



Thank you for coming today! Before we start today, I would like to speak briefly about current events concerning Israel.

December 6th President Trump made a bold, brave, and in my humble opinion, correct move to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to begin the move of our embassy to Jerusalem. Will this spark more violence? Possibly. But, not recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital and not moving our embassy has not prevented any hatred or violence. In fact, it has emboldened those who commit terror to feel that threats and terror get them what they want. Of course Europe has gone crazy over the President's recognition of Jerusalem. EU High Commissioner on Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Theresa May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel slammed Trump for recognizing what has been reality for a long time. In fact people who commit violence against Jews in Europe are often acquitted as it is seen as justifiable protest against Israel.

So far this year, the United Nations has passed 18 resolutions against Israel. This includes 6 resolutions in one day on Thursday, November 30th. Those 6 resolutions included a resolution that was approved in a 151-6 vote with nine abstentions that stated "any actions taken by Israel, the occupying power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever."

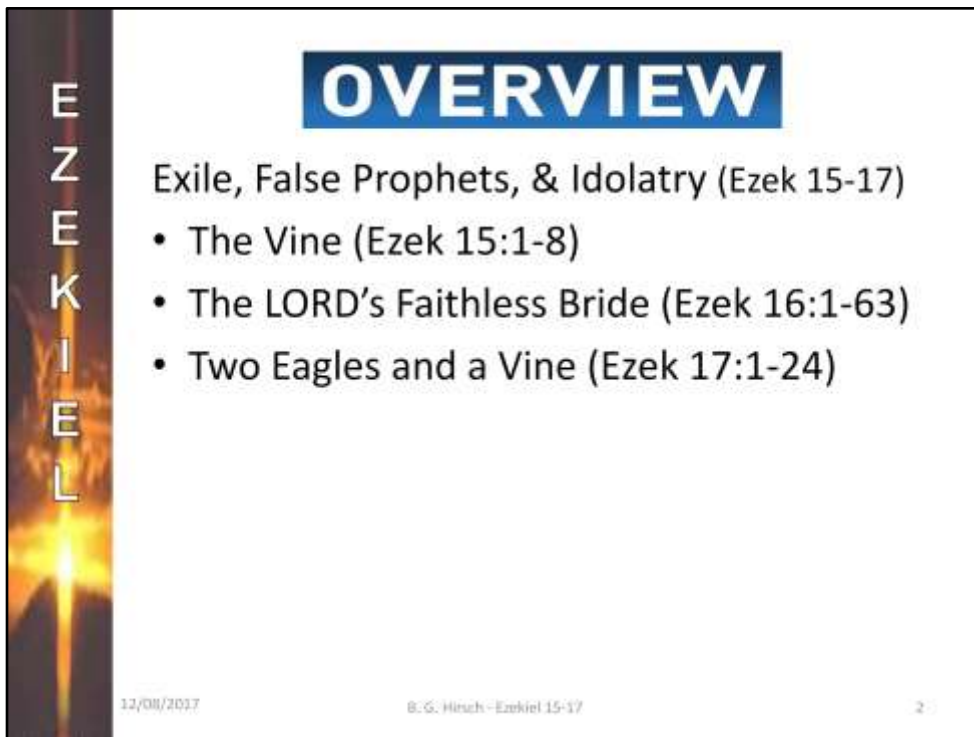
The six countries that voted against the resolution were Canada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, the U.S. and Israel. The nine countries that abstained were Australia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Honduras, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, South Sudan, and Togo.

President Trump's move repudiated this false and hateful UN resolution.

This is just more evidence that we are in the last days. The events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 seem very close indeed.

Let's pray.

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The slide features a vertical title 'EZEKIEL' on the left, with each letter aligned with a corresponding image of a flame or fire. The main title 'OVERVIEW' is in a blue box at the top center. Below it, the text 'Exile, False Prophets, & Idolatry (Ezek 15-17)' is followed by a bulleted list of three topics. At the bottom, there is a date '12/08/2017', a name 'B.G. Hirsch - Ezekiel 15-17', and a small icon of a person.

EZEKIEL

OVERVIEW

Exile, False Prophets, & Idolatry (Ezek 15-17)

- The Vine (Ezek 15:1-8)
- The LORD's Faithless Bride (Ezek 16:1-63)
- Two Eagles and a Vine (Ezek 17:1-24)

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This week's lesson will examine chapters 15, 16, and 17 of Ezekiel. Chapter 15 is only 8 verses, but chapter 16 is the longest chapter in Ezekiel.

In these chapters we will see the LORD give allegories regarding Israel and Jerusalem.

An allegory, according to Dictionary.com, "is a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; it is a figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another." Essentially, the LORD will tell stories using objects that are representative of the Jewish people and Jerusalem in order to drive home the point that He is making.


The LORD will liken Israel to a grapevine in chapter 15.

In chapter 16 the LORD will speak of Jerusalem as a faithless bride.

And in chapter 17, the LORD will speak of two eagles and a vine in discussing Egypt, Babylon, and Judah.

Let's begin...

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Review

- Ezekiel, a priest, a prophet, and a watchman is in Babylon speaking forth God's warnings
- Zedekiah was set up by Nebuchadnezzar as king over Judah in Jerusalem
- Zedekiah rebellion will bring Jerusalem's destruction by 4 severe judgments
- The LORD is against the false prophets and prophetesses

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Let's review.

Ezekiel is a priest from Jerusalem who was taken to Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's second conquest in 598 B.C. He has been in Babylon for more than 6 years. During this time the LORD dramatically commissioned Ezekiel as a prophet and watchman to the exiles in Babylon.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar set up Zedekiah as the king in place of Jehoiachin , who was taken to Babylon in 598 B.C. Zedekiah's rebellion to Nebuchadnezzar's rule is the catalyst for the ultimate destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, which will come in 586 B.C. after a siege of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is a prophet in Jerusalem who is telling Zedekiah the same things that Ezekiel is telling the exiles in Babylon.

The last time we met we heard that the LORD is against the false prophets and prophetesses in Babylon, and He is similarly against the false prophets in Jerusalem that Jeremiah is prophesying against.

We also saw that the LORD intends to delay no longer and that He will destroy Jerusalem with four severe judgments of sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence.

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The Vine

- Different idioms used for Israel
 - Olive Tree (covenant relationship – Rom 11:16-21, Jer 11:16)
 - Fig Tree (National Israel – Matt 21:9)
 - Bramble Bush (failed relationship – Judg 9:14-15, Luke 6:14)
 - Vine (Spiritual relationship – Is 5:1-7, Ezek 15)
- Purpose of a vine is to bear fruit; otherwise it is only good for the fire, but it doesn't burn well
- This is the fate that the inhabitants of Jerusalem will suffer

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Let's read chapter 15 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 8. *(Read verses 1-8.)*

Different idioms are used in scripture to represent the nation of Israel. Probably the four best known are the olive tree, the fig tree, the bramble bush, and the vine.

The olive tree speaks of the LORD's covenant relationship with Israel. Paul speaks of Israel as an olive tree in Romans 11:16-21, and Jeremiah 11:16 also speaks of Israel as an olive tree.

The Fig tree speaks of national Israel. You may remember that Jesus, in Matthew 21:9, when He looked for fruit on a fig tree and found none; He cursed the fig tree and it withered away.

The bramble bush speaks of the failed or evil Israel. Refer to Judges 9:14-15 and Luke 6:14 for these examples.

The vine, our subject for chapter 15 of Ezekiel speaks of the Lord's spiritual relationship with Israel. Chapter 5 of Isaiah, verses 1 to 7 gives one of the best examples of this usage. Let's read Isaiah 5:1-7. *(Read Isaiah 5:1-7)*

The purpose of a vine is to bear fruit. Apart from this purpose, the vine is of no value. The wood of other fruit trees may be used for various purposes, even if you don't get fruit. But, a vine is too soft for making even a peg to hang something from. So a fruitless vine has no purpose except as fuel for a fire. However, a vine is not even good fuel, since it burns too quickly and produces little heat.

The LORD says that the inhabitants of Jerusalem are like a vine that bears no fruit. So the LORD intends to make Jerusalem and the land desolate. He will see that Jerusalem is torn down and burned.

Another interesting usage of the vine is found in Revelation 14:14-20. Verses 14 and 15 read:

¹⁸ And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, as for its grapes are ripe."

¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

This has application to our Christian walk. See Matthew 21:33 – 46 for the parable of the evil husbandmen to whom the LORD leases His vineyard and their murder of His son. Also, see John chapter 15, where Jesus says:

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

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The LORD's Faithless Bride

- Father an Amorite, Mother a Hittite - Cast out and Unwanted
- The LORD made her live and flourish, made her beautiful and wealthy, made her a kingdom and royalty
- Turned from the LORD to faithless adultery
 - Idolatry and child sacrifice
 - Egypt
 - Assyria
 - Chaldeans
- "How sick is your heart"

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This chapter has a number of uncomfortable descriptions and speaks of unpleasant behaviors. Actually, the translations tone down the vile and disgusting reality of the gross behaviors of the people. In Jewish Rabbinic tradition, this material was reserved for mature students and not for beginners. Some rabbis stated that it should not be read publicly.

With that said, let's read chapter 16 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 34. (*Read verses 1-34.*)

The subject of chapter 16 is Israel as an unfaithful wife to the LORD. This is essentially the subject of the whole book of Hosea and in particular Hosea 2:2-23. It also occurs elsewhere such as Malachi 2:14.

Once again the LORD speaks to Ezekiel. This time the LORD tells Ezekiel to make known unto Jerusalem their abominations.

The LORD goes on to describe the birth of the nation of Israel as though Israel was a baby girl. Rather than speaking of Israel's origin through Abraham, and her being the chosen people, the LORD speaks of something different. The LORD says that Israel's birth was in the land of the Canaanites, and that her father was an Amorite, and her mother was a Hittite. The LORD here is speaking of Israel's spiritual and moral condition, and He is likening it to two of the sinful nations that were in the land of Canaan when the Jewish people came into the land.

If you think the LORD was being harsh with His description, then remember Jesus did the same thing in John 8:44. Jesus is called illegitimate by the Jews in the Temple while Jesus is speaking with them. Jesus then says they are the children of the devil. Jesus means that they are the spiritual children of the devil.

The LORD speaks lovingly of Israel. He says that when Israel had matured sufficiently, that the LORD spread the corner of His garment over her. This was symbolic of betrothal as you may remember from the book of Ruth. Israel was considered the wife of the LORD. The LORD then says that He washed off her blood and anointed her with oil. He also clothed her with fine garments. The LORD also showered her with wealth, jewels, gold, and silver. As a result, Israel grew into a beautiful royal kingdom that was beloved of God.

But, Israel was lifted up with pride, much as Satan was when he fell from grace. And Israel became a harlot by chasing after other gods, by worshipping idols. Israel gave the LORD's gold and silver to make idols. Then they set the LORD's oil and incense before those idols. They even set the food, which the LORD provided, before their idols. Worst of all they brutally sacrificed their children, which the LORD calls His children, to Molech.

Even after all of this, they built high places, that is altars, on every street. They sought after the practices of Egypt, Assyria, and the Chaldeans. Even the Philistines, whom God used to punish Israel were ashamed at the lewdness of Israel. And the LORD said to Israel, "How sick is your heart."

The LORD says that Israel was not even the same as other harlots, because instead of being paid, she paid her paramours.
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The LORD's Faithless Bride – cont.

- The LORD's indictment for harlotry with other gods and idols, and for the murder of God's children
- God will judge as He would adulterers and murderers
- Worse than Sodom and Samaria – the LORD will bring to destruction by the hand of her lovers
- LORD will restore and establish new covenant

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Now let's read chapter 16 of Ezekiel verses 35 – 63. (*Read verses 35-63.*)

In verses 1 to 34 of chapter 16, God has read the indictment of Israel. Now, He will render His verdict and pronounce judgment.

Right off the bat, the LORD says in verse 35, "Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD." So the LORD has already indicted Israel as a prostitute in terms of their marriage and covenant relationship.

Because Israel has been a harlot, has committed adultery, and has committed murder by killing the LORD's children, He now pronounces Israel guilty.

The LORD then proceeds to pronounce His judgment. He says that He will cause Israel to be laid naked and to be destroyed at the hands of her lovers. We know this is true, because Assyria and Babylon conquered Israel and Judah and took the Jewish people captive.

This judgment will satisfy God's wrath against Israel. And the LORD says that then He will no longer be angry.

God says that a proverb will be spoken about Israel, which says, "Like mother, like daughter." God states that Israel behaved like her mother, who hated her husband and children, and that Israel is also like her sisters who hated their husbands and children. God calls Samaria Israel's older sister living in the north. He calls Sodom Israel's younger sister living in the south. The LORD then says that Israel was even more corrupt than Sodom and Samaria!

The guilt of Sodom was pride, and the guilt of Israel is having even more pride. So bad are Israel's sins, that they make her sisters to appear righteous!

In the end, the LORD says that He will restore Israel and Jerusalem. He says that he will establish a new covenant with them, not like the covenant that Israel broke. Israel will then know the LORD, and her shame will cause her to keep her mouth shut.

This truly shows the LORD's great love and His grace! Even as he has shown grace to all who receive His Son. I do not think this means that Israel will be saved apart from accepting Jesus, but because in the end they will accept Jesus as it says in Zechariah 13:6.

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Two Eagles and a Vine

- Parable of two eagles
 - 1st eagle is Babylon
 - 2nd eagle is Egypt
- Zedekiah is the topmost branch that was planted with promise, but instead
- The Lord gives the interpretation of the parable and pronounces judgment
- The Lord looks to the future and to the Messiah

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Let's read chapter 17 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 24. (*Read verses 1-24.*)

Chapter 17 takes place approximately two years prior to the fall of Jerusalem. That makes it the year 588 B.C.

Ezekiel is told to speak a parable to the house of Israel, which is given in verses 3 to 10. The parable speaks of two great eagles. The first eagle takes the highest branch from the highest cedar and takes it to the city of merchants. The eagle then takes of the seed of the land and plants it in favorable conditions, where it becomes a vine that should have prospered.

However, a second eagle is an enticement to the vine, which then reaches out to the 2nd eagle rather than the 1st.

As a result the LORD God says that the vine which was planted will not prosper. Rather it will be uprooted and will utterly wither when the east wind strikes it.

In verses 12 to 21, the LORD interprets the parable. Babylon is the 1st eagle who took the highest branch, king Jehoiachin captive to Babylon, the city of merchants. In Jehoiachin's place, Nebuchadnezzar planted Zedekiah who gave an oath before God to serve Nebuchadnezzar. Had Zedekiah kept his oath, the implication is that he and Judah would have thrived. However, Zedekiah rebelled and did not keep his oath as you can see in 2Kings 24 and 2Chron 36.

There was no reason for Zedekiah to revolt except for his ambition. Zedekiah sought an alliance with Egypt, the 2nd eagle. But, because Zedekiah had sworn an oath before the LORD, the LORD required him to keep his oath as a covenant with the LORD. God takes oaths seriously. Solomon said that is better not to swear at all.

Hence, the LORD says that Egypt will not help Zedekiah, and an east wind (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar) will strike him. Zedekiah will go to Babylon where he will die. And the LORD will cause all of Zedekiah's troops to be captured and killed or to be scattered abroad.

In the last three verses of the chapter, the LORD looks to the future. The LORD says that He will take the highest branch (the Branch is one of the terms used of the Messiah) of the highest cedar and will plant it on the mountain of Israel. The LORD says the branch will be a tender one as it says in Isaiah 53:2, **"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."**

The Branch will produce fruit and become a noble cedar. All the trees, or nations, will know that God is the LORD.

Questions? Please chapters 18 and 19 for next time. January 4th, 2018.

Let's pray.