

## A New Plant for a Permanent Home

Ezekiel 17:22-24 (NIV84)

<sup>22</sup> " 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup> On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. <sup>24</sup> All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. "'I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.'"

Take a step back with me for a moment and appreciate the fact that with a message that was recorded some 2500+ years ago, we can still understand and relate to it today. God recorded and preserved his Word not in an obtuse language that only the people of that day or the very learned could understand, but with pictures that we, in a different culture, different society, different language, different time, can understand. That Bible and its message is universal and stands the test of time. Today it's a picture of a tree, but it is also a prophecy. This prophecy of a tree connects to another event that wouldn't take place for 600 years. What is this tree all about?

Ezekiel paints us the picture of a sturdy cedar tree, but the LORD breaks off a shoot from the very top of that cedar and goes to plant it. He plants it on a high and lofty mountain, not a bad place to put a cedar because cedars need room to grow. This particular cedar, God tells us, will grow to be magnificent in size. It will be so big that birds of every kind will nest in it and find shelter in the shade of its branches. The LORD says that by this breaking off and planting and growth of the new tree, all the trees of the field will know that the LORD brings down the tall tree and makes the low tree grow tall. God can dry up a green tree, and he can make a dry tree flourish. This is all in his capacity. When he says he will do something like this, he will certainly do it.

Ezekiel was not giving this message to show the LORD's green thumb in tree planting. There's something more here. That's where the context of Ezekiel's life and the verses immediately preceding ours for today come in handy.

Ezekiel was one of many of the best and brightest of Jerusalem who were whisked away from their homeland to Babylon right around 600 B.C. The Babylonian King was throwing his weight around with the Jewish people, showing them who's the boss, keeping them in line by exiling the best of the best of Judah. The Jewish exiles now living in Babylon are wondering if they will get rescued and if God will save the Jewish King. Using a picture of two eagles and a vine, Ezekiel explains to the people that their king will be exiled himself and will die in Babylon as he will break the treaty with the Babylonians and seek an alliance with the Egyptians. Judah will fall. The king will fall. The mighty Jewish nation, that great cedar, will dry up and be no more.

The LORD is allowing this to happen to the Jewish nation because they had turned away from him. The LORD had promised many years ago - nearly 800 years ago - that if his people rebelled against him, turned away from him, stopped worshiping him, then he would take them away from this land that he had given them. Now he is making good on his word and is bringing down this tall tree of Judah, punishing them in the way that he said he would.

However, the Sovereign LORD, the same one who is allowing the fall of the Jewish nation, is also going to break off a tender sprig from the top of that sturdy cedar which represents the Jewish nation. There is going to be a remnant, a small portion of people, that will not dry up with the rest of the tree.

Snapped off, just like that. Plants don't have feelings or emotions, but knowing that this tree represents the Jewish nation, we are talking about a small group of people being broken off, ripped away from the rest of their countrymen. Their compatriots, their neighbors, their friends, their families - all of these they are being broken off. They are being ripped away from everything they know. No longer do they have strength in numbers. No longer can they count on having familiar comforts. They are now the minority. They are small. They are weak. They are seemingly all on their own. Will this tender sprig survive? Will it grow in its new environment? What will happen to it?

Have you ever felt like you have been broken off from something big and sturdy? Did work reassign you, tell you to pack your things, sell your house, you are being relocated? As you get ready for the move, you know that you are going to lose so many connections that you've made over the years. The neighbors that you got to meet, barbeque with, they aren't coming with you. The friends you made here, yeah, you say that you will stay in touch and you truly intend to, but you know that the face to face relationship is going

away. You will have to start fresh. You will start out in the new place knowing very few, if any, people. You wonder how are you going to make it. Your support system is miles away, states away, maybe halfway across the world. You feel alone, small, vulnerable.

Maybe you felt broken off from something sturdy because of the divorce. Here it was, you thought that you had something solid. This is marriage. Till death do us part, right? We are going to be together for life. Then things changed. The commitment went away. Maybe there was infidelity. Maybe they just up and left. Whatever it was, the marriage was broken apart. The two that had become one are now forcibly, violently separated. That person that you considered your soul mate, the person that complimented you and supported you and loved you is now gone. What do you do? Suddenly after years of marriage you are now by yourself. You are out there on your own. What will happen to me now? You have to start all over. You feel alone, smaller, hurt. You can feel what it's like to be that tender sprig broken off from the top of that cedar.

That same feeling of being alone, insignificant, vulnerable, hurt, that's what the Jewish people were experiencing as Ezekiel prophesied these words: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain." (verse 22) First we hear that painful snapping of twigs, like the breaking of bones. You're killing me! You are taking me from my life! You moved me! You left me! You disrupted everything and brought pain into my life!

The pain is so great that you may have missed what God does with the tender sprig that is broken off from the cedar. Normally, we would think, trash it. Burn it. But that's not what the LORD does. He plants it. He puts it on display for everyone to see. "On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it." (verse 23)

The LORD has purposefully put this tree on display. Even though it is small and broken, weak and vulnerable, great things are coming. God says about this newly planted tender sprig: "it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar." (verse 23) This tender sprig is going to grow and become something magnificent. It's going to be a towering tree with all sorts of branches and fruit. It's going to be a healthy cedar, stronger than the one it came from. This newly planted tender sprig is going to become so massive that "Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches." (verse 23)

God has used this picture of a tree before with his people. The big tree, the Jewish nation, has died. It's the tall tree that has been brought low by the LORD, but a tender shoot rises up to be a bigger and better tree. The tender sprig symbolizes the promised offspring who would come to crush the head of the serpent, the one to come from the family tree of King David. This tree that will produce branches, bear fruit, become a splendid cedar, and provide protection and nesting for every kind of bird is referring to Jesus, the descendant of David. From that tender sprig, from that remnant of the Jewish nation, Jesus will come. From that green tree that is now being dried up by God, a new tree is planted and is made to flourish. God is going to keep his promise that a king would arise from David's royal line, a king like none other, who will rule for all eternity.

This is Jesus who becomes that great cedar. Everyone can find shelter and protection in him, shelter from the torments of hell, protection from the devil who wants to take advantage of us when we feel broken and alone. It doesn't matter who you are, you have protection and a permanent home with Jesus, this splendid cedar, this low tree that God has made grow tall.

This same shelter and protection that comes from the splendid cedar of Jesus is here for us now. If you are feeling broken off by a move, that you are in a new place and feel all alone and have to start over, Jesus is one who actually came with you on the move. As he promised, "Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) He doesn't leave you all alone. You don't start over with him. His protection on this new chapter in your life is right there with you. Your nest, your home, with Jesus does not change; it's permanent.

If you are still feeling broken off and hurt and alone from the divorce, feeling that something solid has now crumbled, Jesus is still your shelter and your home. He does not leave you. He does not walk out on you. He is completely faithful with you and to you all the time. No matter where you are starting over, you have the LORD with you, with a relationship that does not crumble or fail ever. You have a permanent shelter and home with him.

The Sovereign LORD brought down the tall tree of the Jewish nation, but from that tender sprig he planted, from that remnant of the Jewish people, a greater cedar arose: Jesus Christ. He will not dry up. The LORD makes him flourish as our Savior who never leaves us or forsakes us. We can always count on Jesus to be our permanent home, our nest, our protection. He is our safe place now and forever. Amen.