

The Lion and the Vineyard

An Unexpected Christmas Story

- 1 ¹ Raise a keen *qinah* [lamentation]
For Israel's princes! And say,
- 2 ² What was **your mother?**
A lioness!
Among lions she lounged,
Amid young lions nursed her cubs.
- 3 ³ She reared one of her cubs;
a young lion he grew.
He learned to tear prey in tearing fury;
Men he devoured.
- 4 ⁴ **Nations roared** against him;
Trapped in their pit,
Hooked and hauled off
To Egypt's land.
- 5 ⁵ She saw her sickened wait drag on,
Her **hope was doomed, destroyed.**
She snatched one more from her whelps,
and made him a mighty young lion.
- 6 ⁶ He lurked and loped among the lions,
A ruthless young lion he rose.
He learned to rip and rend his prey,
And gulped down men like meat.
- 7 ⁷ He ravished their widows in wanton lust;
Their cities he crushed to waste.
The land and its life lay horror-struck, hushed,
At the roar of his ruthless voice.
- 8 ⁸ Nations neared from near and far, all round,
From provinces they pressed in swarm;
They spread their snare-net swift over him,
In pit he was snared and seized.
- 9 ⁹ With chains and collar they caged him cruel,
Hauled him with hooks to Babylon's hall,
- 6 ⁶ So his voice—once victorious—**vanished**
forever,
No roar resounds on Israel's mountains.
- 7 ⁷ **This is a lament—a dirge of doom,**
And it has become our wail.
- 10 ¹⁰ **Your mother** was a vine in wine-blood red,
Planted by plentiful waters wide.
She flowered fruitful, branches bursting free,
From floods of water full and deep.
- 11 ¹¹ **Her stems grew** strong as scepters bold,
For rulers' rods to reign.
Her stature soared supreme among boughs,
Seen in her height, her branches vast.
- 12 ¹² But **fury flared**—she was wrenched and ripped;
Hurling to the harsh earth below.
The east wind withered her fruit to dust,
Her strong stems snapped and scorched.
*Fire feasted on them—flames devoured all.*¹
- 13 ¹³ And now she is planted in **parched desert**
waste,
In dry and thirsty wilderness ground.
A land of drought, devoid of dew or drink,
Where thirst and barrenness abound.
- 14 ¹⁴ And fire flared from a branch of her boughs,
Burned and **devoured** her fruit.
No strong stem was spared for a scepter,
No rod to rule or reign.

Ezekiel 19:1-14

¹ This is the only fifth cola (line) in the entire poem's 3:2 couplets!

The Scepter Shall Not Depart

The prophecy came in the elder days with specificity the likes of which no one could have imagined. Jacob, the father of Israel, was nearing his death, yet summoned the strength to sit up in bed. He had trusted in the God who appeared to him at Luz—El Shaddai and had given him a great promise, “I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession” (Gen 48:3-4). So Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come” (49:1).

One by one, he began naming them. First Reuben, his firstborn, then Simeon and Levi. Then he came to Judah, his fourth born. “Judah, your brothers shall praise you” (8a), he said, making play on his son’s name which means “Praise.” In what way? “Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you” (8b). This was a remarkable prophecy that reminds us of how Judah and his brothers had themselves bowed down to Joseph when they came into Egypt desperate for food.

“Judah is a lion’s cub,” he continued. “From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?” (9). Later, Judah’s standard around the camp of Israel would be the emblem of a lion. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (10). The prophecy was clear. If ever a king should come to Israel, it would be from the tribe of Judah.

But the old and nearly blind patriarch was not finished with his fourth-born. In fact he was only half finished. “Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes” (11). Suddenly, the symbol of the lion gives way to that of a donkey tied to a vine. Judah would somehow wash his garments in wine, staining them red like blood. “His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk” (12), the image is one of a hideous creature dripping in blood and only the teeth remain unbloodied.

Many years later, in the days of Samuel, the people demanded a king, rejecting God as their king. They also re-

fused the prophecy and chose **Saul** from the house of Benjamin. Saul was a wicked man who did not love the LORD, so the LORD ended his rule on the battlefield. But kingship was promised all the way back with Jacob and God always had a plan. The tiny book of Ruth ends by telling you that she married into the **line of Judah** and that from her would come Obed, Jesse, and **David** (**Ruth 4:18-22**). When David was anointed king, we learn, “**Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah**” (**2Sam 2:4**). David, the greatest king of Israel, was fulfilling the promise.

But now let’s recall the first half of the prophecy of the lion. “**The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet...**” (**10a**). Apparently, this kingship would **rule forever!** And for centuries, that’s exactly how it appeared. For longer than there has been an America if you consider its symbolic founding to be in 1620 with the Mayflower Compact, Judah had a king on the throne in Jerusalem.

1. David (c. 1010–970 BC; initially over Judah only, then united kingdom)
2. Solomon (c. 970–930 BC; united kingdom, but Judah's capital remained Jerusalem)

3. Rehoboam (c. 930–913 BC)
4. Abijah (or Abijam; c. 913–911 BC)
5. Asa (c. 911–870 BC)
6. Jehoshaphat (c. 870–848 BC)
7. Jehoram (or Joram; c. 848–841 BC)
8. Ahaziah (c. 841 BC)
9. Athaliah (queen regnant/usurper; c. 841–835 BC)
10. Joash (or Jehoash; c. 835–796 BC)
11. Amaziah (c. 796–767 BC)
12. Azariah (or Uzziah; c. 767–740 BC)
13. Jotham (c. 740–735 BC)
14. Ahaz (c. 735–715 BC)
15. Hezekiah (c. 715–686 BC)
16. Manasseh (c. 686–642 BC)
17. Amon (c. 642–640 BC)
18. Josiah (c. 640–609 BC)

It seemed like it would go on forever. And indeed, because of the promise, many assumed that it would, including the latter kings themselves.

But the very year that king Josiah, the last good king of Israel, died in battle trying to hold back Pharaoh Neco, his son, **Jehoahaz**, who reigned only three months (**2Kg 23:31**), was taken captive to Egypt in chains where he later died. Pharaoh installed his brother **Jehoiakim** (c. 609–598 BC),

originally named Eliakim, in his place, forcing him to pay heavy tribute to Egypt. This king was so evil that he not only oppressed his own people to pay off the debts, but he burned the scroll of Jeremiah. He switched allegiance to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco in 605 BC. But he would rebel against that king six years later, bringing down the full wrath of the Babylonian war machine upon Jerusalem which besieged the city in 598, throwing the king's body out over the walls like trash ([Jer 22:19](#)).

In his place, his son [Jehoiachin](#) (also called Jeconiah or Coniah) reigned a grand total of three months and ten days, after which he surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in March 597 BC and was swiftly deported with his family and 10,000 exiles along with Ezekiel to Babylon where he lived out his days. Nebuchadnezzar then installed his uncle, Mattaniah, renamed [Zedekiah](#) (597-586 BC), a weak and indecisive puppet who likewise rebelled against Babylon, after which the Great Oak besieged Jerusalem again, the city fell and the temple was destroyed. Zedekiah was blinded after seeing his sons killed, then he too was taken to Babylon in chains. [Thus ended the reign of Judah and her kings. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet...” \(10a\)?](#)

Ezekiel 19's

Today, we continue in Ezekiel. However, it is fascinating to me that this is Christmas week in 2025. For what we will see is that unlike no chapter in Ezekiel before it, this passage very much **lends itself to the story of the birth of the Messiah**, but in a most unexpected way, not in what it says so much as what it necessitates we talk about.

The chapter is short—a mere **14 verses**. It is its own self-contained unit of thought. It forms **a two-column weave of seven rows** (see opening text layout). The columns follow the two stories of the chapter. Curiously, those stories are of a **lioness** and her cubs followed by a **vine** metaphor, exactly the what we see in Jacob's prophecy of Judah: first the lion, then the vine. This is not coincidental.

The seven rows follow the path of **a tragic descent**. They begin (rows 2-3) in the pinnacle of covenantal blessing—the royal strength of the Davidic line and the national prosperity of God's gifts, the height as it were. They descend (row 4) from dominance to captivity—the loss of freedom and autonomy of Judah. There is a further descent from ravaging to irreversible exile to desolation (row 5). Row 6 is barrenness, consumption by fire, a judgment motif that echoes

the ideas of hell (Sheol) and sees the end of the ruling line—no king, no fruit, no future.

Amazingly, this is **exactly parallel** both in structure and in mirroring descent to **ch. 17's** 2x7 weave, but with one unmistakable difference. That weave's seventh row ending in hope. This one? Not so much. The last line, **"This is a lamentation and has become a lamentation."** This is because we have now moved through the center of **chs. 12-24** (this is **18:15-17** and its absolute perfect obedience needed to earn life through law-keeping) and whereas there was hope on the front side, this side is beginning with a tremendous lack of it.

These two chapters also mirror one another in that they **both talk about a vine**. In fact, you can go back to ch. 15 which (I have now discovered) is also a two row weave, which **is also about a vine**. In fact, **chs. 13, 15, 17, and now 19** are all two column weaves and all are dealing in binary themes of paired images of deception/rise followed by exposure and fall. They are all highly emotional, symmetrical laments and indictments that mirror the betrayal and loss that comes from false prophecy, worthless vines, rebellion, and a royal end. While I can't confirm yet, I highly suspect that cs. 21 and 23 and 24:15-27 will follow suit as they are

also dealing in binaries of twos (forest fire parable + sword song; Oholah/Oholibah as paired sisters; wife's death and silent mourning).

Contrast this with **chs 12, 14, 16, 18**, and what I presume to be 20, 22, and 24:1-14 which are all **three column weaves** consisting of divine accusations of sin followed by a prophetic or individual mandate followed by a verdict of accountability (exile signs in 12; elders/idolatry in 14; wife betrayal in 16; responsibility in 18; history in 20; city sins in 22; pot siege in 24). The **emotional responses** of the two column chapters are contrasted in the three column weaves with the **rational, reasoned accusations** and calls to recognition where God argues with his people, emphasizes choice, justice, and an inescapable outcome.

It is simply astonishing that Ezekiel wrote this all this way. What could be the purpose? As the late Jacob Milgrom used to say, "**Structure is theology.**" In these triadic chapters, God's judgment is relational and logical, offering understanding even in condemnation, while in our chapter today and its binary parallels, God's judgment evokes grief, sin perverts gifts into self-destruction, and it all leads to tragic inevitability. In the former, God confronts **the mind**. In the latter, he confronts **the heart**. The idea is that together, it

might lead to **full recognition** of the situation before the restoration of the book can commence. This strict literary structure is both balanced and profound!

A Lamentation of Lions

The chapter begins on a very generic note that we've not seen in a while. “**And you, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel**” (**Ezek 19:1**). It **doesn't say** that the Word of God has come to him. It **doesn't mention** that he is the “son of man.” Just a short, terse, “**And you...**”² This creates an immediate sense of urgency and direct confrontation. It's as if God is cutting straight to the chase: no preamble, no cushion. The lament is coming, and Ezekiel must deliver it now.

But just what is this “**lament?**” It is called a *qinah*. It is a **funeral dirge**, a “**lament for the dead.**”³ That's certainly not very positive. It has a very **specific meter** to it in Hebrew: a longer **3-beat** line followed by shorter **2-beat** line, making it

² Allen says something that fits extremely well with our weave observation of just how close ch. 17 is to 19 structurally. “Its opening ואתה “and you” is characteristic of a section within a unit, as in 4:9. It is best understood as originally a continuation of the unit that began with 17:1, into which chap. 18 has been redactionally inserted.” **Leslie C. Allen**, *Ezekiel 1–19*, vol. 28, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1994), 285.

³ **Walther Zimmerli**, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979–), 391.

very curious that this the rhythm of the entire chs. 12-24's longer 3 followed by shorter 2 column weaves. It doesn't rhyme, though there is a lot of alliteration (alliteration is where the first letter of a word repeats in following words). This creates a sense of discombobulation, as if something is just off a bit. In what follows, I'm using a translation I had the A. I. give based on this meter and devices such as alliteration, which most translations do not retain.

This dirge will be directed at Israel via these two metaphors of the lion and the vine. Is God saying that Judah's funeral is at hand? Now, importantly I think, it directs this dirge towards "Israel's princes." But the word is very clearly the word for a prince (*nasi*; Gk: *archon*) and not the word for a king (*melek*). Given that the lion imagery from Genesis onward is usually about kings, this may feel a bit unexpected or understated as we go along.

The lamentation gets underway in vs. 2: "What was your mother? A lioness! Among lions she lounged, Amid young lions nursed her cubs." Here, the princes from vs. 1 are called "cubs." This means that the lioness is Judah, or more specifically, the Davidic royal house. The other lions, therefore, must be the nations (Assyria, Egypt, Babylon,

etc.) around her. Together they are a most interesting family, a pride if you will, and she is the picture of a royal lioness strutting its strength. This language of strutting her pride very deliberately echoes that of **Gen 49:9**, “Judah is a lion’s cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?” Remember, this is what Jacob predicted would happen to Judah *in the future*. So far, so good.

“She reared one of her cubs; a young lion he grew. He learned to tear prey in tearing fury; men he devoured” (**Ezek 19:3**). The lioness raises one of her royal cubs who becomes a **Davidic prince/king**. He grows into a strong young lion—full of promise—but instead of protecting the people, he learns to hunt and devour human beings, i.e. his own people! It’s the same promise as **Gen 49:9**, the noble lion’s cub from whom the scepter will never depart. But that cub so full of promise becomes a man-eating monster, **the exact opposite of the Davidic ideal** of a Shepherd-king who protects the flock. Obviously, this doesn’t refer to cannibalism, but to a ricked ruler who oppresses, exploits, and destroys his own people (**Ezek 34:2-4; Micah 3:1-3**).

“Nations roared against him; in their pit he was trapped. Hooked and hauled off; to Egypt’s land” (Ezek 19:4). Suddenly, some of the other lions in the pride start to assert their authority over the lioness and her cub. This refers to Josiah’s sons Jehoahaz who was taken by Pharaoh Neco to Egypt after only three months as king in Jerusalem. In Egypt, he died (Jer 22:11-12). Such is the politics of the world-stage in her political pride. Unlike animal lions in a pride, human lions can be brutal to one another. That’s part of the irony of the metaphor. In a stable pride of lions, the males, often brothers and close relatives, are highly cooperative—the hunt together, defend territory side-by-side, and share mating rights with minimal lethal infighting. Serious brutality is rare among them once established. But with human lions? Human sin and depravity is a powerful destructive force among the sons of Noah.

“She saw her sickened wait drag on, Her hope was doomed, destroyed. She snatched one more from her whelps, And made him a mighty young lion” (Ezek 19:5). The Davidic line personified, the people of Judah, saw what happened to Jehoahaz, so when Neco appointed his brother Jehoiakim-Eliakim as vassal over Judah (2Kg 23:34-36), the people in their stunned despair at what happened to his

brother, **went along with it**. What choice did they have? The more powerful lion had asserted itself.

“He lurked and loped among the lions, A ruthless young lion he rose. He learned to rip and rend his prey, And gulped down men like meat” (**Ezek 19:6**). You can hear **the alliteration of the lament**: *lurking and loping among the lions*. This man is a politician! But he is a politician after his brother’s heart, depicted as at least as violent against his own people than his brother? **Amazing that such men could come from Josiah**, the most faithful king Judah ever had? Somewhere along the line—whether in the royal court, the lingering idolatry of the people, or the sons’ own hard hearts—something went terribly wrong. Remember the last chapter? **Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children for their fathers. But each man will die for his own sin**. Such are these two sons of Josiah. Wicked as the day is long.

There is irony in these two verses now, because Ezekiel in attributing Jehoiakim’s kingship to the lioness rather than the lion-Neco (5), shows that even under foreign domination, Judah is actively continuing the Davidic succession while pursuing policies that lead to further predation and eventual captivity (6). Surely, they had to know that Jehoiakim was as corrupt as his brother? No?

“He ravished their widows in wanton lust, Their cities he crushed to waste. The land and its life lay horror-struck, hushed, At the roar of his ruthless voice” (7). My translation here says that he “ravished their widows.” The ESV says “seized.” But as Heiser points out, the term is *yada*, which means “to know.” While that can mean intellectual knowledge, it is also a sexual euphemism. The ESV is therefore rather inexplicable.⁴ What’s going on there? It could be a reference to the new king taking the old king’s harem and having relations with them to assert his authority over the old king and his rulership. It is what Absalom did when he displaced David (2Sam 12:11-12). That way, any children they have will be known to be his.

But it is also possible that this refers to simply the evil at the institutional level that allowed widows to be treated in such ways with no recourse. Or, perhaps, the king’s policies themselves create “widows” through death, debt, and dispossessions as they enable their violation, whether literally by him or systemically through politics. That might fit the idea of seeing these widow’s cities being crushed to waste better, as obviously the king of Judah didn’t go around making war on his own cities. Rather, it is his policies that did

⁴ See Michael S. Heiser, “[Naked Bible Podcast Transcript Ep. 135: Ezekiel 19-20](#),” *Naked Bible Podcast* (Dec 4, 2016), 9.

the job for him. Thus, **the land itself was horror-struck** at the roar of this cub and his ruthless voice. Such is the tyranny of almost all nations that have had kings.

“Then nations neared from near and far, all round, From provinces they pressed in swarm. They spread their snare-net swift over him; In pit he was snared and seized. With chains and collar they caged him cruel, Hauled him with hooks to Babylon's hall” (**Ezek 19:8-9a**). These two verses bring the lion allegory for **the second “young lion” to its grim conclusion**. After portraying the king’s internal tyranny—strutting confidently, devouring his own people, ravishing widows, ruining cities, and terrifying the land with his “roar,” the lament now shows the external consequences: surrounding nations finally unite to hunt him down like a dangerous beast, capture him humiliatingly, and silence his royal voice forever.

These nations from near and far represent **a coalition of imperial powers** that are encircling Judah. This points to Nebuchadnezzar and his allies who mobilized after Jehoiakim’s rebellion (**2Kgs 24:1-2**). There is no escape in any direction. The hunting imagery of a net and pit is the same as the first cub. Both princes of Judah end up snared the same way.

This I think helps you understand at least in part why this is a lament **against princes** rather than kings. These men are not kings like they are supposed to be. They are spoiled little brat children who never grew up and learned to fear the LORD. They are Prince Andrew caught in his pedophile ring, not sons of David and Hezekiah and Josiah who deserve the crown and throne of Judah. This is Commodus, the perverted son of Marcus Aurelius in *Gladiator*, without moral compass let alone faith in the Lord. These men are not worthy of the promises foretold by Jacob.

So, **taken away into Babylon** he goes. Not a proud king with head held high, but a pouty little prince now enslaved to the king of Babylon. The story concludes, “**So his voice—once victorious—vanished forever, No roar resounds on Israel’s mountains**” (9b). **The kingship is gone.** The line of successors has ended. There is no more scepter in the halls of David and Solomon. Mt. Zion lays waste and empty. The pride of Israel has fallen. Sing forth the lamentations. The king is no more.

Yet, how can this be? For wasn’t the promise of Jacob that “**The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples**” (**Gen 49:10**)?

A Vigil of a Vine

This takes us to **the second of the two stories**. It begins the same way, “*Your mother.*” Notice previously? “**What was your mother?**” This directly connects the two columns of the weave in Row 2. Before, she was a lioness. No, she is “**a vine in wine-blood red, Planted by plentiful waters wide.**” This imagery deliberately alludes to the second half of Jacob’s prophecy. There was to be a young donkey found to a choice vine, but his garments are washed in wine and his eyes are darker than wine (**Gen 49:11-12**).

But the **metaphor here is multifaceted**, if not perhaps mixed. On one hand, she is **planted by plentiful waters**. Mother Jerusalem is like the Tree of Psalm 1, almost like the Tree of Life itself. It continues, “**She flowered fruitful, branches bursting free, From floods of water full and deep.**” She had many children—many sons of David. For centuries they ruled over Israel as they drank from the Water of Life.

And yet, she is a vine in wine-blood red? You wouldn’t get this from the ESV, which simply says, “**Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard,**” though it notes, “**Most manuscripts have ‘in your blood.’**” The word untranslated by the ESV is *bedomkha*, and it likely a word-play on “blood” (*dam*). Of course, red grapes can stain like blood. So is this an image

of blood-like vitality in grape clusters or does it hint at violence tied to the lion's devouring men? **Ezek 22:4** says, “Of the blood that you shed you are guilty.” Thus, Eliezer of Beaugency writes: “Your mother ... that is, the kingdom of Judah, became lowly as a vine on account of the blood you shed ... yet in spite of the evil I brought on her I allowed her to survive [planted by abundant water, as above, 17:5f.].⁵ Yet, if read in parallel with the weave (**vs. 2**), it is likely that the vine is being viewed as luxuriant and vivid, pulsing with life, and yet that very “blood-red” vitality carries an ominous echo of the violence that stained her branches.

The story continues, “Her stems grew strong as scepters bold, For rulers' rods to reign. Her stature soared supreme among boughs, Seen in her height, her branches vast” (**Ezek 19:11**). This line puts a much more positive spin on it than the parallel in Row 3, where we learned that as the young cub grew, it learned to tear its prey and devour men. Here, the “stems,” the parallel of the “cubs,” grow strong, so that's the same. But now, Judah is being viewed from that same idea we've seen in chs. 15 and 17 where we previously met the vine, also in two column weaves. She is soaring high among all the trees. Her branches are vast. She is supreme

⁵ Cited in **Moshe Greenberg**, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 22, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 353.

among all the nations. Surely, this hints not at the kings of Ezekiel's day, but to the reigns of David and Solomon. "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all other kings... the whole earth sought audience with Solomon" (1Kgs 4:21, 25; 10:23-27).

But just as we saw in Row 4 with the lion, things take a dark turn immediately. "But fury flared—she was wrenched and ripped, Hurlled to the harsh earth below. The east wind withered her fruit to dust, Her strong stems snapped and scorched. Fire feasted on them—flames devoured all" (Ezek 19:12). This is exactly what we saw in Ch. 15 with the useless vine whose wood is good-for-nothing being burned to the ground. And it's the same interpretation. In an instant, just as mother Jerusalem is literally on top of the world, the highest of all trees, in a moment of fury from the east, from Babylon, she is completely undone. His fury becomes a fire. Her branches are ripped and torn and thrown to the ground below. This is the same high-to-low movement we saw in ch. 17 as well. And, in the only stanza that adds a fifth line, fire feasted and flames devoured everything.

This compresses all of the troubles with the four kings in Ezekiel's day into one climactic horrific event which is met with vs. 13's, "And now she is planted in parched desert waste, In dry and thirsty wilderness ground. A land of

drought, devoid of dew or drink, Where thirst and barrenness abound.” Babylon, while an oasis, is nevertheless on the outskirts of absolute utter desert. Spiritually, Babylon couldn’t get more desert, a haunt of jackals and demons (Isa 13:21-22; Rev 18:2), far from the fertile watered land that had God’s word and his presence saturate it for a millennia. Now, all that is left is spiritual drought, famine, and thirst. As Amos predicted years earlier, “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). It’s just that now, this famine is 1000 miles from their home where they are stuck and cannot go back.

This leaves us with only vs. 14. It ends on the same note as the lion-lamentation, only with an even more overt statement about Genesis 49. “And fire flared from a branch of her boughs, Burned and devoured her fruit. No strong stem was spared for a scepter, No rod to rule or reign.” The kingship is gone. The line of successors has ended. There is no more scepter in the halls of David and Solomon. Mt. Zion lays waste and empty. The pride of Israel has fallen. Sing forth the lamentations. The king is no more.

Yet, **how can this be?** For it wasn't merely a promise of a scepter that will not depart that Jacob gave, but is this red-stained vine of Ezekiel 19 really what was finally meant when he said in the attached verse that continues the rule of the king, “**Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk**” (**Gen 49:11-12**)?

The Coming King

Beloved, I want to **point out something** again. We have just come through **ch. 18**, which is **the literary center** of **chs. 12-24**. Previously, when we heard about the vine, we were also met with unexpected hope at the end. But now that we are through the personal responsibility phase of this doom that Ezekiel is proclaiming upon Judah, we see no hope at the end of ch. 19. It is **pure lamentation**. Utter hopelessness. And this is appropriate, because Ezekiel was prophesying to the people of his generation, showing them that they all deserve what is coming, preparing them not for Jacob's fulfillment, but for their own captivity and how

they were to properly, biblically respond to what God was doing in their day.

And yet, surely, the people would have held out hope, because of Jacob, no? The scepter would not depart, right? How then can Ezekiel proclaim such things? How could the people be met with silence from this point onward? Had God truly abandoned them forever, forsaking his own unilateral covenant given to Abraham?

Just here, you need to remember something else about **Genesis 49** that predicted something amazing, something that surely had to continue on past Zedekiah. The scepter would not depart, it says, “Until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” “To him?” Who is “him?” Young’s Literal renders the verse, “he scepter turneth not aside from Judah, And a lawgiver from between his feet, Till his Seed come; And his is the obedience of peoples.” The KJV more famously has, “Until Shiloh comes.” Shiloh is a messianic title meaning “peace-bringer.” You can hear that in the “Seed” language. Thus, the Targum reads, “Until the time that the King Meshiha shall come.” Thus, the NT opens with these very words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac,

and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob *the father of Judah* and his brothers, *and Judah* the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron ...” and so on up through David and then through Joseph the father of Jesus (**Matt 1:1-3, 6, 16**).

There are many other passages in the OT that predicted that there would in fact be a **coming king** from the tribe of Judah. In **2 Sam 7:12-13**, God gives David the promise, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his *kingdom*. He shall build *a house* for my name, and I will establish *the throne* of his kingdom forever.” Obviously, if there are no more kings in Ezekiel’s stories, this can’t be the end of the story.

Isaiah famously predicted, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the *government* shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace*. Of the increase of his *government* and of peace there will be no end, on the *throne of David* and over his *kingdom*, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (**Isa 9:6-7**). *Prince*—the very designation used in Ezekiel 19, but this prince would prove worthy.

It is into these two prophecies Luke tells us [at the birth of the Messiah](#), “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him *the throne* of his father David, and he *will reign* over the house of Jacob forever, and of *his kingdom* there will be no end” ([Luke 1:32-33](#)). This is a combination of the promise of Jacob, of Isaiah, and the promise given to David, the son of Judah.

And so remember what [the wise men](#) from the east (Babylon?) said when they heard that Jesus had been born? “Where is he who has been born *king* of the Jews? For we have seen his star when it rose and have come to worship him” ([Matt 2:2](#)). The [star language](#) refers back to Genesis 49, for that entire passage is astral prophecy linking Reuben to Aquarius, Dan to Scorpio, Joseph to Taurus, and Judah to Leo—the four fixed signs of the Zodiac.⁶ But it also refers to [the prophecy of Balaam](#) who foresaw, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: *a star* shall come out of Jacob, and *a scepter* shall rise out of Israel” ([Num 24:17](#)). It’s [the scepter language](#) again. **A king!** As Micah will later say, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans *of Judah*, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be *ruler in Israel*, whose coming forth is from

⁶ See my sermon, “[Gen 49:1-29—A Boot to the Head](#),” RBCNC (5-17-2015).

of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2), which Matthew directly quotes in the Magi story (Matt 2:5-6). Hence, Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5), the King of Genesis 49 to which Ezekiel 19 ultimately necessitates talking about. It is, in a word, the Christmas story in a most unexpected text.

Yes, people did not think Ezekiel 19 was ever the end of it. But they lifted up their heads and remembered the prophecies of old, having faith that God was not going to fully renege on his promises.

But unlike our culture, which love Christmas but not its Christ, you must not forget just who it was that was born in that manger in Bethlehem long ago. This was not some baby. This was the man destined to cause the rise and ruin of many, and to be a sign spoken against (Luke 2:34). This was the King of Israel and the King of kings! We do not worship him because he was some nice man who taught neat things. We worship him because he is the King, the one who came after all the others had fallen into oblivion. Out of the stump of Judah, this baby was born fulfilling the hopes and expectations of Israel (see Simeon/Anna).

Thus we rightly sing, “Hark! The herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn *King!*”⁷ “O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem; Come and behold Him born *the King* of angels ... Christ the Lord!”⁸ “Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is *the King* of Israel.”⁹

But don't just leave the baby there in the manger. For this Christ grew up, and as the prophecy of his birth gives way, so comes that of his death. And the obedient Son went forward into Jerusalem a week before his death on *the colt of a donkey*, and on that predestined day dipped his garments not in the blood of his enemies or subjects, but in *the wine-blood of redemption*, his own blood, which he offered as a sacrifice to his Father, teeth glimmering white through his blood-wine-soaked body and face. “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” “*It is finished.*” And when he was raised from the dead three days later, he would *receive his kingdom* just as it had been foretold. The only God who ever became a man had died for man that we might be brought to God, saved through faith in the one who, born to rule, willingly died that we might have life.

⁷ Charles Wesley, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” (1739).

⁸ John Francis Wade, “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” (1743).

⁹ “The First Noel,” Traditional English carol (17th-18th cent).

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive *her King*.”¹⁰

Therefore,

“Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, *the newborn King*.”¹¹

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¹⁰ Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World,” (1719).

¹¹ James Montgomery, “Angels from the Realms of Glory,” (1816).