

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 24/03/2012



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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

Lev 21-22	Ezek 17-19	Jacob 2:14 – 3:18
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Leviticus 21-22

Laws for the Priests and Fitness for Service (Leviticus 21-22)

Because God is holy, His priests, who serve Him and represent Him to His people, must also be holy.

God is eternal and wholly separate from sin. Human death is the product of sin. So, God's priests must be separate from defilement through death. To accomplish this, the priests were forbidden to become defiled with the death of any person who was not a direct and close family member. Proper mourning was appropriate, and hence mourning for a father or mother, brother or sister, son or daughter was permitted. But otherwise, the priest had to be kept far from the defilement of the dead. For the high priest, even defilement for parents was not permitted, nor outward signs of mourning allowed.

Again, tonsures (area shaving of the head), certain beard trimming and body piercing for the priests are prohibited. Such practices were pagan in origin and God wanted His priesthood to be distinctively non-pagan.

Priestly marriages were also subject to stipulations not bound upon the average Israelite. In the case of the high priest, it very clearly states that he could marry only an Israelite virgin. Moreover, the priests of God had to be physically unblemished to perform certain rites. A blemished or deformed priest could not enter within the Holy Place, nor could he officiate at the altar. He could, however, engage in the other duties of the priesthood and partake of the offerings. The spiritual parallels with Jesus Christ, our High Priest, should be obvious.

Not only did the priests' conduct and station in life have to be holy before a holy God, but even their momentary circumstances had to be holy. To officiate at the altar, a priest had to have no ritual defilement upon him. If defiled by disease, bodily discharge, a dead body, a discharge of semen (which may have symbolized the unfruitful going forth of life), an unclean animal, an unclean person, or by any other means, the priest could not officiate until he was ritually cleansed. Ritual uncleanness was representative of sin. And the holy God cannot be defiled by sin—so everything connected with approach to Him must be without its stain.

Furthermore, if defiled, the priest could not partake of the holy offerings. The priests received portions of certain offerings, which they and their immediate families could eat. But those who partook of the offerings had to also be ritually pure. Thus, as we can see, those who serve God and benefit from His service, must all be clean.

The concluding portions of this section deal with sacrificial fitness. The animals sacrificed to God were symbolic of Christ in different ways. Christ was morally and spiritually perfect and unblemished. Thus, the animals that typified Him had to be physically perfect and unblemished. A sacrifice or offering made with a defective animal was rejected, and an insult to the perfect God. Carnal man would prefer to give God the defects and keep the good for himself. But this God will not allow. Moreover, it was required that sacrifices be from the worshiper's own goods—not from a foreigner's goods. Every sacrifice must “cost” the one sacrificing. Finally notice, once again, that the chapter closes with an emphasis on holiness.

Ezekiel 17-19

Parable of the Eagles and God's Judgment on Oath Breaking (Ezekiel 17)

Chapter 17 is a message concerning Jewish royalty and the world powers of Ezekiel's time. It is first presented as a riddle or parable of two great eagles, a cedar tree and a vine (verses 1-10). The exiles with Ezekiel are evidently given some time to make sense of it, but they are unable to (compare verses 11-12). So God directs His prophet to make the meaning plain (verses 11-21). Jesus would later use this type of teaching technique.

The first eagle (verse 1) represented Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar (verse 12). The eagle was used to symbolize both the tool God used to punish as well as the speed at which the punishment was carried out (compare Deuteronomy 28:49; Isaiah 46:11; Hosea 8:1). The large, powerful wings enabled the eagle to fly long distances and symbolized the extent of the territory under the eagle's power. “Full plumage” (verse 1, NIV) represented a populous empire. “Various colors” revealed the empire to be composed of different peoples from various nations.

“Lebanon” denoted the entire area at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea (the Levant), the region of Israel and Syria. As God had told Israel in Joshua 1:4, “From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory” (see also 2 Kings 14:9). Jerusalem was the chief city of this region. Moreover, as noted in the Bible Reading Program comments on Jeremiah 22, another passage in which Jerusalem is referred to as Lebanon, the Phoenician area of Tyre and Sidon commonly referred to as Lebanon was the source of the cedar wood used in the construction of the royal buildings of Jerusalem in the time of David and Solomon. Thus the cedar of Lebanon in Ezekiel 16:3 symbolized Judah and the Davidic royal family. The cedar's “highest branch” (verse 3) and “topmost shoot” (verse 4, NIV), which the eagle broke off and carried away, were the king who was removed from the throne and his princes (verse 12). They were taken to a “city of merchants” in a “land of trade.”

Even without the explicit interpretation, this was clearly Babylon, as the previous chapter of Ezekiel referred to “the land of the trader, Chaldea” (16:29).

The riddle should not have been hard to unravel so far. This had already happened in 597 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar deported King Jehoiachin or Jeconiah to Babylon along with most of the nobility. Indeed, this is when Ezekiel himself and the exiles among whom he lived went into captivity. Continuing the parable, Nebuchadnezzar then “took also of the seed of the land” (17:5, KJV) a particular seed and planted “it” in a fertile field, setting it up as a willow tree. (The New King James interpolation of “some of the seed of the land” is evidently incorrect.) The seed here was a reference to “a member of the royal family” (verse 13, NIV) who replaced the topmost shoot. The fertile field was simply the Promised Land. God had earlier described it as “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs” (Deuteronomy 8:7).

The new king was set up as a “willow by abundant water” (Ezekiel 17:5, NIV), illustrating his prosperous life as king but also his total dependence on Babylon for his rule, just as a willow is dependent on water. This too had already happened when Jeconiah was removed.

Nebuchadnezzar set up Jeconiah’s uncle, Josiah’s third son Mattaniah now renamed Zedekiah, as ruler over Judah. The “spreading vine of low stature,” with its branches turned toward the Babylonian eagle and its roots firmly planted under it in the soil of the Promised Land, pictured Zedekiah and the people of Judah under him continuing to flourish—but only as a subject vassal kingdom under Babylon.

Another great eagle enters the scene in verse 7, which, as God explains, represented Egypt and its pharaoh (compare verse 15). Egypt was also a populous empire of “full plumage” (NIV). The roots and branches of the vine now stretch toward this eagle, seeking to be watered by it instead of Babylon, symbolizing the entire nation reaching out to Egypt for help to gain independence from Babylon. God explains, “But he [Zedekiah] rebelled against him [Nebuchadnezzar] by sending his ambassadors to Egypt, that they might give him horses and many people” (verse 15). Yet, as God proclaims, this effort would fail.

The Jewish ruler was a fool. His throne was safe and he was protected by Babylon. His kingdom would be strengthened and the throne passed to his children if he remained faithful to Babylon. But he would not. The vine, king and nation, would not survive because of his foolish actions. It would be uprooted to wither when touched by the “east wind”—symbolic of destruction from Babylon in the east (verses 8-10).

This mention of Zedekiah’s rebellion was prophetic, as it had not yet happened. Ezekiel 17 falls within chapters 12-19, a section dated to 592-591 B.C. (compare 8:1; 20:1). Yet it was not until 588 B.C., when Pharaoh Hophra came to the throne of Egypt, that Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon. And this rebellion did indeed prove to be the historical impetus for the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:20-25:1). In response, Nebuchadnezzar sent an army and laid siege to the city. In the summer of 586, the food supply was gone in Jerusalem. The wall was breached and the city fell to the Babylonians, who destroyed it.

In verses 15-21, God decries Zedekiah's betrayal of his oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar (see verse 13). Psalm 15:4 gives God's standard for giving one's word: "he who swears to his own hurt and does not change"—i.e., does not go back on it. Why should there be different standards for nations or kings? In fact, this wouldn't even have been to Zedekiah's hurt. The relationship with Babylon guaranteed peace in the region due to Babylon's powerful army. The vine was "planted in fertile soil and placed ...beside abundant waters." Zedekiah ought to have realized that his position could not be improved by rebellion. But even if it could, he had sworn his loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar.

This covenant was not an international treaty freely entered into, but one imposed on him by a conquering king. Nevertheless, Zedekiah had publicly agreed to it. Most importantly, the oath was made in God's name (2 Chronicles 36:13), and God considered it binding. In fact, God considers breaking a vow made in His name to be treason against Him (Ezekiel 17:20). Ezekiel relays God's message that those who break their oaths and covenants will not be delivered. As a personal judgment against Zedekiah, God says, "Because he had given his hand in pledge and yet did all these things, he shall not escape" (verse 18, NIV). God was true to His own word. As already pictured in Ezekiel 12:12-14, Zedekiah would attempt an escape at the time the walls of Jerusalem fell, but would be caught, blinded and taken captive and his troops killed. And that's exactly what happened (Jeremiah 52:7-11).

Transplanting of the Davidic Throne (Ezekiel 17)

Continuing the imagery of the parable mentioned earlier in the chapter, the last three verses in Ezekiel 17 relay a remarkable prophecy. It begins with God stating, "I [not Babylon this time but God Himself] will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar..." (verse 22, KJV). The New King James Version says "one of the highest branches," but that is incorrect. God is taking of, something from, the highest branch. The highest branch is of course the king. And what does God take that is of this king? "A tender one from the topmost of its young twigs" (NRSV). The young twigs of the branch would be the king's children. A "tender" one would seem to signify a female, especially when we consider that Zedekiah's sons were all killed. This tender twig is then planted in "a high and prominent mountain." A mountain often signifies a great nation in Bible prophecy—this one being apparently one of the foremost nations in the world. God then specifies what he means: "On the mountain height [the very top of the nation, the throne] of Israel [not Judah!] I will plant it."

Most commentators misinterpret the meaning. Some see the prophecy as signifying Jeconiah's descendant Zerubbabel, who later returned to Judea from the Babylonian exile as a governor. Yet he was only a governor under the Persians, not ruling in majesty as a king over "birds of every sort"—many other peoples. Furthermore, he was not cut out from Judah when the nation and royal family stood as a tall Lebanon cedar, but long after the nation had been carried away into captivity. The planting of the twig in the high mountain of Israel in this interpretation is seen as the return of Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. But Judah was not then or anytime afterward a great nation that came to rule over many other peoples. In fact, the Jewish state remained mostly

subjugated to foreign powers and eventually ceased to exist once again. The bringing down of the high, fruitful tree (verse 24) is said to be the fall of Zedekiah while the exaltation of the low, dry tree is claimed to be the restoration of the lineage of Jeconiah. But his lineage was never really restored, as none of his descendants were ever to occupy the throne (Jeremiah 22:30).

Recognizing the problems with Zerubbabel in the interpretation, many commentators see the prophecy as messianic, as the Messiah would come from the line of David. Yet there are problems with this too. When Jesus Christ lived, neither Judah nor its royal family could in any way be symbolized by a tall cedar, as the area was then occupied by the Romans and no Davidic king had ruled there for more than 500 years. And the bringing down of the high tree and exaltation of the low tree does not fit such an analogy. So the explanation is given this way: The cropped off young twig was a member of the Davidic family at the time of Ezekiel from whom Jesus descended, Himself a branch from the replanting in Jerusalem. Often this twig is understood to be the lineage of Jeconiah through Zerubbabel continuing on to Christ. But whereas Jesus' adoptive father Joseph came from this lineage, He Himself did not physically descend from Jeconiah and this Zerubbabel or else He would not be a legitimate heir to the throne. Jesus, through His mother Mary, sprang from the Davidic line of Nathan, which was nowhere near the "highest branches of the high cedar" at any time. And again, the high and low trees don't fit.

So what does the prophecy mean? As explained in our online publication *The Throne of Britain: Its Biblical Origin and Future*, it concerns a transfer of the line of David in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah from Judah to Israel. The tender sprig of the highest branch taken by God and planted elsewhere represents one of the daughters of Zedekiah who was under the protection of Jeremiah (compare Jeremiah 43:5-6), God's instrument used for pulling down the throne and planting it elsewhere (compare Jeremiah 1:10)—moving the Davidic lineage from Judah to the British Isles. (See our online publication just referred to at www.ucg.org/brp/materials/throne/ for a much more thorough and detailed explanation.)

All of northern and western Europe at this time was dominated by the northern tribes of Israel — taken into captivity by the Assyrians years before, but now a large, migratory nation long on the move after the collapse of the Assyrian Empire. Eventually, the leading tribe of Israel, Ephraim, would settle in the British Isles, come under the Davidic throne and expand to become the greatest empire in history, ruling many peoples over a vast portion of the earth (send for or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more.)

"And," God says, "all the trees of the field [other nations of the earth] shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it" (Ezekiel 17:24). Judah was the "high tree" and Israel the "low tree" from the time the two kingdoms split in the days of Rehoboam, due to David's throne ruling over Judah and not Israel. Judah had been a "green tree," fruitful with Davidic royalty, and Israel a "dry tree" throughout that period. God would reverse the positions, resulting in a major mark on world history.

Personal Accountability (Ezekiel 18)

Perhaps as we are reading through the prophets and hear all of the judgments against Israel, Judah or surrounding nations, we may be tempted to think of it as only so much history— history that doesn't really concern us. After all, the judgments are for the evil deeds of people who lived more than 2,500 years ago. The reader might ask, "How can they apply to me?"

In this chapter God clearly lays down the rule of judgment that applies to everyone at all times. This is the principle that He will use with all people in determining their final reward or punishment. It agrees with that very ancient rule God spoke to Cain: "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" (Genesis 4:7).

After hearing the warnings of coming destruction given by God's prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Jews apparently began to talk among themselves, essentially saying that God was unfair. They felt that they were going to be punished for the sins of their forefathers. They didn't see their generation as all that evil when compared to the previous ones. So they resentfully came up with a saying: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2) or, as the New Living Translation renders it, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children's mouths pucker at the taste." As we earlier read, God also used Jeremiah to confute this false proverb (Jeremiah 31:29).

It is obviously illogical that one person would eat something sour but another have the sour taste in his mouth. And by this they meant to symbolize something they considered just as illogical. Their real complaint: It isn't fair for one generation to be punished for the sins of previous generations! This was the response of the people to the warnings of the prophets— concluding that God was obviously in the wrong, justifying themselves. They were perhaps twisting the meaning of the principle God mentioned in Exodus 20:5—"visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." God meant that children are negatively affected by their parents' sins—that sin can have far-reaching consequences, especially when children learn their parents' ideas and emulate their behavior. He did not mean that even though the children are innocent, they must be punished for their parents' mistakes.

God tells the people to stop using the proverb and that their reasoning is completely off base (Ezekiel 18:3). He points out up front that He certainly has the right to punish. All people— parents and children—belong to Him (Ezekiel 18:4). He is the Creator of all things. People are accountable to Him, not the other way around. He then explains that every individual is held responsible for his own conduct. "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). "Soul" here simply means a living, physical being or person (compare Genesis 2:7, KJV). (As a side note, this helps to demonstrate that the Bible does not teach the concept of an "immortal soul." Rather, we see here that a "soul" is simply a person—and is quite mortal.) Conversely, "But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right...he shall surely live" (Ezekiel 18:5, 9).

Personal accountability was clearly established in the law that God had already given. Deuteronomy 24:16 stated, "The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the

children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.” God does not punish the children for the fathers’ sins unless they follow in their sinful ways and “fill up the measure of their father’s guilt,” as the Pharisees of Jesus’ day did (see Matthew 23:32).

In emphasizing the point, the example is given of a righteous father (Ezekiel 18:5-9), an unrighteous son (verses 10-13, 18), and a righteous grandson (verses 14-17). Not only is the point clearly made by using these relationships, but for Ezekiel’s Jewish audience the personal examples of three well-known kings of Judah would probably have come to mind—Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah.

In the description of the righteous man and his grandson, it is evident that a just man does what is right. The list of characteristics includes not worshipping idols and not “eat[ing] on the mountains” (verses 6, 11, 15; 22:9)—that is, not partaking at high places, not participating in pagan worship at pagan shrines. The list further includes not defiling another’s wife, not committing robbery and not “approach[ing] a woman during her impurity” (18:6) or, in today’s terms, not having “intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period” (CEV). This last item, also listed as a sin in 22:10, might appear to modern sensibilities to be out of place in a list of moral prohibitions, but it should be remembered that this was included in the Mosaic law’s list of sexual abominations (Leviticus 18:19) and was punishable by death (20:18). (See the Bible Reading Program’s comments on these passages for more on the issue.) The point about not exacting usury or increase—lending money at interest—should be understood as not charging interest when giving personal loans to others in need. (It does not prohibit lending at interest as part of business or banking, as Jesus Christ spoke approvingly of this practice.)

Of course, righteousness is not just following a list of don’ts. It is important to notice in Ezekiel 18 that God points out the positive actions of one who is righteous. Not only does a righteous man obey the Eighth Commandment against stealing, but he is careful to watch out and provide for the needs of others. He practices the give way of life! He takes care of the hungry and covers the cold with a garment. Is this not “true religion” as taught by the writers of the New Testament? A righteous man has internalized God’s commandments and lives them outwardly as well as internally.

The unrighteous son, on the other hand, does not live as God commands. Matthew Henry’s Commentary notes on this passage, “It is...no uncommon case, but a very melancholy one, that the child of a very godly father, notwithstanding all the instructions given him, the good education he has had and the needful rebukes that have been given him, and the restraints he has been laid under, after all the pains taken with him and prayers put up for him, may yet prove notoriously wicked and vile, the grief of his father, the shame of his family.”

Down through history fathers have desired to have their sons follow after them in their offices or accomplishments. But God is clear: A good father does not pile up “merit” for his son. How often in history and modern times have we seen a son promoted to a high position of responsibility under his father or to his father’s office only to find that the son proves to be an evil man who

lacks the character necessary for the job? Such was the case with several kings of Judah, most notably Hezekiah's son Manasseh. He perpetrated all of the evils listed in Ezekiel 17 even though his father was one of Judah's most righteous kings.

Yet recall that Manasseh eventually came to repent of his evil ways. This principle is also addressed in Ezekiel 17. God shows that He will reward or punish according to the change made in a person's life—if that change is permanent. If a wicked man repents, turning from his sins, God will not bring punishment on Him (Ezekiel 18:21-22). Repentance means that a person's entire state of mind has changed from one of disobedience to one of obedience. He now walks a new path that leads in a new direction—and this is reflected in his actions. God desires repentance, not punishment. The point is made that God takes absolutely no pleasure in the death of the wicked. As the Giver of life, He does not want to destroy anyone. He hates sin because of what it does; He does not hate the sinner. We do not truly turn from sin unless we come to hate it too. We must set our affection on that which is lawful and right and agrees with the Word of God. If we do this, God promises to forgive our sins and give us eternal life.

Herein, we see a truly "New Testament" concept in that a repentant person could find forgiveness for wrongdoing and have the opportunity to start over. Of course, we have a much greater understanding of this whole process today. Jesus Christ has been sacrificed and given His life in atonement for the sins of the world. The Old Testament sacrificial system looked forward to this fact. It is through the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice that our sins are forgiven—yet, still, only if we repentantly determine to live our lives according to God's commands from now on.

Thankfully, regardless of how evil someone may have been throughout life, if the mind is changed or converted and one begins truly seeking and obeying God, God will forgive and forget his past transgressions. The way of God involves mercy, forgiveness and grace. That's not to say that this passage buttresses the idea of "a deathbed repentance," for repentance involves both a change of heart and then the followed appropriate change of action. That takes time.

But what of the opposite situation, where a person who has been living righteously turns to a life of evil? Will his past make up for his present? Human reasoning concludes that all deeds should be placed in a balance—good on one side, bad on the other. Then, if the good deeds outweigh the bad, you win the prize. We hear this idea even today as people refer to themselves as "pretty much a good person" or say of the deceased at a funeral that "his good outweighed his bad." God's perfect judgment, however, requires the right state of mind and behavior be maintained to the end (see Matthew 24:13). This does not mean that a righteous man will never slip up and sin. He will (1 John 1:8). But when he does he repents, relying on God's promise to forgive the repentant as in Ezekiel 18, and continues to seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

A warning is given to people to not turn from this way of righteousness. God's words are clear that a person who turns from the truth will die in his sins. The New Testament explains in stark terms that ultimate rejection of God will lead to eternal death. We need to understand that for God's true servants, this life is a judgment period (1 Peter 4:17). The time of evaluation lasts for the duration of our lives after we come to understand what God has done for us and what He expects of us.

God points out that the only way to be ultimately saved from death is to have a change of heart—a converted one made possible only by a new spirit. The final point of many of Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's messages is the necessity for us to have a new spirit and a new heart. Human beings need the Spirit of God working in them to truly have the transformed heart and mind that God requires. (To help you better understand, send for our download our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.)

Lamentation for the Princes of Israel (Ezekiel 19)

Chapter 19 follows right on from chapter 18. God directs His prophet to bewail the uprooting of the nation. "The exiles' last hope was that Zedekiah could be trusted to throw off the Babylonian yoke. Ezekiel now demolishes that in a funeral dirge chanted over Judah's leaders" (Bible Reader's Companion, chaps. 19-21 summary).

That the term "princes of Israel" (verse 1) refers to Judah's leaders in Ezekiel's time is apparent from the details given about particular individuals, though it is possible that there are dual references here that could also apply to the end-time fall of Israel and Judah.

In the imagery of the first part of the lament, the "mother" of the people is portrayed as a lioness. Israel as a whole had been pictured as a lioness: "It now must be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, and lifts itself up like a lion; it shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain" (Numbers 23:23-24; compare Micah 5:8-9). The tribe of Judah had been similarly portrayed in the context of it possessing Israel's royal lineage: "Judah...your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey...you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion who, shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah..." (Genesis 49:8-10). Jerusalem, the nation's capital, was referred to as Ariel ("Lion of God") in Isaiah 29:1.

In verses 3-4 of Ezekiel 19, the lioness (i.e., the nation) sets up one of her cubs as a lion, a national leader. As *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains: "The first whelp was Jehoahaz (vv. 3-4), who had been placed on the throne by the Judeans following the death of his father, Josiah (2 Kings 23:31). Jehoahaz learned, as a young lion, to tear and devour mankind, doing evil in the sight of the Lord (v. 3; 2 Kings 23:32). Becoming world renowned for the violence in his reign of three months, he was seized in 609 B.C. like a hunted lion and brought bound to Egypt where he ultimately died (v. 4; 2 Kings 23:33-34; 2 Chronicles 36:1-4; Jer 22:10-12)" (note on verses 1-9).

The lioness then sets up a new lion cub. The next king of Judah was Jehoahaz's brother Jehoiakim. But he was set up as ruler not by Judah itself but by the Egyptian pharaoh. And though Jehoiakim was brought before Nebuchadnezzar in chains as described in verse 9, he was not removed from office or taken from the Holy Land as described here. Rather, "the second whelp was Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin [or Jeconiah, who became king upon his father's death and not by foreign appointment] (vv. 5-9; cf. 2 Kings 24:8-17; 2 Chronicles 36:8-10); Jehoiakim [a foreign appointment] was bypassed...[Jehoiachin's] reign was not substantially different from his father's, for Jehoiachin too learned to devour mankind. Jehoiachin destroyed cities and desolated the land (v. 7). Yet he also did not escape the snare of the 'lion-hunting' nations that trapped him in their 'pit' and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar in a 'cage' in 597 B.C. Later he was released (2 Kings 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:9-11). No longer would he 'roar' in Judah" (same note).

For the second part of the lamentation (Ezekiel 19:10-14), the imagery shifts to that of the vine, another symbol of the nation as we've seen in chapters 15 and 17.

Where Ezekiel 19:10 says, "Your mother was like a vine in your bloodline," the word translated as "bloodline" in the New King James Version literally means "blood" (KJV). The exact meaning here is debated. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary prefers the meaning of "'in the blood of thy grapes,' i.e., in her full strength, as the red wine is the strength of the grape" (note on verse 10). The Ferrar Fenton Translation says "vigorous vine plant."

The nation, explains The Expositor's Bible Commentary in its note on verses 10-14, "had grown large and fruitful during the kingdom period with many branches for ruling scepters (or kings) (vv. 10b-11). Yet this vine was finally plucked up and cast to the ground, where its exposed roots withered under the blasts of the east wind (Babylonia) (cf. 17:6-10, 15). The vine (or nation) was transplanted into a desert place—into captivity (v. 13). The 'fire' that 'spread from one of its main branches' [NIV throughout quotation] was the destruction that Zedekiah, Judah's current ruler, had brought on Judah ('consumed its fruit') (v. 14a). Judah's present condition was the responsibility, in part, of Zedekiah. Ezekiel had answered the exiles' question (in this chapter) by demonstrating the foolishness of trusting in Zedekiah, for he was partially responsible for the imminent judgment. In fact, there was not a 'strong branch' in Judah at all—no one 'fit for a ruler's scepter' (v. 14b), not even Zedekiah, who would be deported in 586 B.C. There was no hope! Judgment was coming!"

James 2:14-3:18

Does belief alone deliver? No. What use is it for anyone to say he has belief but does not have works? If someone is hungry or without clothing, words alone do not help them. They need literally food and literal clothing to take care of their needs.

Belief is demonstrated to the world by actions, so that they are visible. Belief without works is dead. Abraham was declared right by works. Doing works perfects the belief. A man is declared right by works, and not by belief alone.

In chapter 3, James advises of the great responsibility of being teachers because of the greater expectation and judgment. We are so susceptible to stumbling in our walk by our words. The large and strong horse is bridled and guided by a bit in the mouth. Large waters vessels also are controlled by a small instrument called a rudder. So too the tongue for us is a little member yet boasts greatly.

How a little fire kindles a great forest. (Exodus 35:3)

All things in the earth have been tamed by mankind, but no man is able to tame the tongue. Just as a fountain of water cannot put out both sweet and bitter water, it is wrong to bless God without mouth and curse out brother. Our brothers are made in the image of God.

If you have bitter jealousy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast against and lie against the truth. This is not heavenly wisdom. It is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. For from these come every foul deed.

Wisdom from above is: clean, peaceable, gentle, ready to obey, filled with compassion and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.