transform their lives!

726

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The subject of the verb is the first eagle, Nebuchadnezzar. The vine will be uprooted, its fruit cut off and its leaves wither. Zedekiah’s monarchy will be destroyed, all the heirs to the throne killed, and all the nobles of Judea will perish.” (P. 103)

(continued...)

וְאֶת־פְּרִיָּהּ יִקְוֶס׃

And strip off its fruit?

וַיִּבֹשׁ׃

And it will dry up / wither;

כָּל־טְרֵפֵי צִמְחָהּ תִּיבֹשׁ׃

all of its fresh-picked growth will dry up / wither--

וְלֹא־בְזֹרַע גְּדוּלָּהּ וְבַעַם־רָב׃

and not by a great arm and / or by a numerous people--⁷²⁷

לְמִשְׁאוֹת אוֹתָהּ מִשְׁרָשֶׁיהָ׃

to pull it up by its roots!

17:10 וְהִנֵּה שְׂתוּלָה׃

And look—it was transplanted—

הֲתִצְלַח׃

will it prosper / thrive?

⁷²⁶(...continued)

Eichrodt states that Ezekiel “can thus portray the natural vengeance of the disappointed Babylonian by the symbol of the eagle [our ‘griffon-vulture’] tearing up the vine by the roots.” (P. 225)

⁷²⁷

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Pharaoh, who made a military alliance with Zedekiah, will not come to his rescue at the critical moment. As so often with Ezekiel, here too he drops the metaphor and speaks in plain terms, referring to *great power* and *much people*. The rendering of **King James**...‘even without great or much people to pluck it up by the roots thereof,’ is closer to the Hebrew and means that Nebuchadnezzar will not require a display of great force and a numerous army to destroy the Judean kingdom.” (P. 103)

תֵּלֹא כִנְעַת בָּהּ רֵיחַ הַקָּרִים תִּיבֶשׁ

When an east wind touches it,⁷²⁸ will it not dry up / wither?

יִבֶשׁ

It will dry up / wither!

עַל-עֲרֶגֶת צִמְחָהּ תִּיבֶשׁ:

Upon a garden-bed, its sprout / growth will dry up / wither!⁷²⁹

17:11⁷³⁰

728

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The allusion is to the Babylonian empire which was situated north-east of the holy land. Zedekiah’s confidence in his military preparations, which led to his rebellion against Babylon, is held by the prophet to be an empty dream.” (P. 103) Hilmer states that “Here, [the east wind] stands for Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian forces.” He adds that the east wind is “the hot, dry wind known as the *khamsin*, which withers vegetation (see **19:12**).” (P. 1248)

729

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Though the vine was planted in fertile soil where it could have grown luxuriantly, it would not withstand the force of *the east wind*.” (P. 103)

730

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 11-21** “Interpretation of the Parable.”

Reimer comments that “The first phase of explanation identifies the characters of the fable [vison-story] (**verses 11-15**) before spelling out the moral of the story (**verses 16-18**)...

“The first [griffon-vulture / eagle] is the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who takes her king, i.e., Judah’s king Jehoiachin (the ‘twig’), to Babylon (**verse 12**). The royal off-spring (the ‘seed’) is Zedekiah (**verse 13**), Jehoiachin’s uncle and replacement to whom Ezekiel never refers as a ‘king’...

“Zedekiah’s failure was to break his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar (**verses 13-14**) by turning to Egypt (**verse 15**), whose king was Hophra, the lesser [griffon-vulture / eagle]. Ultimately, hope in Egyptian aid will prove futile (**verse 17**; see **Jeremiah 37:6-10**). The breaking of this political covenant will bring disaster on Zedekiah and his people (**Ezekiel 17:18**).” (P. 1522) See **Jeremiah 37:6-10**,

6 וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH’s word was / came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

(continued...)

730 (...continued)

- 7 כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
In this way YHWH God of Israel spoke:
כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ אֶל־מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה
In this way you shall speak to (the) king of Judah,
הַשֹּׁלֵחַ אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי לְדַרְשָׁנִי
the one sending you to Me to inquire of Me:
הִנֵּה חֵיל פָּרַעְהַּ הֵיצֵא לָכֶם לְעִזְרָה
Look—Pharaoh’s army, the one going forth to you people for help,
שׁוֹב לְאַרְצוֹ מִצְרַיִם:
is returning to its land--Egypt!
- 8 וְשָׁבוּ הַכַּשְׂדִּים וְנִלְחָמוּ עַל־הָעִיר הַזֹּאת
And the Chaldeans will return, and will fight against this city;
וְלָכְדָהּ וְשָׂרְפָהּ בָּאֵשׁ:
and they will capture it, and will burn it with the fire!
- 9 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
In this way YHWH spoke:
אַל־תִּשְׂאוּ נַפְשֵׁיכֶם לְאֹמֹר
Do not lift up your innermost-beings, saying,
הֲלֹךְ יֵלְכוּ מֵעַלֵּינוּ הַכַּשְׂדִּים
The Chaldeans will certainly go away from against us,
כִּי־לֹא יֵלְכוּ:
because they will not go away!
- 10 כִּי אִם־הִכִּיתֶם כָּל־חֵיל כַּשְׂדִּים
Because if you struck all (the) army of the Chaldeans
הַנִּלְחָמִים אֶתְכֶם
the ones fighting with you people,
וְנִשְׂאָרוּ בָּכֶם אֲנָשִׁים מְדַקְרִים
and there were left remaining among them wounded / pierced men,
אִישׁ בְּאֹהֱלוֹ
each man in his tent,
יִקְוּמוּ וְשָׂרְפוּ אֶת־הָעִיר הַזֹּאת בָּאֵשׁ:
they would rise up and would burn this city with the fire!

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's Word was / came to me saying:

17:12 אָמַר־נָא לְבַיִת הַמְּרִי

Say now / please⁷³¹ to the rebellious house [of Israel]:⁷³²

הֲלֹא יָדַעְתֶּם מָה־אֵלֶּה

Did you (plural) not know what these (things are / mean)?

אָמַר הַנֶּהֱבֵא מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל יְרוּשָׁלַם

Say: Look, Babylon's king came (to) Jerusalem;

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־מֶלֶכָּהּ וְאֶת־שָׂרֶיהָ

and he took her king and her officials,

וַיָּבֵא אוֹתָם אֵלָיו בְּבֶלְהָ:

and he brought them to himself, to Babylon.⁷³³

731

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The prophet is now commanded to explain the meaning of the parable.” (P. 103)

732

Rabbi Fisch states that the “rebellious house” is “the people of Israel (compare **2:3, 5**) , more exactly, the kingdom of Judah.” (P. 103)

733

Rabbi Fisch comments that “King Jehoiachin and his princes, represented in the parable by the top of the cedar and the topmost of the young twigs respectively (**verses 3-4**), were carried away as captives to Babylon.” (P. 104)

Matties likewise interprets, “The great eagle [our ‘griffon-vulture’] is Nebuchadnezzar who invaded in 597 B.C.E. The cedar sprig is Jehoiachin, who was deported (and treated favorably, **verse 5**).” (P. 1178)

17:13 וַיִּקַּח מִזֶּרַע הַמְּלֹכָה

And he took from (the) royal descendants;⁷³⁴

וַיִּכְרַת אִתּוֹ בְּרִית

and he cut with him a covenant;

וַיִּבֵּא אִתּוֹ בְּאֵלֶּה

and he brought him into an oath.⁷³⁵

וְאֶת־אֵילֵי הָאָרֶץ לָקַח:

And the land's leaders he took (away),⁷³⁶

734

Rabbi Fisch states that “The reference is to Zedekiah whom Nebuchadnezzar placed on the throne after deposing Jehoiachin. This is the interpretation of the seed of the land being planted in a fruitful soil (verse 5).” (P. 104)

735

Rabbi Fisch comments concerning *a covenant...an oath* that they were “made in the name of God to secure Zedekiah’s loyalty to Babylonian suzerainty.” (P. 104) Compare **2 Chronicles 36:13**,

וְגַם בַּמֶּלֶךְ נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מָרַד

And also he [Zedekiah] rebelled against the king Nebuchadnezzar,

אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעוּ בְּאֱלֹהִים

to whom he (king Nebuchadnezzar) caused him to swear (allegiance) by God.

וַיִּקְשׁ אֶת־עַרְפוֹ וַיִּאֱמָץ אֶת־לִבּוֹ

And he hardened his neck, and he strengthened his heart

מִשׁוּב אֶל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

from / against returning to YHWH, God of Israel.

736

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Influential leaders of Judea were also taken to Babylon as hostages to guarantee the observance of the terms of the treaty.” (P. 104) Compare **2 Kings 24:15**,

וַיִּגַּל אֶת־יְהוֹיָכִן בַּבֶּלֶה

And he led away Jehoiachin into Babylon,

וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶת־נְשֵׁי הַמֶּלֶךְ

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

(continued...)

17:14 לְהִיּוֹת מִמְּלָכָה שְׁפֹלָה

so that it would be a lowly kingdom,⁷³⁷

לְבִלְתִּי הִתְנַשֵּׂא

so that it might not raise itself up;

לְשָׁמֹר אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ

so that (the) covenant would be kept,

לְעִמּוּדָהּ:

for its standing.

17:15 וַיִּמְרֹד־בּוֹ

And he rebelled against him,

לְשַׁלַּח מַלְאָכָיו מִצְרַיִם

to / by sending his messengers (to) Egypt,⁷³⁸

לְתַתְּלוֹ סוּסִים

to give to him horses,

⁷³⁶(...continued)

וְאֶת־סְרִיסָיו וְאֶת (אֲוֹלָיו) [אֵילָיו] הָאָרֶץ

and his eunuchs and chief men of the land,

הוֹלִיךְ גּוֹלָה מִירוּשָׁלַם בְּבָבֶלָהּ:

he led (into) exile from Jerusalem into Babylon.

⁷³⁷

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Nebuchadnezzar’s purpose was that Judea should remain a vassal state of Babylon. This is the meaning of the vine of low stature (**verse 6**).” (P. 104)

⁷³⁸

Rabbi Fisch comments that Egypt “is the interpretation of the other great [griffon vulture / eagle] towards which the vine bent its branches (**verse 7**).” (P. 104) Matties comments that “Zedekiah rebels in favor of a pro-Egyptian policy (see also **Jeremiah 27:1-28:1**, hoping to receive military help from Psammetichus II.” (P. 1178)

וְעַם־רַב

and a large people / army.

הֲיִצְלַח

Will he prosper / thrive?⁷³⁹

הַיּוֹמֵי אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים

Will the one doing these things escape?

וְהִפְרֹת בְּרִית וְנִמְלָט:

And he broke a covenant—and will he escape?⁷⁴⁰

17:16 חַי־אֲנִי

As I live--⁷⁴¹

נֹאם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH--

אִם־לֹא בְּמִקּוֹם הַמֶּלֶךְ

He will not, in the king's place,

739

Rabbi Fisch notes that the question means “Can he succeed in his plan?” (P. 104) And, of course, the implication is No, he cannot! Hilmer’s translation has “Will he break the treaty and yet escape?” He comments that this is “the point of the chapter.” (P. 1248) See **verses 16 and 18**. Our answer is No. YHWH’s people cannot break the treaties they make with other nations, including the Babylonians, and escape. YHWH will punish such breaking of covenants / treaties!

740

Rabbi Fisch states that “One who breaks a sacred covenant taken in the name of God cannot hope for Divine support in his undertaking.” (P. 104) Here, it is a matter of an Israelite king making a sacred covenant with a Babylonian king, probably involving taking an oath in the name of Marduk, the God of Babylon—but a covenant oath that YHWH considers binding!

741

For this phrase, “As I live,” in the mouth of YHWH, see footnote 461. It is a Divine oath.

הַמְּמַלֵּךְ אֹתוֹ

the one who made him king,

אֲשֶׁר בָּזָה אֶת־אֱלֹהָיו

whose oath he despised,

וְאֲשֶׁר הִפָּר אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ

and whose covenant he broke,

אִתּוֹ בְּתוֹךְ־בָּבֶל יָמוּת:

with him, in Babylon's midst, he will die!⁷⁴²

17:17 וְלֹא בְּחַיִל גָּדוֹל

And not with a great army,

וּבִקְהָל רָב

and / or with a numerous assembly

יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ פְּרַעַה בְּמִלְחָמָה

will Pharaoh act / work with him in the war--⁷⁴³

742

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Nebuchadnezzar who, after slaughtering Zedekiah’s sons, carried him to Babylon where he died, had thereby virtually destroyed the kingdom. This is the interpretation of shall he not pull up the roots thereof, etc. (**verse 9**).” (P. 105)

Eichrodt states that Ezekiel above all else “wishes to show that the course proposed by Zedekiah and its failure is not just the result of immoral politics, which carry their own punishment with them, what the parable could allow, but a direct act of rebellion against Yahweh’s holy will, a defiance not merely of the Babylonian, but of [YHWH] Himself, and which must therefore end by being judged and punished by Him.” (P. 226)

Matties states “Because Zedekiah violated the covenant obligations to Nebuchadnezzar, the consequences are clear: he will die in Babylon and the Egyptian military will not help (see also **2 Kings 25:1-7**).” (Pp. 1178-79)

743

(continued...)

בְּשִׁפּוֹךְ סִלְלָה

when mound(s) (are) poured out,

וּבְבִנּוֹת דְּיִגְק

and siege-wall(s) (are) built⁷⁴⁴

לְהַכְרִית נַפְשֹׁת רַבּוֹת:

to cut off many innermost-beings / lives.

17:18 וּבִזְהָ אֱלֹהִים

And he despised an oath,

לְהַפְרֵי בְרִית

to break a covenant.

וְהִנֵּה נָתַן יָדוֹ

And look—he gave his hand!⁷⁴⁵

וְכָל-אֲלֵה עָשָׂה

And all these (things) he did.

לֹא יִפְלֹט:

He will not escape!

⁷⁴³(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch states that this is literally “‘shall Pharaoh do it in the war.’ Kimchi renders: ‘neither shall Pharaoh...wage war against him,’ against Nebuchadnezzar when he besieges Jerusalem. Pharaoh did not fulfil the terms of his treaty with Judea. This is the intention of ‘neither shall great power or much people be at hand,’ etc. (verse 9)” (P. 105)

⁷⁴⁴

Rabbi Fisch states that the mounds and siege-walls are “military constructions to invest a city.” (P. 105)

⁷⁴⁵

Rabbi Fisch states that Pharaoh had given his hand “as a pledge of faithfully carrying out the terms of the covenant.” (P. 105)

לִכְּן כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה יֵהְיֶה׃⁷⁴⁶

Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

חַי־אֲנִי׃

As I live⁷⁴⁷

אִם־לֹא אֶלְתִּי אֲשֶׁר בָּזָה

Surely it was My oath that he despised,

וּבְרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר הִפְרִיר

and My covenant that he broke!⁷⁴⁸

746

Reimer entitles **verses 19-21** “The Parable Interpreted.” He states that “The ‘natural,’ political explanation does not exhaust the meaning of the parable. Zedekiah’s political covenant is now termed ‘My covenant’ by [YHWH] (**verse 19**). [YHWH] takes full responsibility for the disaster to come (‘I will return...spread...bring...enter,’ all first-person verbs, now seen not as military defeat but as Divine judgment).” (P. 1523)

Matties likewise states that Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Jerusalem, deportation of the king, and victory over Zedekiah’s forces is nothing other than [YHWH’s] response to Zedekiah’s covenant violations. Oddly, breaking the political treaty is here tantamount to revolt against [YHWH], since Nebuchadnezzar is [YHWH’s] agent of judgment.” (P. 1179)

747

For this phrase, “As I live,” in the mouth of YHWH, see footnote 461. It is a Divine oath.

748

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The violation of an undertaking given in the name of God, even with a heathen like the king of Babylon, is equal to breaking a covenant with God Himself. The sanctity of an oath could not be more emphatically stressed.” (P. 105)

Hilmer states that “The king of Judah would have sworn faithfulness to the treaty in the name of [YHWH]. To swear such an oath and then violate it was to despise [YHWH].” (P. 1248) But notice that while Hilmer say Judah’s king “would have sworn...in the name of [YHWH],” the text itself does not say this. Also notice that the text does not call the king of Babylon, or Pharaoh “heathen.” YHWH holds treaties made in the name of God—even in the name of Marduk, or of Isis, the names for God used in Babylon, as binding. The passage seems to say, You made a covenant in the name of some other God,
(continued...)

748(...continued)

but I, YHWH, consider that covenant binding—a Divine covenant! Do you agree?

And we ask, Does YHWH consider honest worship of other Gods in reality worship of Him?
How else can you explain the language of the post-exilic **Malachi 1:11**:

כִּי מִמִּזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ

Because from sun's rising

וְעַד־מְבֹאוֹ

and as far as its setting

גָּדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם

My name-- great among the nations!

וּבְכָל־מְקוֹם

And in every place

מִקְטָר מִנְשָׁא לְשֵׁמִי

incense was brought near to / for My name,

וּמִנְחָה טְהוֹרָה

and a pure gift / offering--

כִּי־גָדוֹל שְׁמִי בְּגוֹיִם

because My name (is) great among the nations!

אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

—said YHWH of Armies.

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) makes this affirmation even stronger:

διότι ἀπ' ἀνατολῶν ἡλίου ἕως δυσμῶν

Because from risings of (the) sun as far as (its) settings,

τὸ ὄνομά μου δεδόξασται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν

the name of Mine has been glorified among the nations / gentiles;

καὶ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ θυμίαμα προσάγεται τῷ ὀνόματί μου καὶ θυσία καθαρὰ

and in every place incense is being brought to My name, and pure / clean sacrifices;

διότι μέγα τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν

because great (is) the name of Mine among the nations / gentiles--

λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ

says Lord Almighty!

But some nervous Christian translators, instead of accepting this powerful claim concerning YHWH of Israel's universal greatness, take the liberty of making the statement future—"My name *will be* great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure

(continued...)

⁷⁴⁸(...continued)

offerings *will be* brought to my name, because my name *will be* great among the nations,' says the Lord Almighty." (**King James, New International and English Standard Version**). However, **Tanakh**, the **New Jerusalem Bible** and the **New Revised Standard** leave the language as it is in Hebrew and Greek, in the present tense.

The German commentator C. F. Keil frankly states that, "The idea, therefore, that the statement, that incense is burned and sacrifice offered to the name of [YHWH] in every place, refers to the sacrifices which the heathen offered to their Gods, is quite inadmissible [and we ask, is it Keil's job to say what is admissible and inadmissible in this ancient writing? Simply because it does not agree with Keil's views, does that mean he has the right to change the statement? We think not!]. At the time of Malachi the name of [YHWH] was not great from the rising to the setting of the sun, nor were incense and sacrifice offered to Him in every place, and therefore...the expression ['in every place' says too much]. Consequently we must understand the words prophetically as relating to that spread of the kingdom of God among all nations, with which the worship of the true God would commence 'in every place.' ['In every place'] forms an antithesis to the **one** place, in the temple at Jerusalem, to which the worship of [YHWH] was limited during the time of the old covenant..." (P. 438)

All of which means, Malachi's statement cannot be taken at face value, and the modern commentator has the right to change his perfect tenses into futures! But this is to reject a recurring biblical theme that can give the student of **Malachi** a much broader and fuller understanding of the nature of YHWH, the God of Israel:

"Whose name is majestic in all the earth" (**Psalms 8:1, 9**); "Who sits enthroned to long-lasting time; having established His throne for justice, and Who judges the world with righteousness"; "He judges the peoples with uprightness; He is a stronghold for the oppressed in times of trouble" (**Psalms 9:7-8**); "Who is in His set-apart temple, His throne in heaven; His eyes seeing and testing the children of humanity"; "Who tests the righteous, but hates the wicked and one who loves violence" (**Psalms 11:4-5**); "Whose glory the heavens declare, and Whose handiwork the sky above proclaims; with day to day pouring forth speech, and night to night revealing knowledge" (it is a universal proclamation—to the ends of the earth (**Psalms 19:1-4**);

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to YHWH, and all the families of the nations shall worship before Him—for kingship belongs to YHWH, and He rules over the nations." "All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before Him shall bow all who go down to the dust" (**Psalms 22:27-29**).

Yes, "the earth is YHWH's, and all who dwell therein" (**Psalms 24:1**); "YHWH loves righteousness and justice; and the earth is full of YHWH's steadfast-love!" (**Psalms 33:5**); "therefore let all the earth tremble in awe before YHWH, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe before Him" (**Psalms** (continued...))

⁷⁴⁸(...continued)

33:6) “YHWH sees all the children of humanity; He fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds” (**Psalm 33:13-15**); “His eye is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His steadfast love, that He may deliver their innermost-being from death, and keep them alive in famine” (**Psalm 33:19-20**). “His eyes are towards the righteous, and His ears towards their cry; when they cry for help He hears and delivers them; He is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (**Psalm 34:15-18**).

“The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of YHWH God’s wings; they feast on the abundance of His house / temple; He gives them drink from the river of His delights” (**Psalm 36:7-8**); He is the God Who says, “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations and in the earth!” (**Psalm 46:10**)!

And so the sons of Korah say, “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! For YHWH, the Most High, is to be feared, a great King over all the earth!” (**Psalm 47:1-2**). This God “reigns over the nations, and the princes of the people gather as the people of the God of Abraham” (**Psalm 47:8-9**); “as His name, so His praise reaches to the ends of the earth” (**Psalm 48:10**)--isn’t that the same thing **Malachi 1:11** is saying?

“All peoples in the world, low and high, rich and poor, are called to hear about God Who gives hope in the face of death” (**Psalm 49**); “God, the Mighty One, YHWH, speaks and summons the earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting, to enter into His worship” (**Psalm 50**); “He is YHWH, Who doesn’t delight in the sacrifice of animals, but in the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart” (**Psalm 51**).

The worshiper of YHWH says “I will give thanks to You among the peoples; I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your steadfast-love is great to the heavens, Your faithfulness to the clouds!” (**Psalm 57:9-11**); “All mankind will say, Surely there is a God Who judges on earth!” (**Psalm 58:11**); “when God’s judgments on the wicked are seen, then all mankind fears; they tell what God has done and ponder upon it” (**Psalm 64:9**).

“God hears prayer, and to Him shall all flesh come; He is the hope of all the ends of the earth, and of the farthest seas; those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at His signs” (**Psalm 65:2, 5, 8**); “as God enriches all the earth with His bounty; all the earth is encouraged to shout for joy to God, to sing the glory of His name, giving Him glorious praise! All the earth worships Him and sings praises to Him” (**Psalm 66:1-4**); all are invited to “come and see what God has done with His awesome deeds to the children of humanity” (**Psalm 66:5**). “He is the One Who keeps watch over the nations.” **Psalm 67** prays that “God’s way may be known on earth, His saving power among all nations, with all the peoples praising God.” **Psalm 68:32** calls to the kingdoms of the earth to sing to God.” **Psalm 69:34** says, “Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them.” **Psalm 72** prays that “all nations will serve Him...May all nations call Him blessed, and the whole earth be filled with His glory!”
(continued...)

⁷⁴⁸(...continued)

Psalm 76 states that “YHWH is to be feared by the kings of the earth.” **Psalm 86:9** says “all the nations YHWH has made will come and worship Him.” **Psalm 87** declares that “Egypt and Babylon, Philistia and Tyre and Cush / Ethiopia were all born in Zion, the mother city of all manner of non-Jewish people!”

Psalm 96 invites all the earth to sing to YHWH, and calls His people “to declare His glory among the nations, all peoples; the families of peoples are called to ascribe glory and strength to YHWH, worshiping His splendor. He is the God who judges the world in / by righteousness.” **Psalm 97** proclaims the fact that “YHWH reigned,” and the whole earth is called to rejoice in Him. **Psalm 98** likewise calls upon all the earth to “make a joyful noise to YHWH. “ **Psalm 99** calls upon all the peoples to “praise YHWH’s great and holy name.” **Psalm 100** likewise calls upon all the earth to “make a joyful noise to YHWH.” See especially **Psalm 113:2-4**,

- 2 יְהוָה שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבֹרָךְ
May YHWH’s name be blessed,
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם:
from now and until long-lasting-time!--
- 3 מִמִּזְרַח-שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד-מְבֹאֵו
from (the) sun’s rising as far as its setting--
מִהַלֵּל שֵׁם יְהוָה:
YHWH’s name is praised!
- 4 רַם עַל-כָּל-גּוֹיִם | יְהוָה
High above all nations / peoples (is) YHWH--
עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ:
above the heavens (is) His glory!

(Verse 3 is closely related to **Malachi 1:11**, and receives the same treatment by translators, many of whom have “is to be praised.” But we think this is mistaken, and the proper translation is that of **Tanakh**, “From east to west the name of [YHWH] is praised.”)

Psalm 117 again calls for the universality of praise: “Praise YHWH, all nations! Extol Him, all peoples! For great is His steadfast-love toward us.” **Psalm 138:4** says that “All kings of the earth will praise / confess YHWH.” **Psalm 148:7-13** says,

- 7 הַלְלוּ אֶת-יְהוָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ
Praise YHWH from the earth!
תַּנְיִנִים וְכָל-תְּהוֹמוֹת:
Sea-monsters / serpents / dragons, and all ocean-depths!
- 8 אֵשׁ וּבָרָד שֶׁלֵג וְקִיטּוֹר
Fire and hail, snow and thick-smoke!

(continued...)

748 (...continued)

רוּחַ סְעָרָה עֹשֶׂה דְבָרָיו:

Storm-wind, accomplisher of His word!

9 הַהָרִים וְכָל־גְּבוּעוֹת

The mountains, and all hills!

עֵץ פְּרִי וְכָל־אֲרָזִים:

Fruit-trees, and all cedars!

10 הַחַיָּה וְכָל־בְּהֵמָה

The wild animals, and all cattle!

רֶמֶשׂ וְצִפּוֹר כָּנָף:

Creeping things, and wild birds!

11 מַלְכֵי־אֶרֶץ וְכָל־לְאֻמִּים

Kings of earth, and all peoples!

שָׂרִים וְכָל־שֹׁפְטֵי אֶרֶץ:

Princes and all earth's judges!

12 בַּחֲוָרִים וְגַם־בְּתוֹלוֹת

Select young men, and also young women!

זְקֵנִים עִם־נְעָרִים:

Old men, together with young men!

13 יִהְלְלוּ | אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה

Let them praise / they will praise the name of YHWH!

כִּי־נִשְׁגַּב שְׁמוֹ לְבָדּוּ

Because His name alone is highly exalted!

הוֹדּוֹ עַל־אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

His splendor is over earth and heavens!

(Oh yes, this is the universal God, YHWH!)

And perhaps **Psalm 150** says it best:

1 הִלְלוּ יְהוָה

Praise (plural imperative) Yah!

הִלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקִדְשׁוֹ

Praise (the) Supreme God in His set-apartness / holiness!

(continued...)

⁷⁴⁸(...continued)

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּרִקְיעַ עֲזוֹ:

Praise Him in (the) expanse of His might!

2 הַלְלוּהוּ בְּגִבּוֹרָתוֹ

Praise Him in His strength / might!

הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרַב גְּדֻלּוֹ:

Praise Him according to (the) abundance of His greatness!

3 הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתִקְעַ שׁוֹפָר

Praise Him with (the) sound of a ram's horn / trumpet!

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר:

Praise Him with guitar and stringed-instrument!

4 הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֶף וּמְחוּל

Praise Him with tambourine and dance!

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:

Praise Him with stringed instruments and reed-pipe!

5 הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי-שִׁמְעַ

Praise Him with sounding cymbals!

הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:

Praise Him with a shout of cymbals!

6 כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה

All that has breath, let it praise Yah!

הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה:

Praise Yah!

It is an interesting and helpful question--"Why do some Christian translators feel compelled to change from the present to the future tense in **Malachi 1:11**?" A closely related question is, "Why are Christian readers of the **Hebrew Bible** so reticent to affirm its numerous statements concerning YHWH's loving forgiveness and granting of salvation to humanity, or YHWH's statements such as **Amos 9:7** that YHWH has acted for other nations, even the most hated of Israel's enemies, just as He has acted in Israel's history?"

And we wonder, do some Christians feel that they are detracting from the honor of Jesus Christ by admitting what the **Hebrew Bible** claims about YHWH? How do you personally respond to such matters? Are we the heirs of an exclusiveness that is reflected in such views, refusing to accept biblical statements affirming YHWH's universal activity and impact, resulting in His worship in all the earth?

וְנִתְּנוּ בְּרֹאשׁוֹ:

And I will place it on his head!⁷⁴⁹

749

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The guilt of his treachery will recoil on his head.” (P. 105) Eichrodt states that this shows Ezekiel’s “profound conviction that even such a decisive turn for the worse in the fortunes of Israel has been brought about by [YHWH] of Israel Who controls history, and that her oath of loyalty to Babylon is at the same time a profession of readiness to subject herself to the will of [YHWH]. In doing so he agrees at every point with Jeremiah.” (P. 227) See **Jeremiah 27:1-8**,

- 1 בְּרֹאשִׁית מַמְלַכַת יְהוֹיָקִים
In (the) beginning / at first of Yehoyaqim’s kingsom,
בֶּן-יְאוֹשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה
son of Josiah, king of Judah,
הָיָה הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֶל-יִרְמְיָהוּ
this Word was / came to Jeremiah,
מֵאֵת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:
from YHWH, saying:
- 2 כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלַי
In this way YHWH spoke to me:
עֲשֵׂה לְךָ מוֹסָרוֹת וּמְטוֹת
Make for yourself bands and yoke-bars,
וְנִתְּתָם עַל-צַוְאָרְךָ:
and place them upon your neck!
- 3 וְשִׁלַּחְתָּם אֶל-מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם
And you shall send them to Edom’s king,
וְאֶל-מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב וְאֶל-מֶלֶךְ בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן
and to Moab’s king, and to (the) Children of Ammon’s king;
וְאֶל-מֶלֶךְ צָר וְאֶל-מֶלֶךְ צִידוֹן
and to Tyre’s king, and to (the) king of Sidon;
בְּיַד מְלָאכִים הַבָּאִים יְרוּשָׁלַם
by (the) hand of messengers, the ones coming (to) Jerusalem,
אֶל-צִדְקִיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה:
to Zedekiah, king of Judah.
- 4 וְצִוִּיתָ אֹתָם אֶל-אֲדֹנֵיהֶם לֵאמֹר:
And you shall command them, to / for their masters, saying:

(continued...)

749 (...continued)

כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

In this way spoke YHWH of Armies, God of Israel:

כֹּה תֹאמְרוּ אֶל־אֲדֹנֵיכֶם:

In this way they shall speak to their masters:

5 אֲנִכִּי עָשִׂיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

I, I made the earth,

אֶת־הָאָדָם וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה

the human(s), and the animal(s)

אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ

which (are) upon the earth's surface,

בְּכַחִּי הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזְרוּעֵי הַנְּטוּיָה

with My great strength, and My outstretched arm.

וְנָתַתִּיהָ לְאִשֶׁר יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינָי:

And I will give it to whomever was right in My eyes.

6 וְעַתָּה אֲנִכִּי נָתַתִּי אֶת־כָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה

And now I, I have given all these lands

בְּיַד נְבוּכַדְנֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל עַבְדִּי

into (the) hand of Nebukhadhnetstsar, king of Babylon, My servant;

וְגַם אֶת־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה

and also (the) wild animal(s) of the field,

נָתַתִּי לוֹ לְעַבְדּוֹ:

I have given to him, to serve him.

7 וְעַבְדּוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם

And all the nations will serve him,

וְאֶת־בְּנוֹ וְאֶת־בְּנֵי־בְנוֹ

and his son, and his son's son,

עַד בֹּא־עַת אֲרֻצּוֹ גַם־הוּא

until (the) time of his land comes—also it.

וְעַבְדּוּ בוֹ גּוֹיִם רַבִּים

And many nations will serve him,

וּמְלָכִים גְּדֹלִים:

and great kings!

(continued...)

17:20 וּפְרִשְׁתִּי עָלָיו רְשֵׁתִי

And I will spread over him My net,⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁹(...continued)

8 וְהָיָה הַגּוֹי וְהַמְּמֻלְכָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲבֹדוּ אֹתוֹ
And it will happen—the nation, and the kingdom, which will not serve him,
אֶת־נְבוּכַדְנֶאֱצַר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל
Nebuchadnetsar, king of Babylon;
וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִתֵּן אֶת־צוּאָרוֹ בְּעַל מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל
and whoever will not give / bow his neck in (the) yoke of (the) king of Babylon,
בַּחֶרֶב וּבְרָעָב וּבַדָּבָר
with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence—

נְאֻם־יְהוָה

(it is) a saying of YHWH—

אֶפְקֹד עַל־הַגּוֹי הַהוּא

I will visit (with punishment) upon that nation,

עַד־תִּמְּוִי אֹתָם בְּיָדוֹ;

until My finishing them off by his hand!

(See the remainder of the chapter, plus **Jeremiah 28:14** and **37:7-9**.) YHWH calls the Babylonian king His “servant,” and orders all peoples and nations to willingly serve him—on pain of Divine punishment if they fail to do so!)

750

See **Ezekiel 12:13**, where it is said concerning king Zedekiah,

וּפְרִשְׁתִּי אֶת־רְשֵׁתִי עָלָיו

And I will spread My net over him,

וְנִתְפַשׂ בְּמִצּוֹדֹתַי

and he will be seized in My *masada* / stronghold / snare.

וְהֵבֵאתִי אֹתוֹ בְּבִלְהָ אֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים

And I will bring him to Babylon, land of (the) Chaldeans.

וְאוֹתָהּ לֹא־יִרְאֶה

But / and it (Babylon) he will not see,

וְשֵׁם יְמוֹתָהּ:

(continued...)

וְנִתְפַּשׂ בַּמְצוּרָתִי

and he will be seized in My stronghold / encircling net.

וְהֵבִיאֹתִיָּהוּ בְּכֶלֶה

And I will bring him to Babylon,

וְנִשְׁפָּטֵתִי אִתּוֹ שָׁם

and I will enter into judgment with him there--

מֵעַלֹּו אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל-בִּי:

(for) his faithlessness by which he acted faithlessly against Me.⁷⁵¹

17:21 וְאֵת כָּל- (מְבַרְחִיו) [מְבַרְחִיו]

And all his fugitives⁷⁵²

⁷⁵⁰(...continued)

and there he will die!

(All of this as a result of breaking his covenant with Babylon!)

751

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Humiliated and imprisoned in Babylon on account of his violation of the covenant, Zedekiah will be conscious of his guilt.” (Pp. 105-06)

Eichrodt comments on **verses 20-21** that “The more extravagant the hopes based, according to the **Scroll of Jeremiah**, on Egyptian intervention, the more severely are they hit by the prophet’s threat that Yahweh Himself will catch the perjured king in his net to bring him to trial at Babylon where his overlord has his palace, and will deliver his soldiers to their enemies’ swords and scatter their remnants in wild panic...This pronouncement is already removed from any suspicions of being a *vaticinium ex eventu* [a prophecy written after the author already had information about the events being ‘foretold.’ The text is written so as to appear that the prophecy had taken place before the event, when in fact it was written after the events supposedly predicted] by the fact that it does not give a word for word description of the punishment, which we know Zedekiah did suffer at the hands of the Babylonians at Riblah on the Orontes.” (P. 227)

752

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” מְבַרְחִיו; and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” מְבַרְחָיו, the plural “his fugitives” instead the singular, “his fugitive.” This is the only place in the **Hebrew Bible** where this noun occurs, and as a result, its meaning is uncertain. How-
(continued...)

בְּכָל־אֲנָפָיו

in all his troops,

בַּחֶרֶב יִפְּלוּ

will fall by the sword.

וְהַנִּשְׁאָרִים לְכָל־רוּחַ יִפְּרָשׁוּ

And the ones remaining will be scattered.

וַיֵּדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי:

And you (plural) will know that I, YHWH, have spoken!⁷⁵³

Verses 17:22-24 Another Parable / Allegory: The New Tree

“17:22 In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: And I, I will take from the cedar tree-top, the high one, and I will give / plant (it). From (the) top of its tender young shoots I will pluck (one), And I, I will transplant (it) upon a mountain, high and exalted. 17:23 On a mountain height of Israel I will transplant it and it will bear branch(es) / bough(s), and it will make / produce fruit. And it will become a majestic cedar; and every bird will dwell beneath it, every wing(ed) bird will dwell in (the) shadow of its branches / boughs. 17:24 And all trees of the field will know that I YHWH, I bring low a high / exalted tree; I made high a low tree. I dried up (the) moist / green tree, and I will make fruitful (the) dried up tree. I, YHWH, I said (it), and I will do (it)!⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵²(...continued)

ver, it is from the root פָּרַח, “to go through,” “to flee,” and it is used of people, not of places, so “fugitive” is a good guess.

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “all his mighty men,” and he notes that “Many Hebrew manuscripts ...have the reading *mibcharaw*...which means ‘his chosen men, choice troops,’ as in **Daniel 11:15** (chosen people).” (P. 106)

⁷⁵³

Rabbi Fisch comments that “When the predicted retribution has been accomplished, they will realize that the prophet was speaking in the name of God when he opposed the plan against Babylon.” (P. 106)

⁷⁵⁴

(continued...)

⁷⁵⁴(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 22-24** “Promise of Restoration.” He comments that “As is the common practice of the prophets, a message of doom is tempered by hope of a brighter future which would follow.” (P. 106)

Paul uses this kind of allegorical teaching (branches broken off of an olive tree, wild olive shoots being grafted in, in their place) concerning Israel and her future in **Romans 11**, where he also holds that in spite of Israel's failures, there is a blessed future awaiting her because of [YHWH's] actions in history. Compare **Mark 4:32** for Jesus' use of similar language in his parable of the mustard seed (the tiny mustard seed growing into a very large plant, with birds of the heaven nesting in it).

Eichrodt comments on these verses that “In effective contrast to the actions of earthly rulers comes the news that Yahweh Himself takes action by planting a cedar shoot, thus displaying to all nations His power to guide the course of history. Unlike the first eagle [our ‘griffon-vulture’] He plants the shoot in its native soil...As in **Isaiah 2:2; Psalm 48:3** and **Zechariah 14:10**, we see the ancient Eastern conception of the world-mountain taken up and transferred to Jerusalem, so as briefly to state in a new way, by a well-known term from the world of myth, the world-wide importance of the sanctuary in revealing the Lordship of Yahweh...There is a deliberate insistence on the inconspicuousness of the shoot chosen by Yahweh so as to display the miracle of the Divine saving work through the way in which it thrives, just as in **Isaiah 11:1** and **53:2-3**...

“Here, as in **Hosea 14:9**, the evergreen cypress is identified with the tree of life in the garden of paradise, the cedar becomes a miraculous tree full of life-giving fruit. That the birds dwell in its branches shows that it is a refuge to all who seek protection: the ruler appointed by Yahweh gains world-wide significance. True, the idea is not developed any further, and there is no attempt to give a political interpretation pointing to a world-empire; the outlines of the world-embracing salvation are deliberately left vague, a sign that the writer was aware of the danger that the picture might be misused for nationalistic purposes.” (P. 228) See **Hosea 14:9^{Heb} / 8^{Eng}**

אֶפְרַיִם מַה־לִּי עוֹד לְעֵצִים

Ephraim, what (is there) for Me still for the idols?

אָנִי עֲנִיתִי וְאֲשׁוּרֶנּוּ

I, I answered, and I will watch / regard / protect him;

אָנִי כְּבְרוֹשׁ רֵעֵנָן

I (am) like a luxuriant cypress-tree!

מִמֶּנִּי פְרִיָךְ נִמְצָא:

From Me your fruit was found!

Macintosh, in the **International Critical Commentary** comments that “The last authentic words of Hosea's prophecy constitute a fitting finale to his work, to his ultimate aspiration and concern...

(continued...)

17:22 כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

וּלְקַחְתִּי אֲנִי מִצְמֶרֶת הָאֲרֶז הַרְמָה

And I, I⁷⁵⁵ will take from the cedar tree-top, the high one,

⁷⁵⁴(...continued)

Hosea's prayer concludes with a vision of the total unity that shall be between Israel and her God. This vision is expressed in words of the ecstatic dialogue...elsewhere familiar from the **Song of Songs**], where the voices of man and woman alternate in a wholly complementary fashion...

“Ephraim will finally repudiate her addiction to the idols of Canaan with a confession which implies penitence and a renewal of fidelity. Yahweh's response is immediate, for He loves those who love Him (compare, with Jerome, **Proverbs 8:17**); now He is free to offer His fully attentive protection ...The tempo increases and Ephraim, basking in the assurance of such protection, proclaims that now her condition is like that of a luxuriant juniper...a symbol of abiding youth and vigor...

“Finally, Yahweh's exclamation assures the nation that He is the Source of her fruit. Here, no doubt, the word פֶּרִי [‘fruit’] again alludes by word-play to the very name of Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם)...It is typical of Hosea's artistry that he should choose words which allude to one of his central perceptions: that the fertility of the land is inexorably bound up with the love of Yahweh for His people and with the single-minded commitment to Him to which they are called.” (Pp. 579-80)

Reimer entitles **verses 22-24** “A New Parable.” He comments that “[YHWH's] action continues as the terms of the parable [our ‘vision-story’] are used to sketch not a flawed present but an ideal messianic future. The [griffon-vultures / eagles] are absent. [YHWH] chooses a new sprig from the topmost part of the cedar (**verse 22**) and plants it Himself (**verse 23**). The terms asserting [YHWH's] sovereignty in **verse 24** resonate with **1 Samuel 2:1-10** [which we entitle ‘Hannah's Song,’ celebrating the birth of Samuel] and **Luke 1:46-55** [Mary's Song, celebrating the birth of Jesus].” (P. 1523)

Yes, YHWH Is...and He will give birth to His chosen leader for His people in the midst of a world filled with false leaders! Our task is to follow the one He has chosen! It was Samuel in the time of Hannah; it is Jesus in our time!

⁷⁵⁵

Rabbi Fisch states that “The repetition of the personal pronoun [‘I’] is to emphasize that this time it will be [YHWH], not Nebuchadnezzar, Who will cut off a twig from the cedar. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar removed it to Babylon for destruction (**verses 3-4**), [YHWH] will bring it back to the holy city and replant it in the sacred soil where it will grow into a great cedar.” (P. 106) Himler's translation has
(continued...)

וְנָתַתִּי

and I will give / plant (it).⁷⁵⁶

מִרֶאֶשׁ יִנְקוּתָיו רֶךְ אֶקְטֹף

From (the) top of its tender young shoots I will pluck (one),⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁵(...continued)

“I Myself,” and he comments that “a beautiful Messianic promise follows, using the previous imagery in a totally new and unexpected way.” (P. 1248)

⁷⁵⁶

Rabbi Fisch holds that this means God will “restore it to its former splendor. Some interpret this as referring to the restoration under Zerubbabel, a descendant of Jehoiachin. The Targum and Rashi understand it as an allusion to the Messianic kingdom.” (P. 106)

⁷⁵⁷

The “shoot” or “twig” [the Hebrew noun is יֹנְקֶת, **yoneqeth**, a feminine noun meaning “young shoot,” or “twig” which occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** as follows:

Job 14:7 there is hope for a tree that has been cut down, that its shoots / twigs will not cease, but will sprout again;

Job 8:16 the wicked are like a lush plant whose shoots spread all over the garden;

Job 15:30, which claims that the shoots of the wicked will be dried up by the flame;

Hosea 14:7, where the Divine promise is made to Israel, that it will take root like the trees of Lebanon, with its shoots spreading out;

Ezekiel 17:22 (here), where the shoot / twig from the very top of a cedar tree is planted by YHWH;

Psalms 80:12, where it is the shoot / twig from a grape-vine symbolizing Israel, that reaches out its shoot / twig to the Euphrates River.

For further information about this “shoot / twig,” see the next verse, where it is depicted as being planted by YHWH on the top of a high mountain, becoming a “noble cedar,” and in the shade of its branches all sorts of birds will build their nests.

Hilmer claims that the “shoot” or “twig” is referring to “a member of David’s family.” (P. 1248) He says to compare the following three passage, which have similar language, but none of which have this noun יֹנְקֶת, **yoneqeth**:

Isaiah 11:1,

(continued...)

⁷⁵⁷(...continued)

וַיֵּצֵא הַטֵּר מִגִּזְע יֵשׁוּ

And a branch will arise out of Jesse's stump;

וַיִּצְר מִשְׂרָשׁוֹ יִפְרֶה:

and a sprout from his roots will bear fruit!

(Does Hilmer think that “shoot” or “twig” (יוֹנֶקֶת, **yoneqeth**) is equivalent to “branch” (חֵטֶר, **choter**) or “sprout” (נִצָּר, **netser**?) We think all three words are virtual synonyms.

Zechariah 3:8,

שְׁמַע-נָא יְהוֹשֻׁעַ הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל

Listen now, Joshua, the great / high priest,

אַתָּה וְרַעֲיֶיךָ הַיֹּשְׁבִים לְפָנַיִךְ

you and your companions, the ones sitting before you;

כִּי-אֲנָשִׁי מוֹפֵת הֵמָּה

because they (are) men of a sign / wonder / portent;

כִּי-הִנְנִי מְבִיא אֶת-עַבְדִּי צִמָּח:

because look at Me-bringing My servant, “Sprout.”

(Does Hilmer think that “shoot” or “twig” (יוֹנֶקֶת, **yoneqeth**) is equivalent to צִמָּח, ‘sprout’? We would include this word with the three above, all four of them virtual synonyms.)

Zechariah 6:12,

וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר

And you shall speak to him, saying,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לֵאמֹר

In this way YHWH of Armies spoke, saying,

הִנֵּה-אִישׁ צִמָּח שְׁמוֹ

Look—a man, Sprout (is) his name!

וּמִתַּחְתָּיו יִצְמָח

And from beneath him will sprout forth,

וּבָנָה אֶת-הַיְכָל יְהוָה:

and he will build YHWH's temple!

The fact is, the noun יוֹנֶקֶת, **yoneqeth**, “shoot” or “twig” is not used in these passages. However they all use words relating to parts of a tree or plant or vine that can be used for replanting, and from which new life will sprout forth. Hilmer claims that this language points to “a member of David's family,” i.e. Israel's royal family—and therefore is predicting the Messiah / coming king of Israel. But the text itself does not use the term “Messiah,” nor does it mention David's family. Who do you think (continued...)

וְשִׁתְּלֵתִי אֲנִי עַל הַר־גְּבוּהַ וְתִלְוִל:

And I, I will transplant (it) upon a mountain, high and exalted.

17:23 בְּהַר מְרוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשַׁתְּלֵנּוּ

On a mountain height of Israel I will transplant it⁷⁵⁸

וְנִשְׂא עֵנָף

and it will bear branch(es) / bough(s),

וְעִשָּׂה פְּרִי

and it will make / produce fruit.⁷⁵⁹

וְהָיָה לְאַרְזֵי אֲדִיר

And it will become a majestic cedar,⁷⁶⁰

וְשָׁכְנוּ תַּחְתָּיו כָּל צִפּוֹר

⁷⁵⁷(...continued)

Zechariah is referring to as “building the (second) temple?”

⁷⁵⁸

Rabbi Fisch holds that the high mountain and the mountain height of Israel both are referring to Mount Zion, Jerusalem. (P. 106) Hilmer agrees, stating that the high and lofty mountain is Jerusalem. And we say, Perhaps...but in fact is the earthly city of Jerusalem located on a “high and lofty mountain”? We hardly think so. However, the city understood spiritually, as exalted above the hills, in the sky, as the “heavenly Zion,” may be what Zechariah is referring to.

⁷⁵⁹

Rabbi Fisch notes that “Unlike Zedekiah who perished together with his sons, the reestablished dynasty will endure and the kingship pass from father to son.” (P. 106)

⁷⁶⁰

Rabbi Fisch understands this to mean that “Jerusalem will again become the center of a great kingdom.” (P. 106)

and every bird will dwell beneath it,

כָּל־כַּנְף־עוֹף־בְּצֶלֶל דְּלִי־יָתִיב תִּשְׁכָּנָה:

every wing(ed bird) will dwell in (the) shadow of its branches / boughs.⁷⁶¹

761

Rabbi Fisch states, “As birds build their nest in the branches of the tree, so will many nations place themselves under the protection of the restored Davidic monarchy.” (Pp. 107-07) Or, as Matties

puts it, “This cedar becomes a kind of cosmic tree on the cosmic mountain of God from which all creatures will benefit.”

For this depiction in **Ezekiel 17:23** of a great kingdom as a large tree with earth’s birds nesting in its branches see **Ezekiel 31:6** (Assyria in its greatness); **Daniel 4:12** (Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom of Babylon). And, for the kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus, see **Mark 4:30-32**,

30 Καὶ ἔλεγεν·

And he was saying,

πῶς ὁμοιώσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ

How shall we compare the kingdom of the God,

ἢ ἐν τίνι αὐτὴν παραβολῇ θώμεν;

or in what parable shall we place it?

31 ὡς κόκκῳ σινάπεως,

(It is) like a mustard seed,

ὃς ὅταν σπαρῇ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

which, when sown upon the ground,

μικρότερον ὄν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

being smallest of all the seeds that are upon the earth,

32 καὶ ὅταν σπαρῇ,

and when it is sown

ἀναβαίνει καὶ γίνεται μείζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων

it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants

καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους,

and makes large branches,.

ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ

so as to be able, beneath its shade,

τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνοῦν.

the birds of the air to make nests.

This passage in **Mark 4** is abbreviated in **Matthew 13:31-32** and **Luke 13:18-19**. We think it is obvious that Jesus is depicted as using the language of **Ezekiel 17:22-23**. Wayne Gruden and Thomas

(continued...)

17:24 וַיִּדְעוּ כָּל-עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה

And all trees of the field will know

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה הַשְּׁפַלְתִּי עֵץ גָּבֹהַ

That I YHWH, I bring low a high / exalted tree;

הַגְּבוֹהַתִּי עֵץ שְׁפָל

I made high a low tree.

הוֹבֵשְׁתִּי עֵץ לֵחַ

I dried up (the) moist / green tree,

וְהַפְרֵחְתִּי עֵץ יבֵּשׁ

and I will make fruitful (the) dried up tree.

אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי:

I, YHWH, I said (it), and I will do (it)!⁷⁶²

⁷⁶¹(...continued)

Schreiner note that “The Jews expected the kingdom to come with apocalyptic power, bringing [YHWH’s] judgment on all evil, and hence Jesus’ teaching that it would arrive in such an ‘insignificant’ way was surprising.” (**English Standard Version**, p. 1985) Compare **Ezekiel 31:1-9** (using similar imagery for the kingdom of Assyria in a warning to Pharaoh of Egypt); **Daniel 4:10-12** (a vision of Nebuchadnezzar, which Daniel saw as meaning his large kingdom that was about to be cut down).

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The allegory is continued. The revived Davidic dynasty is compared to a lofty cedar (**verse 23**), the heathen nations to ordinary trees. When, in contrast to the present helplessness, Israel is elevated to the position of a universal kingdom, the peoples of the world will acknowledge the Sovereignty and intervention of God in the affairs of men...all people will then know that it is by the will of God that the haughty are humbled and the lowly elevated.” (P. 107)

⁷⁶²

Darr comments that “The text does not end with the deaths of Zedekiah and his political ambitions. Suddenly, and without explanation, Yahweh proclaims a plan by which God will Personally replant the cedar’s topmost sprout upon ‘the mountain of Israel’ (Zion). There it will grow into a magnificent, fruit-bearing (!) cedar. Here, indeed, is a grace note deeply rooted in nationalistic hope. With profound trust in Yahweh’s enduring commitment to Israel, Ezekiel asserts that the same God Who brings the house of David to an ignoble end is, at that very moment, planning its future exaltation...But
(continued...)

⁷⁶²(...continued)

the author of **17:22-24** does not hold before his readers scenes of Israel's vengeance against its foes or of celebrations for battles fought and won. His is a portrait of a peaceable kingdom where, amid the great cedar's branches, every bird nests in safety...

“To no one's surprise, **17:22-24** insists that all nations (‘all the trees of the field’) will acknowledge Yahweh's unparalleled sovereignty and power. Indeed, the presence of the recognition formula in **17:24a** confirms that worldwide acknowledgment of Israel's God is a primary goal of Yahweh's plan to

reestablish and glorify David's line. The Great Reverser, Who brings low the high tree and exalts the low tree, thereby demonstrates that power that transcends every human expectation.” (P. 143)

Eichrodt comments on **verse 24** that “The astonished recognition given by the trees of the field, i.e. the nations of the world with their rulers, to the miraculous work of Yahweh does not...involve either their ‘conversion’ or yet their political subjugation to a world-empire under the hegemony of Zion... Whereas Isaiah sees the effects of this recognition in a new politics of peace among the nations [**Isaiah 2:2-4**], the religious effect is incomparably more important here. The eyes of the nations are opened to the wonderful world-power of Yahweh which, by annihilation and revivification, by abasing and exalting, by the downfall of mighty empires and the establishment of an apparently quite devastated kingdom to a position of world-wide significance, shows that the world-plan announced in His Word is being carried out.” (P. 229)

Eichrodt concludes his study of **chapter 17** stating that “The prediction against Zedekiah shows us the prophet from a new aspect, by giving us an insight into his political thought. In strong contrast to the prophets of salvation he does not let himself be carried away by patriotic enthusiasm for the independence of Judah (compare **Jeremiah 28** with its depiction of Hananiah, the false prophet), but sees in her attempt to play off Egypt against Babylon the very thing that will set the seal upon her ruin...The determining factor for Ezekiel is not an assessment of the political and military strength of the rival empires, but the introduction of Jewish politics into Yahweh's government of the world, which results from reverent surrender to the holy will of the Lord of the universe...

“An unrepentant nation cannot obtain His help by persistence; rather, they must start to take seriously the Divine will to govern their social and political life and reconstitute the state on the foundations laid down by [YHWH] for the common life of mankind, and thus attain, as a by-product of that, to a respected position in international life. That amounts to what we may call a politics of faith, which allows even the decisions of its foreign policy to be determined by the knowledge of [YHWH's] will to be King and by His quite real demands, a politics like that represented by Isaiah during his bitter struggle against the pro-Egyptianism of his day. The barefaced way in which Zedekiah broke his oath of fealty is a clear example of how men refuse to conform to [YHWH's] decisions, and of how, while breaking laws sanctified by [YHWH] Himself, they strive by false and faithless methods of their own to pursue a policy of self-willed intrigue, which has no regard for [YHWH's] world-aims.

(continued...)

⁷⁶²(...continued)

“It is this profoundly serious view of politics as a decision made possible only through knowledge and real respect for the moral principles and objectives established by [YHWH] Himself for human community life which Ezekiel, in general agreement with his predecessors, unflinchingly maintained during a period of moral dissolution and chaos...

“Precisely in this way, he also causes an ultimate disquiet to the political life of our time, so that we cannot be content with *sacro egoismo* [Sacro-Egoism is a term defining a sociological approach in Western society wherein the ultimate authority regarding religious thought and interpretation rests with the individual. As theological thought evolved, specifically after the advent of liberalism in the nineteenth century, a change began to take place in the religious world. Religious attitudes and prioritization seem to begin shifting from Sacro-Clericalism, where authority is given to the church and its representatives, to Sacro-Egoism, where the individual assumes greatest authority. The role of the individual, the self, was elevated more than ever before and self-reliance was glamorized, epitomized, and utilized in society--even until the present] or with calculations of what means are best adapted to reach material ends as if they were the obvious principles which should guide all political practice, to which all Divine and human moral commands ought to yield...

“Here there is a demand for an absolutely binding obedience to the direction of the eternal Will of [YHWH] Who rules the world, which requires us to go by the standards He has set even if it involves the sacrifice of some momentary advantage, whatever great decisive objectives of peaceful national and personal life and respect for the rights of our brethren are at stake, since that is the only road for our politics to take if they are to prove promising in the long run. Such a type of politics becomes possible only when men are aware of [YHWH] Who brings men’s destiny to fulfilment, though it is imperilled by their imperfection and their sin. The concluding section of this chapter points in this direction, by describing the way in which [YHWH] intervenes. It is far from describing a dark destiny dressed up in mythological embellishments. It discloses the true and real background to all human endeavor, without which those human endeavors must flag in hopeless despair under the double burden of their own responsibilities and their own failure to meet them.” (Pp. 229-231)

This is, we think, Eichrodt’s wordy way of saying “the Kingdom of God.” If the church wants to accomplish anything, let it concentrate on this—doing the will of YHWH, regardless of the cost, just as Jesus did—rebuking the proud and the mighty, humbly serving the lowly and forsaken, bringing healing and forgiveness and new life wherever he went, trusting YHWH for his future, even when being put to death. And out of that life-ministry, grew the mighty world-wide tree of the first three centuries C.E.

And what happened then? In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine began to take charge of the followers of Jesus—ordering their thinking to be unified with creedal statements (instead of their prior freedom of thought and theology), and putting the sword in the hands of the church’s leaders (bishops), encouraging them to force conformity at the pain of death. The result was that the secular government took over the place of YHWH, and the Church largely lost its mission and purpose, often-
(continued...)

⁷⁶²(...continued)

times becoming the instrument of death rather than of life.

Since that time, there have been numerous attempts at reformation and renewal– and YHWH has blessed those movements, as long as they have stayed true to the vision of YHWH / Jesus as their King, determined to do YHWH's / Jesus' will, regardless of the cost. Wherever that has happened, Divine blessings have followed. Our challenge today is to repeat that effort at reformation and renewal, in loving submission to YHWH / Jesus. Do we dare to do that?