

Week Thirty-three: A Kingdom Parable - Ezekiel 16



Overview

The LORD promises to make Abraham a great nation and promises him the land of Canaan, in which this nation will live. Years later He takes Abraham's grandson Jacob and his descendants to Egypt during a worldwide famine. During the following 400 years Abraham's descendants multiply to a nation of two to three million people.

God raises up Moses to lead the nation to Canaan—the Promised Land. Prior to their entry into the land the LORD warns Israel in Deuteronomy of the dangers of ingratitude and of taking credit for their prosperity once they have entered the land of promise (Deut. 6:10-19; 8:11-20). He also warns them through the Blessings and Cursings that captivity by a foreign nation will follow Israel's continued disobedience: "And it shall be, that just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess" (Deut. 28:63).

One generation after another refuses to heed God's warnings. The Assyrians remove Israel from their land in 722 BC. A hundred or so years later the Babylonians make Judah a vassal prior to destroying it and taking the people captive in 586 BC.

In 605 BC the Babylonians relocate many of Jerusalem's elite to the banks of the Kebar River in Babylon, where Ezekiel, a young priest, sees a vision of God and His glory, and hears God's call to prophesy to those in exile. A year later, the exiles' sixth year in

Babylon, the LORD takes Ezekiel in a vision to Jerusalem, where God shows him what He Himself sees—Jerusalem's leaders and priests conducting abominable practices in the temple. Ezekiel sees the glory of God progressively depart from the holy temple, the city of Jerusalem, and from the land of Israel. He sees the judgment of God upon the nations. In the midst of all these visions God gives Ezekiel three parables that illustrate His relationship with Jerusalem, their unfaithfulness to Him, and His judgment on them (Ezekiel 15-17).

Parables mirror real life situations and expose the hearts of men or situations in a way that direct confrontation does not. God employs many such parables throughout the Bible to confront or teach truth.

Today's lesson focuses on Ezekiel's parable of an adulterous woman to describe Israel's relationship with the Living God.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will appreciate God's extravagant grace lavished upon a stubborn, adulterous city and people and His covenantal loyalty to them.

Key Truths

The use of parables in confrontation indicates that very little time will pass between the telling of the parable and the coming judgment. The stories of the Bible equip God's people today with powerful resources to confront the seriousness of sin and coming judgment.

Bible literacy prepares God's people to understand the wicked tendency of the human heart, to appreciate God's dealings with wayward people, and to warn people so they don't fall into the same sin.

Sexual sin and idolatry are symptomatic of pride, prosperity, and idleness. Before repenting of idolatry and sexual sin, God's people must repent of their root causes.

Lesson Outline

Ezekiel reminds the exiles who formerly dwelt in Jerusalem of their history with God through the parable of an adulterous woman. This graphic parable captures Israel's relationship with God. Verses 1-43 describe Jerusalem's adulterous relationship with God from beginning to present day; verses 44-59 compare Jerusalem's adultery with that of Samaria and Sodom, who have already gone into captivity; and verses 60-63 conclude Ezekiel's parable by highlighting God's covenant loyalty and promise of atonement for Jerusalem's sin.

At the beginning of the parable the LORD makes clear His goal: "Cause Jerusalem to know her abominations" (16:2). He intends to paint a vivid picture of how deplorably they have responded to His love initiative.

1. A Picture of Helplessness - Ezekiel 16:3-5

Ezekiel uses a hint of color to create an outline in the first strokes of his word painting. He describes Jerusalem's original inhabitants, the Amorites and Hittites. These Canaanite peoples descend from Noah's son, Ham (Gen. 9:24-27). Perhaps Ezekiel refers to the original inhabitants of Jerusalem to demonstrate how intermarrying with the Canaanites and worshiping their gods has corrupted Israel. Israel has proved, by their immorality and idol worship, that they are no different from the Canaanites. Obviously then, nothing about Jerusalem as a city or its original inhabitants endears it to God.

Ezekiel adds more definition as he describes the people's total lack of appeal, "No eye pitied you, to do any of those things to you [clean you up and swaddle 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" (16:5). A newborn baby is totally dependent upon others. The picture presents the stark reality not only of Israel's condition when God initiates a relationship with her but every man's natural state—that of a helpless castaway.

2. A Position of Honor - Ezekiel 16:6-14

Using colors of royalty, Ezekiel adds further details to his word portrait. The LORD doesn't pass by helpless Israel, but intervenes by speaking life and committing Himself to her. His care for her causes her to flourish. Ezekiel beautifully describes

His care, “I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine . . . Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth . . . I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists . . . Thus you were adorned with gold and silver . . . Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you” (8-14). All that Israel had, she had received from the LORD. His care and His splendor had made her famous among the nations. Perhaps Ezekiel is referring to the monarchy under David and Solomon, to Israel’s temple in Jerusalem, upon which the glory of God had descended.

3. A Portrait of Harlotry - Ezekiel 16:15-52

Ezekiel adds blobs of dark and harsh color to his picture as he describes Israel’s harlotry.

- She takes all that God has given to her and uses those things to make images for worship (16:15-19).
- She offers the fruit of her womb to the deities of pagan nations (16:20-22).
- She builds idols throughout her land and beckons the nations around her to enter her land. God responds by describing her heart as ‘degenerate’ (16:23-30).
- Not only does she give herself away cheaply to the nations around her, but she hires them to come to her as lovers (16:31-35).
- She is abused by those whom she paid to protect her (16:36-41).
- She experiences the outpouring of anger from the One who had previously poured out love and blessing (16:42-43)
- The LORD reveals the root of Samaria and Sodom’s sin, and finds Jerusalem’s sin twice as bad: “Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they” (51). Ezekiel lists the sins of Samaria and Sodom illustrating that sexual sin and idol worship are symptoms of a root problem: “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: she and her sister had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me” (49-50).

God permitted the Assyrians to take Israel into captivity. Sadly, Judah follows in her footsteps. Most of her 345 years of existence are marred by sexual sin, idol worship, and alliances with the nations around her.

4. A Promise of Hope - Ezekiel 16:53-63

Though Jerusalem and her people are covenant breakers, God, the covenant maker keeps His promises. Though His people are living in gross sin, God promises to make atonement for their sins.

Application - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

Meditating on Israel's history (strong Bible literacy) helps God's people understand who God is for His people and warns them of certain judgment for continued disobedience.

God is better to Israel than they deserve; and Israel is more wicked than they think. In the same way, God is better to us than we deserve; we are worse than we think; and we must be alert to the natural tendency to transfer love for God to the blessings He gives.

Pride, prosperity, and idleness create an atmosphere in which sexual sin and idolatry thrive.

Summary

God speaks through the past and through parables and pictures to portray the seriousness of sin and warn of its consequences. *God acts* by promising to redeem a ruined people.

God reveals the root of sexual sin and idolatry. He also highlights His covenant loyalty to His people in spite of their sin by promising to provide an atonement.

Discussion Questions

Considering that pride, prosperity, and idleness characterize American culture, what idols do Americans worship? On a scale of one to ten (one being low and ten being extreme), how would you rate sexual promiscuity in our nation? What does this imply about God's judgment?

Read 2 Peter 1:5-9. How does a believer protect himself from spiritual barrenness? What role does 'forgetting' play in spiritual barrenness and what are some practical ways from preventing spiritual barrenness?