

Ezekiel – Ah! Jerusalem!

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The first fourteen chapters of the Book of Ezekiel lay bare **the sins of the people of Israel**. Ezekiel has dealt specifically with each group of **“thought leaders”**: priests, prophets, civic leaders, and elders. The objective of his preaching was to **convince the exiles** that the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was God’s will, and it would happen. Ezekiel’s mission was to **bring to repentance** those persons among the exiles whom God was calling to form a **remnant of True Worshipers**. God now inspires Ezekiel to use a new technique – **“wisdom literature”**. (Ez15:6b-8, 16:52, 60-61a, 62, 63b)

The Wood of the Vine: YHWH presents a **riddle** to Ezekiel (Ez15:1-5). Jerusalem is **“the vine”**; the people left in Jerusalem are **“the wood”**. Israel, represented by Jerusalem, had proven useless in serving God’s intended purpose for them, **“when it was whole, it was used for nothing”**. Jerusalem was already devastated by Nebuchadnezzar in 597BC, now the few remaining inhabitants were like charred vine-wood, **“can it ever be used for anything”**. The **solution to the riddle** is a message for the exiles – a reiteration of the ongoing message that Ezekiel had been giving them: **“so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem, they have acted faithlessly”** (Ez15:6-8).

Riddle, Parable, Allegory: A dictionary definition of “allegory”: “... a long and complicated story with an underlying moral meaning different from the surface meaning. An allegory may be considered an extended metaphor.” There are two words in Hebrew which include this range of meaning:

- הִידָּה - *hidah*, a feminine noun, “riddle”, “parable”, “difficult question”
Ezekiel uses *hidah* once: **Ezekiel 17:2**
- מָשָׁל - *mashal*, a masculine noun, “proverb”, “byword”
Ezekiel uses *mashal* nine times: Ezekiel 12:22,23, 14:8, **16:44, 17:2**, 18:2,3, 20:49, 24:3
- The word “allegory” derives from the Greek: ἀλληγορέω – *allēgoreō*, a verb, “speak allegorically”, “make an analogy”. It occurs once in the New Testament: Galatians 4:24
- The material in **Ezekiel chapter sixteen**, can clearly be classed as “allegory”

Jerusalem – the Unfaithful Wife: The riddle of chapter fifteen serves as an introduction to the **two allegories of chapter sixteen** (Ez15:6b-8a, 16:1-3a). Verses 3b through 34 of chapter sixteen recount a baby exposed to die by its parents; a benefactor redeems the baby, raises it, and takes it for a wife; the woman becomes exceedingly beautiful and vain; which causes her to turn unfaithful and she becomes the worst kind of whore. **YHWH entered into a “marriage” arrangement with Israel** (Ez16:8), but Israel could NOT resist the “pulls of the world” – “spiritual” whoring after sin (Ez16:30). In the end, YHWH declares **retributive justice** on “the whore” (Ez16:35,37a,38a,40b,43bα).

Sisters: Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom: This allegory contrasts the sins of Jerusalem with two other condemned sinners (Ez16:44-47). The allegory is introduced by a “proverb”, a *mashal*, **“like mother like daughter”**. The allusion to **descent from “Hittites” and “Amorites”** was introduced in the first allegory, but it is more significant to this one. The original inhabitants of Canaan developed heinous religious practices: instead of purging these practices, Israel embraced them making “Hittites” and “Amorites” their spiritual heritage. **Jerusalem’s sins exceed her sisters’ sins**. God’s desire is for “Jerusalem” to “be ashamed”, “to bear her disgrace”, to **repent** – now Jerusalem is beginning to represent those God is calling to be True Worshipers (Ez16:48-52). YHWH now goes to the end result of the Plan of God: **there will be a restoration in the World Tomorrow**. The **New Israel will be repentant** and will be the example nation to “her sisters” and to the whole world (Ez16:53-63, Ez34:10).

Two Eagles and a Vine: This is a fairly complicated “parable” – it describes the fate of the final “legitimate” king of Israel, **Jehoiachin**, and the “caretaker” king set up by Nebuchadnezzar, **Zedekiah** (Ez17:1-8). The first “eagle” is Nebuchadnezzar; the second “eagle” is Egypt; “the topmost of its young twigs” is Jehoiachin; “the seed of the land” is Zedekiah; “a low spreading vine” is Jerusalem. YHWH propounds the “riddle”- how can a covenant breaker survive (Ez17:9-10)? YHWH provides the interpretation of the “parable” (Ez17:11-15) and the detailed fate of Zedekiah (Ez17:16-21). **The parable ends by extending it to the Messiah and the role of Jerusalem as the center of the Kingdom of God in the World Tomorrow** (Ez17:22-24). Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, became a type of the Messiah (Mt1:12, Lk3:27b, Zc4:6-10a). **“I have spoken, and I will do it” – the Plan of God is clear and certain!**