

A VINE OF LOW STATURE

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God has always required people to be faithful to their word. To make a vow, promise, or covenant, and then not fulfill it faithfully is unacceptable to the Lord. Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 says, "*When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*" This is actually the basis for why God says he *hates* the practice of divorce.

Marriage is a covenant that is entered into by mutual vows. God rebuked the Israelites for dealing treacherously with the "wife of thy *covenant*" by divorcing them (Mal 2:13-16). Ezekiel chapter 17 uses a riddle about a covenant breaker to remind us to always be faithful in everything that we say and do.

A vine destined to wither

Ezekiel 17:1-10 says, "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; and say, Thus saith the Lord God; a great eagle with great wings, longwinged, full of feathers, which had divers colors, came unto Lebanon, and took the highest branch of the cedar: he cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it into a land of traffic; he set it in a city of merchants. He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and the roots thereof were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs. There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers: and, behold, this vine did bend her roots toward him, and shot forth her branches toward him, that he might water it by the furrows of her plantation. It was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. Say thou, Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up the roots thereof, and cut off the fruit thereof, that it wither? it shall wither in all the leaves of her spring, even without great power or many people to pluck it up by the roots thereof. Yea, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind touches it? it shall wither in the furrows where it grew."

Zedekiah the covenant breaker

God explained that the first eagle is "the king of Babylon" who had "come

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(continued)

to Jerusalem” and “taken the king thereof, and the princes thereof, and led them with him to Babylon” (Ezek 17:12). This is the “top of his young twigs” that the first eagle “cropped off” and “carried into a land of traffic” (Ezek 17:4). King Nebuchadnezzar had removed young Jehoiachin from the throne of Judah (2 Kgs 24:8-16; 2 Chr 36:9-10). He then took “of the king’s seed, and made a covenant with him, and has taken an oath of him: he has also taken the mighty of the land” (Ezek 17:13). This is the “seed of the land” that the first eagle planted “in a fruitful field” by great waters (Ezek 17:5). This refers to king Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17; 2 Chr 36:10). But he was a “vine of low stature” (Ezek 17:6), as Nebuchadnezzar was ensuring that his “kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping of his covenant it might stand” (Ezek 17:14). The second eagle is the king of Egypt. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar “in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people” (Ezek 17:15). This is how the “vine did bend her roots” towards the second eagle (Ezek 17:7). But the withering of the vine (Ezek 17:9-10) illustrates that Zedekiah would fall. God asked, “Shall he prosper? shall he escape that does such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered (Ezek 17:15)?” God answered, saying, “As I live, saith the Lord God, surely in the place where the king dwells that made him king, *whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake*, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounts, and building forts, to cut off many persons: *seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant*, when, lo, he had given his hand, and has done all these things, he shall not escape” (Ezek 17:16-18). This parable signified to Israel that king Zedekiah, who broke his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar by making an alliance with Egypt (see also 2 Kgs 24:20; 2 Chr 36:13; Jer 52:1-3), would be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon and be carried to Babylon and die there (2 Kgs 25:1-7; Jer 52:4-11). This principle is not confined to the Old Testament. Romans 1:28-32 gives a detailed list of the characteristics of the wicked, and includes “covenant breakers.” Psalm 15:1 asks, “Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” In God’s answer, He includes “he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not” (Psa 15:4). May we always be faithful down to the smallest things, so that God will one day entrust us with His “true riches” (Luke 16:10-11).