

Ezekiel 17:22-24^{iv}

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.

^{iv} About the [Track 2] First Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered the city of Jerusalem in 597 BCE and forced thousands of Jews to relocate in Babylon. Ezekiel was probably one of these refugees. Like his fellow prophet, Jeremiah, Ezekiel did not encourage the Israelites to hope for a speedy and victorious end to the exile. Both prophets foresaw a time of suffering and mourning as God worked to cleanse the people of their idolatry and hardheartedness.

Ezekiel was a priest who received his call to prophesy while in exile (1:1-3). His priestly experience comes through in many of his messages that deal with the loss of the temple and the departure of God's glory from the inner court (chaps. 8–10, 40–48).

More than any other prophet, Ezekiel was called to transmit God's messages through enacted symbolism. These dramatic allegories carried a visual force that left no room for false interpretations. Despite his "gloom and doom," Ezekiel's visions are balanced by a firm reliance in God's sovereignty. The holy God who disciplines severely will also restore the people and renew their worship. God's judgment will not be retribution so much as cleansing, and Ezekiel relies on God's future work in bringing salvation.

In today's reading, we hear this note of hope. Chapter 17 begins with a "riddle" that describes Israel as a tall cedar that has been broken off by a great eagle (Nebuchadnezzar). Verses 22-24 redirect the people's vision to God's purposes for Israel. While the people hoped for political restoration and restored power, God explains that Israel's role in the world is one of spiritual blessing, not political influence. God alone will accomplish Israel's true destiny.