

Week 33—A Kingdom Parable

Ezekiel 16

August 17 and 18

Summary and Goal:

The people of Judah find themselves as exiles in the Babylonian Empire. Ezekiel has a series of visions explaining why God's people are in this position, how they need to respond, and where God would be taking them in the future. The parable of Israel and Judah in Chapter 16 as the idolatrous bride of Yahweh helps us understand the seriousness and the destructiveness of idols in our lives. God forgives because He is faithful even in our unfaithfulness, but idolatry always leads to suffering and pain.

Main Passage: Ezekiel 16

Session Outline:

- 1. God's People are Called and Given Life**
- 2. God Grieves When His People Worship Other gods**
- 3. God Offers Restitution and Forgiveness For His Unfaithful People**

Session in a Sentence:

God saves us and gives us life though we are completely undeserving. When we worship other people and things instead of Him, it leads us into pain, loneliness, confusion, and despair.

Kingdom Connection:

God's Kingdom was supposed to consist of His called-out covenant people, the nation of Israel, following Him as God and King. That Kingdom continually failed to live up to its calling, so God promises to make a new, everlasting covenant through His Son Jesus. This new Kingdom consists of all those who believe in Jesus, spans time and space, and includes people from every tribe and tongue. God's Kingdom is everlasting, and it exists everywhere that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.

Introduction: What is happening in Ezekiel?

In 722 BC, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the neo-Assyrian empire, the most powerful political entity at the time. Judah also had to fight off the Assyrians under the rule of King Hezekiah a couple of decades later. Hezekiah was a good king who brought the people of Judah back to the worship of the Lord, and God rescued Judah by killing 185,000 of the Assyrian Army (2 Kings 19:35). The Assyrian empire was beginning to weaken, and their strongest rival was the Babylonian empire. After the Assyrians retreated from Jerusalem, King Hezekiah foolishly invited the Babylonian envoys to see his weaponry and wealth in Jerusalem. Perhaps Hezekiah wanted to show off, or perhaps he was trying to curry favor with the Babylonians and make an alliance with them. Either way, God was unhappy with the king of Judah for trying to make and break political alliances based on his own wisdom. God's expectation was that a king in Israel or Judah would function as the vassal of Yahweh. ¹ 1 Kings 20 tells us that God sent the prophet Isaiah to explain to Hezekiah that at some time in the future, his descendants would be taken into Babylonian exile along with all the valuable items from the temple. This ultimately happened while Jehoiakim was the king of Judah when Judah had to make a forced alliance with Babylon, and the Babylonians took hostages from the nobility of Judah. In 598 BC, Jehoiakim tried to rebel against the Babylonians, but he was killed and his son Jehoiachin became king of Judah. Jehoiachin did not listen to the prophet Jeremiah nor trust in the Lord, so he unwisely tried to make an alliance with Egypt to fight against the Babylonians. That alliance did not work, and after three months Jehoiachin and many other people from Judah were taken into exile to Babylon along with many of the treasures of the temple. Ezekiel was taken in this second wave of exile. Within 10 years, the city of Jerusalem was torn down and burned, and almost all of Judah's remaining inhabitants were taken into exile to Babylon. Ezekiel's prophecies span the 20 years surrounding the Israelites being taken into exile into Babylon, and his prophecies call the wandering people of Israel back to faithfulness in God.

1) God's People are Called and Given Life

Ezekiel 16:1 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ² "Son of man, cause Jerusalem, to know her abominations, ³ and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite

¹ Duguid, Iain. *The NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel*. Page 19.

and your mother a Hittite. ⁴As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. ⁵No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. (Ezekiel 16:1-5, Chronological Bible, August 19, p.1088)

This passage is a reminder of where they came from, and it isn't pretty. It is a graphic reminder that their heritage is not the cleanest, nicest or most honorable and definitely not the most spiritual. God is saying you have baggage. Your heritage is messed up. And yet that is no excuse for the choices you make today.

Many people like to carry around their baggage. I have recently been watching some movies and shows that take place in the days where people carried their luggage bags through the airports; this was before there were rollers to make it easier.

Back in those days, it was cumbersome to carry a big bag, a hanging bag, etc. But then they added rollers and a leash. Remember the leashes? You would drag the bags similar to walking/dragging a reluctant dog. And then they added the handle that would come up from the suitcase and you could roll the bags on 2 wheels as it leaned towards you with the greatest of ease. You can carry a lot more weight in the bags like that because of the weight distribution and the leverage.

And sometimes that is exactly what we do with our emotional baggage, family baggage, physical baggage and sometimes even spiritual baggage. We pack it all very nice and compact. We take it with us wherever we go. Just like traveling through the airport and not checking your baggage, so it stays with you the entire trip. You stop for a bite to eat; you pull that bag right up next to your chair. To get a drink of water you lean it just right so it won't topple over while you bend down. You go to the restroom, well you get the point. You take the baggage with you everywhere you go.

God was reminding them of their baggage, where they came from and how pitiful it was; but then look verse 6.

Ezekiel 16:6 “And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ (Ezekiel 16:6, Chronological Bible, August 19, p.1088)

We choose to carry our baggage with us and complain about our past. We sometimes want to have people feel sorry for us because of our background; a bad family life, a broken marriage, a bad financial decision, a bad moral decision. We take our “rolling baggage” with us wherever we go and hang our heads low for all to see.

God passes by us and sees us squirming, feeling sorry for ourselves and simply says LIVE!

In verse 6 the graphic language of “while you were in your blood” is the picture of being “lifeless;” yet God says, “LIVE!”

God makes that offer to each one of us and we each individually have to decide to accept that offer and let go of our baggage and decide to LIVE!

*John 5:21 For just as the Father raised the dead and gives them **life**, even so the Son also gives **life** to whom He wishes.”...²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My Word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal **life**, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into **life**.*

God offers us life and tells us to live! But then the question becomes, “What are we going to do with that opportunity to live?”

A few verses later, we see the metaphor continue with marriage and the groom taking care of the bride.

Listen to these phrases...

Vs. 7, “I made you thrive like a plant of the field.”

Vs. 8, “Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” says the Lord God.

Vs. 9, “I washed you with water, washed off the blood from you and I anointed you with oil.”

Vs. 10, “I also clothed you....wrapped you....covered you....”

Vs. 11, “I adorned you with ornaments and jewelry.”

Vs. 12, “I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head,”

Read verses 13 and 14:

Ezekiel 16:13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. ¹⁴ Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 16:13-14, Chronological Bible, August 19, p.1089)

What a change! Remember the baggage? The squirming in blood, not being wanted by anyone? God said, “LIVE” and then went above and beyond in provisions and blessings.

Blessed beyond measure!

In these verses, Ezekiel hammers home the reality that the people of Israel and Judah were completely dependent on God for their protection and provision. Every good and perfect thing that they experienced was the result of God’s generosity. This is extremely pertinent for us because we live in a time and place where we experience more comfort, prosperity, and wealth than any other population in the history of the world. It is so easy for us to assume that our successes and our comforts come as a result of our hard work, intelligence, and character. While these things certainly are important, the truth is that “every good and perfect gift is from above,” (James 1:17) and at any moment we could lose every bit of our health, wealth, and prosperity. Our very lives are dependent upon the generosity of God. We are called to live in a state of thankfulness and reverent worship toward God because He has provided us with every good thing in our lives. On top of that, every one of us was in the same situation as the baby in Ezekiel’s metaphor. We were left on the side of the road, cared for by no one, wallowing in our own blood and filth because of our sin. Ephesians 2:1 says, *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* We were all dead in our sins, and God has offered new life and salvation for us in Jesus Christ.

2) God Grieves When His People Worship Other gods.

Let’s continue in verses 15-16. (*verses below are given in both the NKJV and NLT*)

Ezekiel 16:15 “But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it. ¹⁶ You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and

played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be. (Ezekiel 16:15-16, Chronological Bible, August 19, p.1089)

Ezekiel 16:15 *But you thought you could get along without me, so you trusted instead in your fame and beauty. You gave yourself as a prostitute to every man who came along. Your beauty was theirs for the asking'¹⁶ You used the lovely things I gave you to make shrines for idols, where you carried out your acts of prostitution. Unbelievable! How could such a thing ever happen? (New Living Translation)*

We wouldn't necessarily think of ourselves as prostitutes, but haven't we also let God's blessings go to our heads and think we can "LIVE" on our own without God or without consequences to our choices?

The consequence of their sin was to live in exile in Babylon. They experienced deaths, sacrifices, fires, all kinds of judgment based on their choices not to LIVE for God, but trying to live on their own without God.

We have now arrived at the key issue with the people of Judah. Ezekiel lays out the reasons that they have found themselves in the precarious position of being exiled out of their homeland and into Babylon. In the metaphor, the young woman enjoyed the fame and attention that she received from the rest of the world, and she decided to make herself a prostitute to all the men who gave her attention. God had saved Israel from a life of death and prostitution, provided for her, made her beautiful, and chose her as His bride, but she responded by making herself a prostitute. God says that Israel prostituted herself to the Canaanites, Egyptians, Assyrians, and the Babylonians. What is God talking about in this metaphor? He is talking about the worship of other gods.

God made Himself clear to the people of Israel, but they effectively prostituted themselves to the other nations of the world by worshiping their gods and asking for their approval and protection. The people of Israel showed that they were insecure, impressionable, and unfaithful by rejecting the Lord and worshiping these other gods.

They would pay lip service to the Lord, but then they would completely ignore His commandments and turn their backs on Him by indulging in the worship and recognition of false idols and gods of other nations. Ezekiel's metaphor tells us that Israel, the dying baby rescued

by the Lord, turned into a beautiful woman and then rejected her husband for the favors of much lesser men.

These same lesser men (Canaanites, Babylonians, Assyrians) then came back to hurt the people of Israel and Judah. The same gods that the Israelites looked to for protection were the very entities that propelled them into destruction.

Though a very graphic picture, this sadly represents a very real picture of how so many even today pay lip service on Sundays (or Saturdays) at church, and then the rest of the week go about their lives without any reverence or commitment to the Lord. These choices will always have consequences.

Every time we effectively prostitute ourselves out to another person or thing instead of God, it leads to our own pain and destruction. This happens without fail. Our idol worship leads to pain, alienation, loneliness, and broken relationships. You and I need to look closely at our own lives and ask this question: "What are the things that I am giving my time, money, affection, energy, passion, and love to instead of God?" We must find the idols that plague our lives and get rid of them because just like the people of Judah, these idols will lead to our destruction if we are not careful.

3) God Offers Restitution and Forgiveness For His Unfaithful People

Ezekiel 16:59 For thus says the Lord GOD: "I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant. ⁶⁰ Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.... ⁶² And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the LORD."' (Ezekiel 16:59-60, 62, Chronological Bible, August 19, p.1091)

Even when we are not faithful, God is faithful. Even when we take God's grace and mercy for granted, God continues to show His grace and mercy.

"God can no more help being gracious than He can cease being God. He is the God of all grace, and He always finds a covenant basis on which He can exercise His grace."

Dr. Charles Feinburg (Dallas Theological Seminary)

In spite of all the things that Judah had done against God, and in spite of their exile into Babylon, God still promises that He will restore an everlasting covenant with His people. This covenant would help them forget their shame and pain, and it would lead them into a new era with their God.

Fortunately for the people of Judah, this exile in Babylon was only temporary. In about 70 years, they would be allowed to return back to their homeland because of the Persian empire. While they were in exile, the people held on to the hope that if they followed God's laws and stayed faithful to Him, that He would keep His promise and restore them to the covenant. Interestingly, when the people returned to Israel and restored Jerusalem and the Temple, they found out that the glory of the Temple was nothing like it had been in the former days. They were back in their homeland, but it didn't feel like the everlasting covenant promised in this chapter had come. That's because the *everlasting covenant* had not come yet! It came with the arrival of Jesus, the faithful Israelite who instituted a new covenant, not just with the physical descendants of Abraham, but with all who follow Him in faith. The *everlasting covenant* is for those who come to know the forgiveness of sin that only comes through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He defeated death so that even when we were dead in our sins, laying in a pool of our own blood, we could hear Him say to us 'Live!' We live because of Jesus' work on the cross, and His covenant is forever. Even when we fall and go back to other gods for validation, affirmation, and pleasure, we are able to confess, repent, and be forgiven of our sins. God is serious about idolatry because it leads to death, but Jesus Christ offers us life. He is faithful even in our unfaithfulness.