

READING PLAN FOR EZEKIEL Chapters 17-31

To get the benefit of this exercise you need to put aside some time each day.
It is both an explanation and a devotion. It is intended as a blessing.

1. Ezekiel 17:1-10. This portion is a parable or allegory in poetry form. There is a good simple explanation of this kind of Hebrew writing in Taylor's book, p143. It is worth the time to study it. Before looking at the interpretation, try to work out the meaning. Tomorrow we will see the interpretation. The East wind in Israel is a wind heated by the desert like our North-east wind in Melbourne in Summer. Lebanon in Old Testament times was not the country that we know today, it was the high mountain East of North of Israel, the location of the valued cedar trees of olden times, some examples are still found there today.

2. Ezekiel 17:11-21. The interpretation. Is it what you thought? For historical background re-read the 2 Kings from the death of good King Josiah in 2 Kings 23:30 to the end of the book. Remember that the Lord tells beforehand in appropriate time what He is intending to do. See Isaiah 42:9, 46:10, 48:3-8. Notice v16 is in the future tense. These things that end the allegory had not then happened.

3. Ezekiel 17:22-24. A prophetic extension. The Lord made it clear to His people that Israel was not finished. Just as we can take a spur from a tomato bush and plant the branch in the soil and water it regularly so that it will grow into a new tomato plant just like the bush from which it was taken and probably come into fruit, so that the life and usefulness of the bush is extended, even if the parent bush should die in a drought. We see that the Lord is to yet propagate Israel by transplanting a cutting to achieve His purposes through His branch. Jesus the Messiah is called that branch in the Bible and will achieve all that God originally intended. The people will be reinstated in their land and will flourish fruitfully. This theme will be extended as we proceed. We must be careful to not spiritualise such passages as these by saying that God will do in the Church what He could not do in Israel. There is no indication here that this is the case. God has a purpose for His people Israel that they that we have yet to appreciate.

4. Ezekiel 18:1-32. Sin is not in the genes. Our sins are ours. Our salvation since Calvary is also in our hands through faith. We cannot blame our problems on Adam, our parents or society. We are responsible for our own choices. The thesis of this chapter is v30. We are personally responsible for our own actions.

We saw in ch.16 that evil accumulates in national affairs. And this principle is intimated in the second commandment Exodus 20:5 & 34:7. When individual wickedness is multiplied by many individuals, a nation's national debt to unrighteousness gets to the tipping point of moral insolvency and that nation is brought down. You can see that is important to us today as we blame such things as someone's criminal behaviour, or perhaps the adoption of an homosexual lifestyle, or the slide into drug addiction upon social rather than individual responsibility. If someone other is responsible I can enjoy my sin and not have to do anything about it.

We need remember that Ezekiel's people lived under the law as summarised by Moses. They were subject to a covenant which the law supported. The law failed and the covenant was broken. It was weak through the flesh, says Paul. Therefore it is now set aside and God wrote a new covenant, a covenant of Grace in Christ through which Israel will be redeemed in God's time. See Jeremiah 31:29-37 The Judahites blamed the consequences of their sin on their fathers. God says that the party is over. 'The soul that sins, it shall die.' They, as well as we, are each responsible for our own actions.

5. Ezekiel 19:1-9. This chapter comprises two allegories. The first is a dirge written in a droll metre. The slow 3:2 metre is quite evident the NASB (Read it aloud and use the punctuation pauses correctly), but not brought out in many other versions. Taylor has a good explanation of it on page 152. In Hebrew, 'prince' can also mean chief, captain or leader. Their kings were all of the house of David. Mother is a metaphor meaning the nation since the ten tribes were taken away, as indicated in v10. The cubs were the ungodly sons of the good king Josiah. See the Historical Background in our introduction. How could a good man have an evil father and evil sons? What can we learn from his experience? Maybe he was so busy reforming the nation that he did not have time to reform his own children. Eli the priest was rejected by the Lord because he did not correct his sons, but allowed them to dreadfully maltreat their constituents.

6. Ezekiel 19:10-14. The imagery has changed but the topic is the same. The KJV reads 'Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood.' and is closer to the Hebrew words than modern versions which have offered a popular interpretation. 'In thy blood,' is taken to mean in your bloodline or ancestral line. You have been handed a marvellous heritage, and so it was for Israel with the first three kings, Saul, David, Solomon then Hezekiah and his father Josiah. Israel was once the wonder of the world. Alas what became of them. How easy it is to despise the heritage of our elders, in particular when it is godly. Israel was not perfect in her early leadership, but it was good. How easy it is for a new government to throw away the sacrifice of previous administrations. Can we see it in our governments, business corporations, schools or families?

7. Ezekiel 20:1-44. This reading begins a new series of prophecies. Some elders of Israel (As in 14:1) enquired of Ezekiel, but we are not told their topic. The Lord took exception. See v21. He left them in no doubt that the reason was their rebellious spirit, using the history of the people as an object lesson. They did not forsake the old ways when the Lord redeemed them. Is this not so often our problem. We want salvation, but we do not want to forsake the old way. Ephesians 4:22-2. We cannot have both as the life of the flesh and the life in the Spirit are mutually exclusive.

1. Israel in Egypt v5-9.
2. Israel in Transit v10-26.
3. Israel in Canaan v27-29.
4. Israel in Question v30-39.
5. Israel in Restoration v40-44.

God clearly told them that He had not given them up. He was working with them through the things that they were suffering to bring about a new attitude and response, that He would gather them in time to fulfil His purposes and blessings v37. The Lord indicates what, not when or how. See also Zechariah 13&14, also of that time which is still yet to come.

We wonder that this people were so stubborn and did not learn? But why do we not learn, for what the Lord was doing with Israel through history, He is doing also in our lives over a very much shorter time. Why do we so stubbornly cling to our own ways. Why are we so reluctant to learn?

8. Ezekiel 20:45-21:7. The first four verses are a parable. The word south is repeated with three different Hebrew words, See Taylor and the NASB translation. Ezekiel brought their objection to the Lord.

In ch.21 He will make it clear. The words and order of words are identical with Ezekiel 20:45&46, except that for "south," is substituted Jerusalem; the holy place, for the temple and its various parts; and the land of Israel. No hiding place is left to pretend misunderstanding.

Our God is very patient with us when we are sincerely slow and fearful, as He was with Gideon. He may become impatient when we are petulant and disobedient.

9. Ezekiel 21:8-17. Taylor suggests that vv9&10 could possibly be part of a popular entertainment or a sword dance song by which the Lord relates the prophecy to the culture of the people. A key verse is v13. The contest between the sword and the sceptre goes deeper than the prediction that Jerusalem be overcome by a Gentile tyrant, for there was in their tradition the blessing of Jacob to Judah that the sceptre would not depart from him 'until Shiloh come' Genesis 49:10. Although Samaria had been swept away, despite all campaigns against it Jerusalem remained to that time intact and a centre of (diminished) government. The sceptre remained intact. Despite her sin, would not Jerusalem survive as the descendant of David and Judah? Was this idea behind the false expectation of the inhabitants?

Ezekiel's response, if that was the case, was to go on with his prophecy.

10. Ezekiel 21:18--32. In this reading we find a prophecy we seldom consider. Ezekiel's model crossroads is a demonstration of Nebuchadnezzar's indecision. The Ammonites lived across the Jordan from Jerusalem. Three forms of divination were used that were widespread in the Middle East and Western Europe for quite some time. The lot fell on Jerusalem v22. The people of Jerusalem heard of this divination but refused to believe it. They used these systems, against the Lord's instruction, and knew how untrustworthy they really were.

A word is added to dispel the notion that the Ammonites would miss out on God's judgement on their iniquities v31. They will in His time be removed from their place. This is told in 25:1-7 when we come to it. The principle of individual and national responsibility applies to Gentiles as well as the Hebrew people. It applies to us in our day also.

V26&27. Zedekiah was the prince (He was not a true king) whose governorship terminated the kingdom until the true king should come. This is the coming of Shiloh. Genesis 49:10. It is a prophecy,

not of the first Christmas, but of the return of Jesus in His millennial splendour. He will blend the priestly and royal offices. With this passage read Zechariah 6:12 & Daniel 7:13. The triple, 'a ruin, a ruin, a ruin.' is the most emphatic form of speech in Hebrew, indicating absolute certainty. This is a blessed study.

11. Ezekiel 22. Three Lessons, each starting with the words "The word of the Lord came to me." vv1, 17 & 23. The first is a catalogue of Judah's sins, in particular the kings, priests, prophets and leaders who worship the gods of the heathen. They always are wrong worship, wrong values and wrong acts. The first step for any people into moral decline and criminal lifestyles is the neglecting the adoration and aspiration of a holy and righteous God. The word most found in this passage is 'blood.' Jerusalem is called a 'bloody city.' How terribly, terribly sad.

The second speaks of judgement. V18 Israel is not silver, but the base metals. When the Lord refines them looking for value, He finds only the earthy stuff. Copper then had some value, but not the precious metal He sought. It reminds us of the parable of the fig tree, when the Lord looked for fruit, He found nothing but leaves. There is a lesson here for all people of all times. Are you bearing fruit? If the Lord refined your life would you only yield copper, tin, iron or lead. Where is the gold, or even the silver.

The third speaks of the failure of God's people. Not only had the priests lost their values and left their calling, but their lives had disastrously affected the land and their people. The land had not received their share of rain. In the Bible drought is often associated with spiritual declension. See Leviticus 26:3&4, Deuteronomy 11:13-15. The priests failed to make these distinctions, or hold sacred convictions, but more than that they did not teach the people to discern between the holy and the profane. Do we need to spell out the personal application? Is there spiritual drought in your life and correspondingly lack of blessing in the lives of others you meet?

12. Ezekiel 23. This is an allegory, a symbolic story of two immoral women. The first was called Oholah, which means 'She who has a tabernacle or tent.' She symbolises the northern Israelite capital, Samaria. Her sister Oholibah symbolises the southern capital, Jerusalem and her name means 'My tent is in her.'

When Samaria separated from Israel, Jeroboam the king established two centres of worship after the Egyptian fashion at Dan and Bethel. See 1 Kings 12:25-32. Egyptian style worship was extended to include that of the neighbouring heathen nations. Samaria did not at any time return to seek the Lord despite the ministry of the prophets. All her kings were evil. Under the Judgement of God, Samaria was sacked by Sennacherib the king in 722BC. This then was her tent.

Oholibah had a succession of good and evil kings. Steadily she copied Oholah. 'My tent is in her.' This was despite the example of suffering and judgement she had ample time to consider. Jerusalem was sacked by the Nebuchadnezzar in BC587 'The lesson history teaches us is that we do not learn from history.' Jerusalem didn't. Today the principles are the same. The detail may be different, but how easily the English speaking nations are sliding away from the heritage of the reformers and revivalists of our grandfather's day.

13. Ezekiel 24:1-14. The Rusty Cauldron. The date v2 is recognised to be 588BC (See also 2 Kings 25:1 & Jeremiah 52:4.) The lesson by now ought to be obvious. Jerusalem is that pot. Cleansing, renewal and restoration is a lesson that much be learned through dire necessity.

Until I learned to trust the Lord,
I never learned to pray;
And never learned to fully trust,
Till sorrow came my way.

He who drinks deepest sorrow
Drinks deepest too of grace,
God sends the storm so He, himself,
Can be our resting place. Author Unknown.

14. Ezekiel 24:15-27. The death of Ezekiel's wife. It was a sudden and unexpected. Ezekiel was forbidden to mourn. This is the meaning of v16&17. To explore this aspect see Taylor p81-2. Despite his tender feeling for his wife, the desire of his eyes, he obeyed the Lord v18, and his actions were immediately noticed by the people.

The purpose of all this is as a sign to the people so they would recognise that God had been

speaking to them when the news of the fall of Jerusalem came v21-24.

We are so spiritually dull that sometimes it takes some momentous event in our lives to just make us stop and really listen. The passage finished with the hope that is realised later in this book, that Ezekiel was a servant of the most High and the people finally were glad to hear and heed Him.

Prophecies Against the Gentile Neighbours

We move to a new section in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

The nations which were neighbours of Israel and had so often striven with them, which were a negative heathen influence on them were automatically swept up in the campaign of conquest by Nebuchadnezzar. There were five near neighbours and two larger powers, Tyre in the North and Egypt in the South. God had sent one prophet after another to the two nations of Israel. Most of their thunder was reserved for God's own people. But Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51, Ezekiel 25-32 and Amos 1&2 speak to this situation. Therefore it is not insignificant. The woes that were to befall them were foretold by God.

National Events in the Purposes and Prophecies of God.

Any thinking person will see that God uses the actions of one person to affect the future of another person. He uses the words of evangelists, friends, recorded messages to encourage, to warn, to win of others and thereby influence their decisions.

God also used the actions of one to modify the attitudes and actions of others, to judge and thus commend or condemn, just as teachers will use all the means at their disposal to mould the attitudes and thus the actions of their students. What God does with us as individuals, He does also with nations.

God uses nation with nation, just as steel sharpens steel. One nation which corrects another today is itself corrected by another tomorrow. Thus The Assyrians were replaced by the Babylonians, who were over run by the Persians who were Subjected by the Macedonians. Another nation was as it were, God's servant in bringing about a new day with new challenges and constraints under which this people's view of life must be reviewed, revised and renewed. As it was with them, so it is with us

There is nothing different for individuals today. When we get away from our walk with God, He allows the circumstances of life to chafe and rub us until we stop and review, reassess, revise and renew our relationship with Him. He uses our situation: health, family members, work associates, neighbours, news, finance, in fact anything. Now all this is done in real time.

By real time we mean that the nations through their leaders were free. Their decisions were theirs. God was not pulling puppet strings. He is the eternal creator of all things. He made man free to decide and free to act. However He knows how man will decide in a given situation, given the constraints of disposition and situation. He also knows the future as clearly as the past. In eternity there is no past or future, or even now. These are time things. Eternity is a dimension where time does not exist. If God were to condemn men or nations for things that He made them do, He would be unjust. He is not unjust. He is holy and righteous. These people, just like us were free to decide and free to act. They, like we, were responsible for their own actions.

15. Ezekiel 25:1-7. Ammon. Because they said 'aha!' It seems to be a very small thing to warrant so strong a judgement. It is an exclamation of surprise, derision, satisfaction or irony. It is as if they were saying. Jerusalem has fallen, now at last this is our chance! The word occurs in Ezekiel three times, each with a similar mood. For a feeling of the word see Job 39:25. Remember these nations had formed a confederation of nations against Israel. Just as so many of Israel's neighbours today have combined to destroy her. If you want to see what the Bible had to say about a confederation as this, read Psalm 83.

16. Ezekiel 25:8-11. Moab. What was true of the Ammonites was also true of the Moabites. Read about one of these sorties when King Jehoiakim was the forced vassal of Nebuchadnezzar 2 Kings 24.2. Shortly afterwards both Ammon and Moab were overrun by the Nabateans and ceased to exist.

17. Ezekiel 25:12-14. Edom. The angst between Edom and Israel go back to Genesis 25:23. Seir is a word meaning hairy. Seir was the grandfather of the Horites (Genesis 36:20- an obscure reference for

many of us, but v 21 ends, ' . . . descended from the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom.) For a comment on this situation read Psalm 137.

18. Ezekiel 25:15-17. Philistines. These people occupied what is now Gaza. Cherethites seem to be another name for Philistines who came to the area from Crete or somewhere in the Aegean (Reference: Deuteronomy 2:23, Jeremiah 47:4, Amos 9:7, Zephaniah 2:5.) Taylor tells us that within a few hundred years this group of people disappeared. They are then not the present Palestinians.

19. Ezekiel 26:1-6. The complaint against Tyre is similar to the previous four. It was more wealthy and influential, being a major seafaring power and a trading nation. Tyre consisted of a city on the coast north of Israel, only about 60km from the Sea of Galilee, with city on the mainland and city on an island off shore which was impregnable. Nebuchadnezzar sacked the coastal city but could not breach the island defences. The sacking of the island was carried out by Alexander 330 years later.



20. Ezekiel 26:7-14. Thus says the Lord about Nebuchadnezzar. The first stage was the siege against the mainland city. It was to be destroyed and the site used by fishermen to cast nets. This is exactly what happened. In modern times the city has been rebuilt. The roof of shields v8 was a similar protection technique to the Roman tortoise.

21. Ezekiel 26:15-25 Thus says the Lord about Tyre's neighbours. If your Bible says isles in v15 read it as coastlands. The Hebrew word can be either, but Tyre's neighbours were coastal people. V17&18 are in the form of a dirge. Taylor.

22. Ezekiel 27:1-24. v1-3a calls for a lament over this loss. The lament is taken up in v25, but first we have a summary of the lamented. Tyre was a proud and well favoured and well ordered city. They had a natural secure harbour and had made the most of it.

v3b-9 tell us how this natural advantage had worked out for them over time making them a major trading nation in the area.

v10&11 summaries this small city state's policy of using mercenaries for military service.

v12-25 is an inventory of the markets and the products they traded.

One of the problems many people have is to identify the nations mentioned. This is understandable because these names changed from place to place and over time. Most of us do not take the time to search them out. A good Bible Encyclopaedia will answer these questions. You can also access on line <http://christiananswers.net/dictionary>.

23. Ezekiel 27:26-36. The lament is taken up as an extended metaphor. It speaks of Tyre as a ship being wrecked by an East wind. For them the East wind was an off shore wind. It is symbolic of Nebuchadnezzar who was from the East. Their trading partners were aghast at what was happening. The hissing v36 was not a hissing of derision, but partly closed lips exhaling because of amazed disbelief. From v32 we hear of the personal lament of these associates. A lament within a lament.

24. Ezekiel 28:11-19. This passage is a separate but related prophecy to that in vv1-10. It is in the form of a lament against the king of Tyre. The word 'king' is deliberate, a departure from the word prince more generally used in these chapters. This passage poses you a question. Is it written about this earthly prince, or about Satan? Quietly, carefully, prayerfully read the passage through. You may decide on the latter, but with some reservation, for we are told that it is about the prince of Tyre. A similar passage about Nebuchadnezzar is found in Isaiah 14.

If it is about Satan it provides us with information about him that is available nowhere else and could only have come by a special revelation of God. It is therefore very instructive. Carefully, prayerfully review it then make and keep to hand notes of your conclusions. It is scheduled to be our topic DV for our Bible Study evening tonight, March 24th.

25. Ezekiel 28:1-10 This is God's dealing with the heart attitude of a leader. It tells of the downfall of Tyre's prince. Taylor identifies him as Ithobal II, but this name is not found in the Bible. (1 Kings 16:31 gives some background information of a dynasty of this name in the area, but this is some time previously.)

The island on which the city stood was called, 'The Holy Isle.' Those who have been to Lindisfarne will have a good mental illustration. The leader like many ancient monarchs declared himself to be divine, an object for worship, based on the power that Tyre's great wealth and political influence gave him. It helped secure his place as prince.

We can see how people in leadership today like to hold onto their place of power when it seems obvious to all others that their time is up. The other hand of this is that there are always others in the wings waiting for their turn in the limelight. Should a leader show humility or honour the charge handed to him and exercise firm control, and if so ought to fully utilize the resources of office to maintain control.

There is a test to be applied. Is the leader doing this in order to genuinely serve the interests of his people, or to revel in the glory that the power has handed him. Our passage suggests the latter. He had turned his powers to profit v3&4. He was using his position for personal gain v4&5. God judges him for it for the arrogance he shows in pretending to be divine when he was not v9&10.

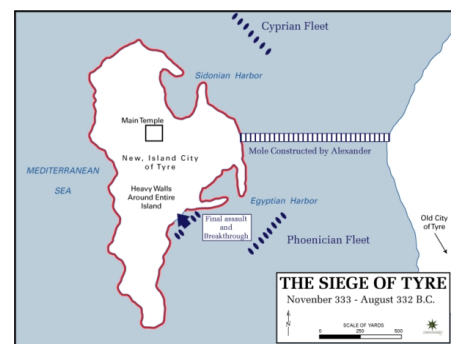
26. Ezekiel 28: 20-24. A younger brother! Sidon was second fiddle to Tyre. Significantly, Genesis 10:15 says, "Canaan fathered Sidon his firstborn." Here is another instance of a firstborn who lost his birthright to a younger brother, by implication. We are reminded of the story of Esau and Jacob in Genesis 25. There we had a story of jealous ambition and contest, but here is implied compliance. Tyre went along with her rich, powerful neighbour and fell into the same sin and condemnation. Remember, Jezebel the wicked, painted, harlot like queen of Ahab was a from Sidon. There is an exception to this instance in the woman of great faith from these regions who sought the Saviour Matthew 15:21-28. There is a lesson to be learned. Let us stand for something, least we fall for anything.

27. Ezekiel 28:25&26. Concluding the chapter we find a promise of restoration for Israel. The prophecy was fulfilled in part by the return of Israel from Babylon, when purified Judaism made inroads by their witness to the idolatry of surrounding nations. The full accomplishment of it however is in the future, when Israel, under Christ with his saints at His feet, shall be the centre of the nations.

What we can see happening by the conquest of the region by Nebuchadnezzar is that the returning nation in embryonic form will be relieved of much of the hostility they had suffered in the centuries since the days of David and Solomon.

28. Ezekiel 29. The first prophecy against Egypt, which was then a declining world power. Mighty Egypt had been the saviour, captor, support and enemy of the Hebrew people over hundreds of years. Now, one year into the siege of Jerusalem, the prophecy comes about Egypt v1. The Hebrews after leaving the land of Egypt, nevertheless carried a desire for it in their hearts. Turn back to Ezekiel 20:5-10 &23:7. Getting the people out of Egypt was easy compared to getting Egypt out of the hearts of the people. Now in this time of stress, the people eyed Egypt as a means of relief. Verse 6 tells the story, "because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel, when they grasped you by the hand you broke all their shoulders . . ."

In v17 in a separate prophecy gives us the historical perspective. Nebuchadnezzar sacked the shore-land part of Tyre, but could not breach the island citadel where the real wealth was. Therefore his forces were unpaid. To remedy the deficiency in funds Nebuchadnezzar marched on Egypt. As we have seen Alexander the great fulfilled these prophecies a few hundred years later. He built a causeway from the mainland to the island using the rubble left behind by Nebuchadnezzar.



29. Ezekiel 30:1-19. 'Minutes to Midnight.' Not only for Egypt, but for their associates v5. This verse is confusing if all English versions are consulted. It is an interesting verse and scholars translate with their own understandings. See Taylor p202. If it were not there the text seems to be complete. It adds information about various people who served the Egyptian army. It reads literally, 'Cush (black skinned people from Ethiopia) and Put (bowmen of the Libyan region) and Lud (Lydian of Asia Minor whom the Egyptians employed as mercenaries. See Jeremiah 46:9) and the mixed horde, sons of the earth (who had) a treaty with them in the sword (or, as mercenaries).' It could be added as afterthought.

These people served the king of Egypt and when Nebuchadnezzar marched on Egypt they fell with

her. Has Lot not escaped from Sodom he would have been overcome along with them, even though he was grieved by their unrighteousness. Acquiescence in iniquity is as bad as compliance in iniquity. Christian beware. We are living in dangerous days.

30. Ezekiel 30:20-26. This passage is in the form of allegory and includes a flashback to when responding to the appeal of Jerusalem's king Zedekiah who at the time was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah 37:1-10, called for Egypt to save them. Egypt's half hearted attempt was repulsed. In the story, his arm was broken v21. The prophecy is that this defeat is to be followed by the breaking of both arms, the total defeat of Egypt and her allies.

I will . . . put my sword into his hand v24. We need to remember that all these people were making their own decisions, and they are responsible for their actions and the consequences of their actions. The Lord achieves his purposes through the free will responses of all these people and in that sense they are His servants. However it also serves to remember that Jonah was sent to Nineveh with a message of doom. The Ninevites believed the prophecy and repented of their sins and the Lord reversed the prophecy of ill boding. He had mercy on them. Just as they were free to decide so God calls on all men everywhere to repent in this day of grace, and he who believes shall be saved.

31. Ezekiel 31 -Again we have an allegory and its interpretation. Pharaoh is the tall cedar tree on the mountain called Lebanon, home of the mighty cedars. The tree was the home of all kinds of birds, as in the previous chapter, foreigners, mercenaries, asylum seekers. When the tree fell the birds nests fell with it. Foreigners cut it down and foreigners sit upon its fallen trunk.

In Matthew 13:31 Jesus took up this imagery. Jewish students who knew their Scriptures could have made the application that Jesus left unspoken. Jesus did not always explain His parables. He expected His people to work it out for themselves. We have to work even harder as it is a foreign culture to ours. Birds and animals gathered themselves to this mustard tree and found shelter in its branches. As we read the previous parable, there are various possible conclusions to the parable story. As a fiend once replied to the remark that there are two sides to every question, he said, "Oh yes that is true, and it makes a great deal of difference to the fly."