

The Twofold, Allegorical Lament for Israel's Princes

Ezekiel Chapter 19

19:1 And you, take up a Qinah / Funeral Dirge / Lament for the Dead, for (the) princes / chiefs of Israel. 19:2 And you shall say, What (was) your mother? A lioness— between lions she laid down; in the midst of young lions she raised her cubs. 19:3 And she brought up one of her cubs--He was / became a young lion, and he learned to tear apart prey [animal's bodies]; He devoured a man / human. 19:4 And nations listened to him / heard about him; in their pit he was seized. And they brought him with the hooks to Egypt-land. 19:5 And she saw, when she waited—her hope perished. And she took another of her cubs; she made him (into) a young lion. 19:6 And he walked to and fro in (the) midst of lions; a young lion he was; and he learned to tear apart prey (animal bodies). He devoured a man / human being. 19:7 And he knew his widows, and their cities he laid waste. And a land and its fullness was made desolate from (the) sound of his roaring. 19:8 And surrounding nations from (the) provinces placed over him, and spread out over him their net; in their pit he was seized. 19:9 And they put him in the cage, And they brought him to (the) king of Babylon. They brought him into the stronghold, So that his voice would not be heard again to / in (the) mountains of Israel. 19:10 Your mother—like the (grape-)vine in your blood, transplanted beside waters--she was bearing fruit and full of branches, from (her) many waters. 19:11 And she had strong stems to / for staffs / rods of rulers; and its height was exalted, over (and) between leafy foliage. And it was seen in its height in / with an abundance of its branches. 19:12 But / and it was pulled up in rage, thrown down to the earth; and the east wind dried up its fruit(s); they were torn off and they dried up / withered. (The) stem of its strength—fire devoured it! 19:13 And now--transplanted in the desert / wilderness, in a land of dryness and thirst! 19:14 And a fire went forth from (the) stem of its branches; it devoured / consumed its fruit. And there was not in it a strong stem, a rod / staff for ruling. It is a lamentation / funeral dirge, and it was used for lamentation / funeral dirge(s).

19:1⁸³⁷

837

Rabbi Fisch entitles **chapter 19** “Dirge Over the Kings and People of Judah.”

He comments that “After stressing the forthcoming calamity and justifying the Divine dispensation, Ezekiel becomes a sympathetic mourner. Speaking in [YHWH's] behalf, he gives expression to his grief over the tragic fate of the last kings of Judah and over the fall of the state...

“Comparing the young Judean rulers to whelps [young offspring of a canid [Any member of the family Canidae, including dogs, wolves, foxes, coyotes and jackals], especially of a dog or a wolf, the young of a bear or similar mammal (lion, tiger, seal); a pup, wolf cub], he bemoans their disastrous end. Jehoahaz, who reigned only three months, was banished by Pharaoh and led in chains to Egypt where he
(continued...)

⁸³⁷(...continued)

died in 608 B.C.E. Yehoyaqim, the brother and successor of Jehoahaz, was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and transported to Babylon, dying on the way in 597 B.C.E. (according to some authorities he died in Babylon). Jehoiachin, who succeeded his father, was exiled by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon after reigning for three months. Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, revolted against his overlord, was captured and blinded by him and brought to Babylon in 586 B.C.E... With that event Judah's national life collapsed and the dynasty came to an end...

“The elegy falls into two sections. **Verses 1-9** relate to the fate of the last Judean kings; and **verses 10-14** refer to the fall of Judah.” (P. 115)

The parallelism in this chapter is obvious. It is a lament (compare the **Scroll of Lamentations**), and as **verse 15** emphasizes, is intended to be used as a cry of lament. Israel (or Judah, or Jerusalem) is pictured as both a great lioness with cubs, and as a fruitful vine in a vineyard. But the lioness' cubs have been taken captive to Egypt and to Babylon, and the vine has been uprooted and transplanted in a dry wilderness. The meaning of the allegorical language is clear, even though the exact kings referred to by the "cubs" is not certain.

Eichrodt explains that the *qina*, or death lament “had its roots deep in antiquity, and was stubbornly maintained, like the other old customs, whose forms had to be observed with unflinching correctness, in order to preserve the living from misfortune...This particular type of lyric is adopted by the prophet, like other forms celebrating a triumph, victor, or marriage, in order to attract the attention of his public...

“Ezekiel...transforms the lament for the princes of Israel into a proclamation of the judgment executed upon the Davidic dynasty, who have become the prey of the powers of death...Two royal personages are represented by young lions entrapped by hunters with nets and pit-falls in order to bring them into captivity. We see here all the technical tricks of the huntsman, some illustrated by Assyrian and Egyptian monuments, some attested by other **Old Testament** passages...

“The young lions stand for princes of Judah...The identification of the first named is unchallenged: Jehoahaz was the only king contemporary with Ezekiel to be led into captivity to Egypt...It is much more difficult to identify the prince who is the subject of the second lion prophecy in **verses 5-9**...It is stated that Jehoiachin, the son of Yehoyaqim (**2 Kings 24:15**), as well as Zedekiah underwent a captivity to Babylon (**2 Kings 25:7**)...The decisive point against its being Jehoiachin is that we cannot imagine his being preferred to his infinitely more important father [Zedekiah], well known for his deadly enmity against the prophets, as a typical example of a king displeasing to [YHWH].” (Pp. 252-53)

Reimer entitles **19:1-14** “Lament for the Princes of Israel.” He comments that Ezekiel presents two further political allegories, like that of **chapter 17**. Unfortunately the symbolism remains unexplained here. In **19:1-9**, a lioness produces two cubs who represent the fate of two Davidic princes while
(continued...)

⁸³⁷(...continued)

in **verses 10-14** a vine produces branches, as well as a particular ‘stem’ that appears to represent a single Davidic figure. The whole is presented as a lamentation (**verse 1**), a distinctive form of Hebrew poetry. Some see this lament as ironic, a pseudo-lament that infuses the literary form of the dirge with disparaging content. Others hear in these words genuine sadness, and the conclusion in **verse 14b** suggests this is the better reading. The political lesson is that even Davidic princes are not immune from the Divine consequences of their actions.” (P. 1525)

Matties comments on **19:1-14** that “This parody [an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect] of a lament or funeral dirge is a riddle (like **chapter 17**) whose aim is to lower the curtain on the last act of the Judean monarchy. A dynasty undergirded by power politics and self-aggrandizement can no longer claim the certainty of Davidic covenant theology.” (P. 1181)

He comments on **19:1-9** that “The chapter concerns *princes* (Ezekiel usually avoids the word ‘king’). Unlike **chapter 17**, there is no explanation here. The lioness is Israel, or the Davidic dynasty (see also **Genesis 49:8-9**). The cubs are both characterized as having ‘devoured humans’ (**verses 3, 6**; see also **22:25**)...

“Ironically, the invaders (**verses 8-9a**) act as [YHWH’s] agents to free Israel from this prince’s terror (**verse 9b**)...The first of the two young lions is Jehoahaz (609 B.C.E.), the only king taken to Egypt (**verse 4**; see also **2 Kings 23:34**). The identity of the second may be deliberately ambiguous: Yehoyaim (609-598 B.C.E.), Jehoiachin (598 B.C.E.), or Zedekiah (598-587 B.C.E.). If it is Yehoyaqim, the description matches the violence reported in **2 Kings 24:4** and accords with the note in **2 Chronicles 36:6**. This also allows the sequence of kings to follow the historical order: Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.” (P. 1182)

Reimer entitles **verses 1-9** “A Lioness and Her Cubs.” He comments that “Both allegories [vision-stories / vignettes] refer to a mother (**verses 2, 10**). One cannot be certain whether a literal queen mother is in view (then most likely Hamutal; **2 Kings 23:31; 24:18**), or rather a symbolic reference to the nation of Judah (compare **Genesis 49:9** and ‘mother’ of Babylon as nation, **Jeremiah 50:12**)...

“**Ezekiel 19:3-4** applies most closely to Jehoahaz, taken captive to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco (**2 Kings 23:31-35**)...The second cub’s identity in **Ezekiel 19:5-9** is much more problematic. Of possible candidates, Zedekiah remains plausible (see **2 Kings 25:6**), but Jehoiachin is more likely (**2 Kings 24:12**). Both Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin reigned only three months, which is thought to be a problem for the negative assessment of the second ‘cub’ (although compare **2 Kings 24:8-9**).” (P. 1525)

Darr entitles **19:1-9** “Maternal Ambitions, Bitter Outcomes,” and **19:10-14**, “The Shocking Death of the Mothering Vine and Her Stems.”

(continued...)

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She comments that “**Verses 1 and 10** address a second-person masculine singular entity (‘*your mother*’), although the prophet does not identify him / them by name. We might reasonably conjecture that Ezekiel’s ostensible addressee is yet among the living. Zedekiah—his contemporary, Judah’s last king, and the ‘vine’ of **chapter 17**—is the most likely candidate...

“As he progresses through **verses 1-14**, the ancient reader will surely ponder whether Ezekiel’s ‘lament’ is sincere or sarcastic...Ezekiel’s ‘praise’ of the prince’s positive and negative comments commingle. Moreover, humans appear in the guise of animals and plants. Indeed, his dirge is no less a fable than **17:2-10**...

“**Verses 2b-9** consist of a two-part (**verses 2b-4, verses 5-9**) fabulous lament over two of Judah’s ‘princes.’ Initially, it focuses on ‘your mother’—a lioness among lions, an exemplary example of her breed. The reader is invited to admire her, stretched out among young lions, raising her cubs. From the litter she selects one cub that, by virtue of her maternal attention and training, grows to become a young lion and successful hunter—a prerequisite for survival. To this point, Ezekiel has said nothing negative about the lioness or her offspring. But with the notice that the latter devours humans (**verse 3b**), positive associations (strength, nobility, etc.) recede and others (rapacity and violence) predominate...

“In response, the nations set out on a lion hunt, a sport of ancient kings. **Verse 4** sheds light on how such beasts were captured. Hebrew *sachat* refers to a pit dug in the ground and then disguised so that the animal unknowingly falls into it. An eighteenth-century B.C.E. letter from Mari describes the success of this technique: “A lion has devoured Habdu-Ami’s sheep in the fold. Now he (Habdu-Ami) has dug a pit in his fold in Bit-Akkaka. While searching for the fold the lion fell into the pit, when Habdu-Ami was in Dur-Iachdun-Lim. The lion tried to escape (the pit), but the shepherds gathered wood, with which they filled the pit and set it on fire. Thus they burned the lion in the fire. He closed his jaws. There shall be no more broken arms any more..’

“With the notice that the nations brought their catch to Egypt (**verse 4b**, Ezekiel provides his first real clue concerning the identity of the lioness’s first cub: Jehoahaz (609 B.C.E.) alone among Judah’s kings was exiled to Egypt (after only a three-month reign; see **2 Kings 23:31-34**). Does he thereby disclose that the lioness is Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah and Jehoahaz’ mother (**2 Kings 23:31**)?

“The second phase of Ezekiel’s fable also focuses initially on the lioness. When she realizes that her son will not return, she selects a second cub; he, too, grows to become a young lion. The prophet details his behavior more fully than that of his predecessor. He swaggers among the pride [group of lions], learns to hunt successfully, and, like his brother, develops a taste for human flesh. Moreover, he ‘knows’ (i.e., has sexual intercourse with) ‘his widows’ (**verse 7a**)...

(continued...)

וַאֲתָהּ שָׂא קִינָה

And you, take up a Qinah / Funeral Dirge / Lament for the Dead,⁸³⁸

אֶל-נְשֵׂי־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

for (the) princes / chiefs of Israel.⁸³⁹

19:2 וַאֲמַרְתָּ

And you shall say,

מַה אִמֶּךָ

What (was) your mother?

⁸³⁷(...continued)

“Both the land and its inhabitants are appalled by the sound of his roaring. The nations of surrounding provinces come to Israel’s ‘rescue,’ capturing him by means of net and pit and bringing him to ‘the king of Babylon’ in order that his roaring no longer be heard on ‘the mountains of Israel’...

“If the first cub represents Jehoahaz, who is the second? This ‘riddle’ has exercised interpreters for centuries...[and it] remains a formidable riddle...

]

“Because Ezekiel does not pause to ‘decode’ this fable (compare **17:11-21**), not only his audience, but also late exilic readers will likely continue to ponder the second cub’s identity, even as they move on to **verses 10-14.**” (Pp.154-156)

⁸³⁸

Hilmer states that the lament [Hebrew קִינָה, **qiynah**; **Rahlfs**, θρηνησος, **threnos**] is “a metered (three beats plus two beats) chant usually composed for funerals of fallen leaders (as in **2 Samuel 1:17-27** [David’s lament over the death of Saul], but often used sarcastically by the **Old Testament** prophets to lament or to ironically predict the death of a nation (see **Isaiah 14:4-21**; **Amos 5:1-3**).” (P. 1250) We think the attempt that has been made by students of the **Hebrew Bible** to determine poetry by the number of beats in a line has not been successful. But then I am no musician!

⁸³⁹

Rabbi Fisch states that “the princes of Israel” were “Jehoahaz, Yehoyaqim and Zedekiah. Ezekiel always employs the term *prince* instead of *king*.” (P. 115)

לְבַיָּא

A lioness⁸⁴⁰

840

The noun לְבַיָּא is “lion.” The noun לְבַיָּא is “lioness.” The noun לְבַיָּא is used for both “lion” and “lioness.” The noun אַרְיָ is another Hebrew name for “lion.” It occurs in the plural as both אַרְיֹת and אַרְיִים.

Hilmer notes that “Although a lament, this chapter is an allegory like that in **chapter 17** (to which it is related in content). **Chapter 17** gives an interpretation, but this one does not. The lioness may be a personification of Israel (see **verse 1**), Judah (see **4:6; 8:1, 17; 9:9**) or Jerusalem (see **5:5**), all of which may be considered to be mother to the kings (see **verses 10-14**.)” (P. 1250)

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The designation *mother* is applied to the house of David, compared to a *lioness* because Judah...and particularly the kingdom of David, are symbolized as a lion.” (P. 115) Compare **Genesis 49:9**, where Jacob predicts concerning Judah:

גֹּדֵר אַרְיָה יִהְיֶה יְהוּדָה

A lion’s cub (is) Judah,

מִטְּרַף בְּנֵי עֲלִית

from (your) victim, my son, you have gone up;

כָּרַע רֹבֵץ כְּאַרְיָה

he crouched, he lay down, like a lion;

וְכִלְבַּיָּא מִי יִקְוֶמְנוּ:

and like a lioness, who will raise him up?

Eichrodt disagrees, stating that “If the parable is wholly concerned with the brothers Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, then the mother who succeeds in raising them to the throne is not the state of Judah or the Davidic dynasty (Zimmerli, etc.). Such a personification is so far-fetched as to require clearer proof. It is much more likely that, as scholars since Kraetzschmar have regularly asserted, the person referred to is Hamutal, the physical mother of the two brothers, and wife of Josiah. As the Queen Mother and former Queen of Judah she held an influential position...Hamutal must have wielded all her influence to have her sons placed on the throne in the days of confusion after the death of Josiah.” (P. 254)

בֵּין אַרְיֹת רַבְצָה

—between lions she laid down;⁸⁴¹

בְּתוֹךְ כְּפָרִים רִבְתָּה גּוּרֶיהָ:

in the midst of young lions she raised her cubs.

19:3 וַתַּעַל אֶחָד מִגּוּרֶיהָ

And she brought up one of her cubs--⁸⁴²

841

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Judah dwelt securely and fearlessly among the nations as long as he remained faithful to the will of God.” (P. 116)

842

Rabbi Fisch states that “The allusion is to Jehoahaz who succeeded his father, Josiah, after his death in the battle of Megiddo. For his reign, compare **2 Kings 23:31-33**, and note also the mention of his fate in **Jeremiah 22:10-12**.” (P. 116) **2 Kings 23:31-33**,

31 בֶּן-עֶשְׂרִים וּשְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנָה יְהוֹאָחָז בְּמָלְכוֹ

Jehoahaz (was) a son of twenty and three year(s) when he reigned as king;

וּשְׁלֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים מָלַךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם

and (for) three months he reigned in Jerusalem.

וּשְׁם אִמּוֹ חַמוּטָל

And his mother's name (was) Chamutal,

בַּת-יִרְמְיָהוּ מִלִּבְנָה:

daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah.

32 וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה

And he did what was evil in YHWH's eyes,

כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-עָשׂוּ אֲבֹתָיו:

according to all that his fathers did.

33 וַיֹּאסְרֵהוּ פַרְעֹה נֶכְחַ

And Pharaoh Nekho bound him (as a prisoner),

בְּרִבְלָה בְּאֶרֶץ חַמָּת

in Riblah, in (the) land of Chamath,

(continued...)

⁸⁴²(...continued)

(בְּמִלְךָ) [מִמְלֶכֶךְ] בִּירוּשָׁלַם

from / preventing his reign as king in Jerusalem.

וַיִּתֵּן עֲנֹשׁ עַל־הָאָרֶץ

And he gave / placed an indemnity / fine over / on the land,

מֵאָה כֶּסֶף־כֶּסֶף וְכֶפֶר זָהָב:

a hundred talent(s) of silver, and a talent of gold.

Jeremiah 22:10-12,

10 אַל־תִּבְכּוּ לְמֵת

You (plural) shall not weep for a dead person,

וְאַל־תִּנְדְּדוּ לוֹ

and you shall not lament for him.

בְּכֹוּ בְּכֹוּ לְהֵלֵךְ

Weep extensively for the one going (away),

כִּי לֹא יָשׁוּב עוֹד

because he will not return again,

וְרָאָה אֶת־אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ:

and he will (not again) see his birth-land!

11 כִּי כֹה אָמַר־יְהוָה

Because in this way YHWH spoke

אֶל־שָׁלֹם בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה

to Shallum, son of Josiah, King of Judah,

הַמֶּלֶךְ תַּחַת יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ אָבִיו

the one ruling in place of Josiah his father,

אֲשֶׁר יָצָא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה

who went forth from this place—

לֹא־יָשׁוּב שָׁם עוֹד:

He will not return there again!

12 כִּי בַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־הִגְלוּ אֹתוֹ

Because in (the) place where they led him in to exile,

שָׁם יָמוּת

there he will die.

וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לֹא־יִרְאֶה עוֹד:

And this land, he will not see again!

כִּפִּיר הָיָה

He was / became a young lion,⁸⁴³

וַיִּלְמַד לְטָרֵף-טָרֵף

and he learned to tear apart prey [animal's bodies];

אָדָם אָכַל:

He devoured a man / human.⁸⁴⁴

19:4 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֱלֹהֵי גוֹיִם

And nations listened to him / heard about him;⁸⁴⁵

בְּשַׁחַתָּם נִתְפַּשׂ

in their pit he was seized.

וַיָּבֵאוּ בְּחָתִים אֶל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

And they brought him with the hooks to Egypt-land.

843

Rabbi Fisch comments that Jehoahaz “came to the throne at the age of twenty-three.” (P. 116)

844

Where the Hebrew has the singular, אָדָם, “a man / human,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the plural, ἀνθρώπους, “men,” “human beings.” Rabbi Fisch notes that Jehoahaz “ventured to wage war against Egypt.” (P. 116)

845

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “the nations assembled against him,” but he notes that the text is literally “listened unto him.” He takes this to mean “Egypt and her vassal states took up the challenge of Jehoahaz” and brought him into their pit with hooks. “The allegory is continued. The lion was captured by falling into a pit prepared for him and then bound in fetters: an allusion to the capture of Jehoahaz by the Egyptians.” (P. 116)

19:5 וַתֵּרֶא כִּי נִוְחָלָהּ

And she saw,⁸⁴⁶ when she waited—

אֲבֵרָה תִּקְוָתָהּ

her hope perished.

וַתִּקַּח אֶחָד מִגְּרִיָּהּ

And she took another of her cubs;⁸⁴⁷

כַּפִּיר שְׂמֹתָהּ:

she made him (into) a young lion.⁸⁴⁸

846

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The subject is the mother lioness.” (P. 116)

847

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Modern commentators hold that Jehoiachin is intended, and Yehoyaqim is omitted from the last kings of Judah in the elegy because he died a peaceful end. But the Jewish commentators identify the second *whelp* with Yehoyaqim, the half-brother and successor of Jehoahaz. From the various accounts of Jehoiachin’s fate...it appears that he was twice taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar. The first time he was carried to Babylon, as stated in **Daniel [1:1-2]**, and subsequently reinstated. After three years’ subservience to Nebudhadnezzar, he again rebelled against him, as recorded in **2 Kings 24:1** where *he turned, and rebelled* is idiomatic for ‘he again rebelled.’ As the consequence of this rebellion he was finally dethroned and taken to Babylon. It is this final phase of his career which the prophet predicted in the words, *He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 22:19).*” (P. 117)

Hilmer states this other cub was “perhaps Jehoiachin (who reigned only three months, **2 Kings 24:8**), but probably Zedekiah (of whom **verse 7** appears a more likely description). Both were taken to Babylon (**verse 9**). If the reference is to Jehoiachin (**2 Kings 24:15**), this was a true lament; if to Zedekiah, it was a prediction (**2 Kings 25:7**).” (P. 1251)

848

Rabbi Fisch states that “Though Pharaoh-necoh placed Yehoyaqim on the throne (**2 Kings 23:34**), the appointment is attributed to the Judean nation because it was made with their approval. He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign.” (P. 117)

19:6 וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹךְ-אֲרִיּוֹת

And he walked to and fro in (the) midst of lions;⁸⁴⁹

כַּפִּיר הָיָה

a young lion he was;

וַיִּלְמַד לְטָרֵף-טָרֵף

and he learned to tear apart prey (animal bodies).

אָדָם אָכַל:

He devoured a man / human being.⁸⁵⁰

19:7 וַיֵּדַע אֶלְמְנוֹתָיו

And he knew his widows⁸⁵¹

849

Rabbi Fisch comments that Yehoyaqim “vacillated between an alliance with Pharaoh-necoh and with Nebuchadnezzar.” (P. 117)

850

Rabbi Fisch comments that Yehoyaqim “defied Nebuchadnezzar which resulted in much bloodshed.” (P. 117)

851

This is a strange statement. It apparently means that the young lion “knew” the widows of the human he had killed, that is, in biblical terminology, he had sexual intercourse with them. Of course, in an allegory, such as this, all things are possible; but it seems that Ezekiel is forgetting that he is talking about a young lion, and lets the human being (Israelite prince) allegorized, break through. What do you think? Could this be a depiction of some Israelite prince, like Absalom, David’s son, having sexual intercourse with David’s concubines, as a sign of his taking over David’s place as Israel’s king? Because of the difficulty of envisioning a young lion “knowing” the widows of his human victims, some suggest that the noun **אֶלְמְנוֹתָיו**, “his widows,” should be changed to **אֶרְמְנוֹתָיו**, “his citadels / fortresses.” But what would “knowing” citadels mean?

This is no problem, of course, for those who don’t mind changing the original text. Just change the verb “to know” into something else, “he destroyed their citadels.” And what you end up with is, you are commenting on your own written text, not the biblical text.

(continued...)

וְעָרֵיהֶם הִחָרִיב

and their cities he laid waste.⁸⁵²

וַתִּשָּׁם אֶרֶץ וּמְלֹאָהּ

And a land and its fullness was made desolate

מִקּוֹל שִׁאֲנָתוֹ:

from (the) sound of his roaring.⁸⁵³

⁸⁵¹(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "he knew their castles," and Rabbi Fisch comments that "The Hebrew phrase is difficult. The noun *almenothaw* normally means "his widows," but is taken as an unusual form of *armenothaw*, "his castles, citadels," as in **Isaiah 13:22**. The verb is translated 'devastated' by the Targum, a sense which cannot be established in Hebrew. It is, however, commonly used of carnal knowledge; and so Rashi and Kimchi interpret as 'he knew their widows,' i.e. his policy brought about the death of a large number of men and rape of their women." (P. 117)

852

Rabbi Fisch comments that "Through his evil deeds he caused the destruction of the cities of the holy land. So Kimchi, but Rashi understands it to mean that he impoverished the cities by levying heavy taxes." (P. 117) Compare **2 Kings 23:35**,

וְהַכֶּסֶף וְהַזָּהָב נָתַן יְהוֹיָקִים לְפַרְעֹה

And the silver and the gold, Yehoyaqim gave / paid to Pharaoh.

אֲךָ הִעָרִיךְ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

However he taxed the land,

לְתַת אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף עַל־פִּי פַרְעֹה

to give / pay the silver upon / according to Pharaoh's mouth / order:

אִישׁ כְּעֶרְכוֹ

(from) each man according to his estimate

נָגַשׁ אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף וְאֶת־הַזָּהָב

he exacted the silver and the gold—

אֶת־עַם הָאָרֶץ לְתַת לְפַרְעֹה נְכוֹה:

to / from (the) people of the land, to give / pay to Pharaoh Nekhoh.

853

Rabbi Fisch's translation has *the nations cried out against him*, but "the Hebrew verb is literally 'gave' with no object. Either 'voice' or 'snare' is to be understood. With the latter object it would
(continued...)

19:8 וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלָיו גּוֹיִם סְבִיב מִמְּדֵינֹת

And surrounding nations from (the) provinces placed over him,

וַיִּפְרְשׂוּ עָלָיו רְשֵׁתָם

and spread out over him their net;

בְּשַׁחְתָּם נִתְפָּשׂ:

in their pit he was seized.

19:9 וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ בְּסוּגָר בְּחַחִים

And they put him in the cage,⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵³(...continued)

mean, ‘the nations laid a snare for him.’” The additional “on every side from the provinces” means that “Several nations joined Nebuchadnezzar in the war against Yehoyaqim, as stated in **2 Kings 24:2.**” (P. 118)

24:2 וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה בּוֹ אֶת־גְּדוּדֵי כַשְׂדִּים

And YHWH sent against him marauding bands of *khasdiym* / Chaldeans,

וְאֶת־גְּדוּדֵי אַרָם וְאֶת־גְּדוּדֵי מוֹאָב

and marauding bands of Aram / Syria, and marauding bands of Moab,

וְאֶת־גְּדוּדֵי בְנֵי־עַמּוֹן

and marauding bands of Ammon’s children.

וַיִּשְׁלַחֵם בֵּית־הַיְהוּדָה לְהַאֲבִידוֹ

And He sent them against Judah, to destroy it,

כַּדְבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר

according to YHWH’s word which He spoke

בְּיַד עֲבָדָיו הַנְּבִיאִים:

by (the) hand of His servants / slaves the prophets.

⁸⁵⁴

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The Hebrew noun *sugar* is either derived from the verb *sagar*, ‘shut up,’ or is a loan-word from the Assyrian *sigaru*, ‘cage.’” He quotes Lofthouse as writing, “Assurbanipal refers to a cage placed at the east gate of Nineveh in which he kept an Arabian monarch imprisoned.” (P. 118)

וַיְבִיאוּ אֶל-מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל

And they brought him to (the) king of Babylon.⁸⁵⁵

וַיְבִיאוּ בְּמִצְדוֹת

They brought him into the stronghold,

לְמַעַן לֹא-יִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ עוֹד

So that his voice would not be heard again⁸⁵⁶

אֶל-הַרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

to / in (the) mountains of Israel.

19:10⁸⁵⁷

855

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Yehoyaqim was twice taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar...The reference here is to his first dethronement when he was imprisoned in Babylon for some time. Jehoiachin is not included in the elegy because his reign of only three months was considered negligible. Zedekiah is not treated separately since his fate was the same as that of Yehoyaqim.” (P. 118)

856

Rabbi Fisch comments that “This is mentioned as a contrast to the noise of his roaring (**verse 7**). His rule over Judea (the mountains of Israel) came to an end.” (P. 118)

857

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 10-14** “Elegy Over the Fall of Judah.”

Eichrodt entitles these same verses “The Parable of the Vine.” Eichrodt comments that “The choice of the new image of a vine gives [this passage] the character of an independent composition... Unlike the lion parable, this concluding passage speaks of the complete annihilation of the royal house, evidently so as to enhance further the ruin previously predicted.

“In the parable of the lions the main emphasis was laid on the fate of Zedekiah. **Verses 10-14** take up again the fate of that king, expressing it under a new image and telling of further misfortunes. The mother therefore evidently means the physical mother of the king, Hamutal. She, like a vine in favorable soil growing rankly and vigorously and forming strong branches, stood occupying an influential position in the house of David as the mother of distinguished sons. Yet only one person is mentioned as being the stem fitted to be the scepter of a ruler..

(continued...)

⁸⁵⁷(...continued)

“This is Zedekiah, in whom, after his accession to the throne and the initial success of his reign, all the hopes of his mother were concentrated. But these hopes are vain: destruction attacks not only the one royal stem but the whole vine. It is torn up by the roots, its branches hewn off and the dried-up ones thrown into the fire, a fate from which its strongest and handsomest stem, the king himself, cannot escape. It is evident that, when it is torn up and thrown on the ground, the fate of the vine is finally sealed ...The dynasty at Jerusalem dies out with the death of the king. **Verses 13** and **14a** must therefore be regarded as additions...

“If one asks for the reason which made Ezekiel append this second lament over Zedekiah, it is most probably to be found in the shattering events of 587, which went far beyond what is suggested in **verses 4-9** and wiped out the king and his whole family. The branches torn off the uprooted vine (**verse 12a**), none of which can ever again grow into a scepter (**verse 14b**) make one think especially of the execution of Zedekiah’s sons, carried out by Nebuchadrezzar when he punished the rebel at Riblah (**2 Kings 25:7**).

Reimer entitles **verses 10-14** “A Vine and Its Stem(s).” He states that “For details, compare the parable of the [griffon vultures] and the vine in **chapter 17**. Whereas the lioness-and-cubs story fixed attention on the fate of individuals, the vine-and-stems (Hebrew *mattoth*, plural of *matteh*) passage makes more inclusive reference to the whole dynasty. **Verses 12** and **14** of **chapter 19** single out one particular strong stem (Hebrew *matteh*) normally translated ‘staff,’ only here referring to a living branch. Wordplay undoubtedly motivated this choice. The reference seems to be to Zedekiah, the last reigning Davidic figure, whose attempts at power politics ended in disaster.” (P. 1525)

Matties comments that “The imagery of the transplanted vine (**verse 10**) and the scepter (**verse 11, 14**) links this chapter explicitly to Jacob’s blessing to Judah in **Genesis 49:8-12**, thus marking the demise of the royal house. The mother vine is Judah, from whom a ruler (scepter) sprouts. The stem (**verse 11**) may be Jehoiachin, who was deported to Babylon (**verse 13**; see also **2 Kings 24:15**) or Zedekiah. **Verse 13** indicates that the vine is transplanted (presumably in Babylon), suggesting that king and people are indicted. **Verse 14** implies that the fire has consumed the last of the dynasty, Zedekiah. The message is shockingly unambiguous. The promises have run their course; the Davidic dynasty is no more. The exilic community must acknowledge this before hope can flourish.” (P. 1182)

Darr comments that “In **verses 10-14**, Ezekiel continues his fabulous lament over the princes of Judah. Here, however, he abandons lion imagery in order to take up another established symbol of royalty and nobility: the vine (**17:5-8**; **31:4-5, 7**; see also **Psalms 1:3**; **Job 29:19**; **Isaiah 44:4**; **Jeremiah 17:8**). Like the vine of **17:5-8**, this plant thrives in well-watered soil. Unlike it, which spread its branches low to the ground (**17:6**), this one ‘mothers’ impressive branches, strong stems and rulers’ scepters (**verse 11a**), so that it towers conspicuously among the clouds. Suddenly, it is ripped from its secure and fruitful environment in fury and subjected to ‘overkill’: hurled to the ground; desiccated by the east
(continued...)

⁸⁵⁷(...continued)

wind (see also **17:10**); stripped of its fruit, its strong stem withered; and burned (see **5:4-5**). Further, the vine is transplanted (what is left to transplant?) to the antithesis of its former soil—dry, thirsty desert ground. There, a fire originating in its own stem utterly consumes its branches and fruit, leaving it no strong stem and ruler’s scepter.

“The enraged agent of the vine’s destruction (**verse 12a**) is not identified. Is he Nebuchadrezzar? Yahweh? Israel’s Deity is nowhere named in this chapter, but Ezekiel everywhere points to the Lord’s control of Judah’s fate; the ‘nations,’ including Babylonia, are merely God’s agents. Hence we can confidently assume that the reader attributes the vine’s demise to Yahweh...

“Here [**verse 10**] also, the identities of both mother and addressee are an enigma. If the reader has identified the first and second lion cubs as Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, respectively, he might presume that **verses 10-14** also speak of Hamutal. If, on the other hand, the reader regards the second cub as either Jehoiakim or Jehoachin, he likely suspects that the vine is no human mother but, like the lioness, represents the Davidic dynasty. The second option is the more compelling of the two...Again, Zedekiah is the most likely addressee...

With the colophon [a statement at the end of a book [or section of a book], giving information about its authorship and printing] of **verse 14b**, a comment that Ezekiel’s lament actually passed into use, **chapter 19** ends. Its presence returns us to the question of whether Ezekiel himself composed it as a heartfelt dirge or as a parody of that genre. Perhaps the answer is twofold. On the one hand, the prophet invites his audience genuinely to admire the lioness. Her maternal behavior is altogether appropriate. When they witness the cubs’ demise through her eyes, they sympathize with her—bereft of her two offspring and of hope. Likewise, his initial description of the fruitful, many branched vine’s thriving in well-watered soil is positive. The audience is shocked when she is suddenly uprooted in fury and subject to multiple lethal afflictions. These observations, coupled with the mournful expressions ‘What a lioness was your mother among lions’ and ‘Your mother was like a vine,’ suggest that the prophet truly laments the mother’s loss (both her experience of *bereavement* (**verses 2-9**) and her own *death*. The demise of the Davidic dynasty is a bitter pill to swallow...

“Her ‘offspring,’ however, are another matter. Each is described in negative as well as some positive terms: The first cub devours humans; the second does likewise and also devastates and depopulates its territory; the lofty branch (**verse 11**) is arrogant; the self-combusting branch destroys both itself and whatever remains of the mothering vine. Where the text speaks of them, Ezekiel’s dirge becomes parodic [a humorous or satirical imitation], a mock song.” (Pp. 157-159)

As Darr reflects over **chapter 19**, she states that “In his dirge over the princes of Judah, Ezekiel both laments the death of the Davidic dynasty—an institution that for centuries symbolized Yahweh’s ongoing commitment to the descendants of David and to their subjects—and indicts those rulers who proved unworthy of their birthright and whose reigns brought their nation to ruin. We, too, know the
(continued...)

אִמְךָ כַּגֵּפֶן בְּדַמְךָ

Your mother⁸⁵⁸—like the (grape-)vine⁸⁵⁹ in your blood,⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁷(...continued)

pain that comes of caring so deeply about institutions (e.g., political, religious) and persons, yet having to say no to policies and behaviors that imperil them and others. Ezekiel's heart is torn—anger and love commingle and compete within it. Who knows nothing of his experience?

“In its own way, Ezekiel's highly nationalistic oracle reiterates the message of **chapter 17**. Persons (even kings) and communities are responsible for the choices they make and must bear the consequences of those choices. Family status, power, and pride are no license to ravage others, to lay waste what they have labored to build, to leave their lives in ruins. Ezekiel must convince his audience that the Davidides have brought on the death of Judah; its downfall is not Yahweh's ‘fault,’ as if God had capriciously walked away from the perpetual covenant extended, at the Lord's initiative, to David and his line (**2 Samuel 7**). And so he portrays them, in the guise of lions and vine branches, inviting his audience to pursue the riddles of their identities; to perceive their behaviors through the metaphorical lenses of familiar imagery; to be appalled, angered, and dismayed by their actions; and finally to assent to the justice of their demise...

“Ezekiel cannot confront Judah's kings face to face. But he challenges his audience to recognize their rulers in his descriptions of fauna and flora and to confess the justice of God's judgment on their selfishness, their devastating practices, and their arrogance. Unlike **chapter 17**, **Ezekiel 19** does not end with a promise that God will resurrect the Davidic line. The dirge is permitted to stand on its own. There are times for lamenting, for grieving the loss of a person, an institution, an enterprise that has failed to live up to its high calling. Laments permit the expression of sadness and anger, of love and frustration, of grief and acceptance. Ezekiel says nothing of Yahweh, but his words disclose not only his own emotions, but also the ravaged heart of God.” (Pp. 159-160)

⁸⁵⁸

Rabbi Fisch states that by “your mother” Ezekiel means “the state of Judah.” (P. 118)

⁸⁵⁹

As Ezekiel returns to the allegory of a “vine,” compare **chapters 15** and **17** where the vine is used in a similar way.

Hilmer comments on the phrase “Your mother was like a vine,” that “The one previously pictured as a lioness (**verse 2**) is here a vine (see **15:2** and **17:7**).” (P. 1250)

⁸⁶⁰

(continued...)

עַל-מַיִם שְׁתוּלָה

transplanted beside waters--

פְּרִיָּהּ וְעִנְפֶיהָ הִיְתָה

she was bearing fruit and full of branches,⁸⁶¹

מִמַּיִם רַבִּים:

from (her) many waters.

19:11 וַיְהִי־וּלָהּ מְטוֹת עֹז׃

And she had strong stems

אֶל-שִׁבְטֵי מְשָׁלִים

to / for staffs / rods of rulers;⁸⁶²

⁸⁶⁰(...continued)

What does this phrase, “in your blood” mean? Rabbi Fisch explains that most Jewish commentators say it means “in your likeness,” but modern translations prefer the meaning “in your natural vigor.” (P. 118)

Translations of this line vary greatly:

King James, “Thy mother *is* like a vine in thy blood”;

Tanakh, “Your mother was like a vine in your blood”;

New Revised Standard, “Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard”;

New International, “Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard”;

New Jerusalem, “Your mother was like a vine”;

Rahlfs, ἡ μήτηρ σου ὡς ἄμπελος ὡς ἄνθος ἐν ῥόα, “The mother of yours—like a vine, like a flower in a pomegranate tree”

⁸⁶¹

Rabbi Fisch holds that her being planted by the waters, and being fruitful, is figurative of “government by righteous kings in former days when the nation prospered and was powerful.” (P. 118) Compare **Ezekiel 17:5**, where similar language is used.

⁸⁶²

Rabbi Fisch thinks this line is referring to “strong and resolute kings [who] ruled over the nation.” (P. 118)

וַתִּגְבַּהּ קוֹמָתוֹ

and its height was exalted,

עַל־בֵּין עֵבְתִים

over (and) between leafy foilage.

וַיֵּרָא בְגָבוֹהוּ

And it was seen in its height

בְּרֹב דְלִיתָיו:

in / with an abundance of its branches.⁸⁶³

19:12 וַתִּתָּשׁ בְּחֵמָה

But / and it was pulled up in rage,

לְאָרֶץ הַשְּׁלֵכָה

thrown down to the earth;⁸⁶⁴

וּרוּחַ הַקְּדִים הוֹבִישׁ פְּרִיָּהּ

and the east wind dried up its fruit(s);⁸⁶⁵

הַתִּפְרְקוּ וַיִּבְשׂוּ

they were torn off and they dried up / withered.

863

Rabbi Fisch thinks this is referring to the time when Judea “held a position of honor and influence among the surrounding peoples.” (P. 119)

864

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Her fall from high position to her present lowly state is so spectacular that it could only be due to [YHWH’s] will.” (P. 119)

865

Rabbi Fisch thinks that “The allusion is to the invading army of Nebuchadnezzar whose seat of government was situated north-east of the holy land (compare **17:10**). Not only did he destroy the kingdom of Judah, but he also put to death all the heirs of Zedekiah and so made an end of the Davidic dynasty.” (P. 110)

מִטָּה עֲזָה אֵשׁ אֲכָלְתָּהּ:

(The) stem of its strength–fire devoured it!⁸⁶⁶

19:13 וְעַתָּה שְׁתוּלָה בַּמִּדְבָּר

And now--transplanted in the desert / wilderness,

בְּאֶרֶץ צִיָּה וְצָמָא:

in a land of dryness and thirst!⁸⁶⁷

19:14 וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִמִּטָּהּ בְּדִיהָ

And a fire⁸⁶⁸ went forth from (the) stem of its branches;

866

Rabbi Fisch says that the “‘strong rod’ [our ‘stem of its strength’] is figurative of the last king, Zedekiah.” (P. 119)

867

Rabbi Fisch holds that this verse is “descriptive of the existing condition of the people in Babylonian captivity.” (P. 119)

Hilmer likewise states that “Babylonia...to Israel seemed like a desert.” (P. 1251) See **Ezekiel 20:35**,

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-מִדְבָּר הָעַמִּים

And I will bring you (plural) to a desert / wilderness of the peoples.

וְנִשְׁפַּטְתִּי אֶתְכֶם שָׁם

And I will enter into judgment with you there,

פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים:

Faces to faces / Face to face--

868

Hilmer claims that “fire” here means “rebellion.” See **2 Kings 24:20c**,

וַיִּמְרֹד צִדְקִיָּהוּ בַּמֶּלֶךְ בְּבָבֶל:

And Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon’s king.

פְּרִיָּהּ אֲכָלָהּ

it devoured / consumed its fruit.⁸⁶⁹

וְלֹא־הָיָה בָּהּ מִטֵּה־עֹז

And there was not in it a strong stem,

שֶׁבֶט לְמִשׁוֹל

a rod / staff for ruling.⁸⁷⁰

קִינָה הִיא

It is a lamentation / funeral dirge,

וְנִתְּנָה לְקִינָה:

and it was (used) for lamentation / funeral dirge(s).⁸⁷¹

869

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The cause of ruin is to be traced to Zedekiah’s rebellion against Babylon.” (P. 119)

870

Rabbi Fisch says this means “The royal house had perished so that no heir to the throne was left.” (P. 119)

871

Rabbi Fisch comments that this last verse means “the elegy was spoken by the prophet before the disaster occurred, and it became the theme of general lamentation over the fall of the state [of Judah / Israel].” (P. 119)

Eichrodt states that “The basic assumption taken for granted without being stated is that Yahweh takes no pleasure in a kingship founded solely on power, or seeking to justify itself by the exercise of power. Such a heathenish type of kingship cannot avert but only accelerate [YHWH’s] judgment upon Judah. An Israelite king, by self-willed political action, may forget his real duty to be an instrument of the Divine will, and thus destroy ‘the inward significance of political events’ (Fohrer) as interpreted by the prophets. His first duty, the prophets all agree in saying, is to establish law and justice; that is his fundamental [YHWH]-given obligation, to avoid or despise what brings him under judgment...

“The living union between people and land, with the king as its constituted guardian, whose power is nourished by it, is now, when its princely representative is led into captivity, left defenseless
(continued...)

⁸⁷¹(...continued)

and exposed to dissolution. [YHWH's] rejection of the king destroys also the system upon which the life of the people is based. The pronouncement of this rejection in the form of the funeral lament takes it for granted as inevitable that the house of David has been overwhelmed by the powers of death, and cuts off all hopes of the promise given to David surviving the fall of Zedekiah (**Jeremiah 28-29**).” (Pp. 255-56)