

Ezekiel 16A

- After a long break we're finally ready to resume our study of the book of Ezekiel
 - I began this study in 2017
 - I taught twenty lessons covering the first 15 chapters of the book before I had to suspend the study at the end of 2017
 - And now nine months later, I'm ready to return to the book
 - Unfortunately, during those intervening 9 months, I transitioned to a new church and therefore a new audience
 - None of you were present when I taught those first 15 chapters, which presents a dilemma for me
 - Do I restart the study from the beginning or pick up where I left off?
 - While I'm most of you would vote for me to start from the beginning, I've decided to pick up where I left off
 - Those first 20 lessons were recorded and are available online, so I've been pointing folks to go there to get what they've missed
 - So for those who have been following this study online, tonight mostly picks up where we left off in Ezekiel's prophecies (*jump to page 11*)
 - But because so many are joining us tonight for the first time in this study, I need to provide a little context and review
 - Beginning with the prophet himself
- Ezekiel was a man, a priest of Judah, who lived long ago in the nation of Israel
 - Ezekiel was a major prophet of the OT called to speak to Judah in the days of the Babylonian captivity
 - He is an unique – even enigmatic – character in scripture
 - God asked things of him that that God asked of no other prophet
 - But he received rare and marvelous visions that no other prophet received
 - And the Lord called this man to deliver some bad news to the nation

- God required this man delivered the whole truth to Israel
- He warned Ezekiel to hold back none of the terrible details of the judgment God was preparing to deliver
- He didn't sugarcoat anything but explained in graphic detail the circumstances Israel was facing for their disobedience to God
- He spoke in graphic and even vulgar terms to awaken the nation to its depravity and hardheartedness
 - He sought to offend Israel, just as they had offended their God
 - And as a result, like most prophets Ezekiel was rejected by his own people, who responded to his declarations with cynicism
 - History does not record his birth or death or even if he had children
 - In fact, there are no records of his life outside the book he wrote
- His name means strengthen by God, and surely he was strengthened by God because he had a very difficult mission
 - He was told to explain to Judah the reason for God's harsh judgment, and Ezekiel delivered that message just as God required
 - He didn't mince words, he didn't soften the blow, and he didn't worry about hurting feeling
 - God told Ezekiel to arrest a disobedient Israel with dramatic words of judgment so they would be without excuse
 - But in the midst of the bad news, God also gave Israel a glimmer of hope
 - Ezekiel provided Israel with a stunning preview of the glory God has prepared for the nation in the Kingdom
 - He assured the captive nation they would one day return from their scattering
 - They would see a renewed temple filled with the Glory of God
 - Then even as Israel was unfaithful to the covenant, nevertheless God would remain faithful to His promises
 - In earlier chapters, we're told Ezekiel wasn't expecting to be a prophet
 - He was training to to serve in the temple as a priest in Jerusalem

- Upon his thirtieth birthday, he would have begun that service
- But before he could serve, the Babylonian army led under the command of King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and the city in 605 BC
 - Babylon's conquest was foretold 120 years earlier by another prophet, Isaiah
 - Isaiah warned a stubborn nation that the Lord was preparing to bring a severe penalty for their disobedience to the covenant
 - That penalty came first in the form of the Assyrian army who conquer the northern tribes in Israel
 - Then later Babylon conquered the southern kingdom of Judah
- Babylon's conquest consisted of three separate waves of invasion
 - Beginning in 605 BC and continuing over the next ten years, the southern kingdom of Judah was defeated and taken captive by Babylon
 - During each wave, Jerusalem experienced more destruction and greater numbers of its citizens were taken into captivity
 - Ezekiel was among those Jews taken to Babylon during the second of these waves of deportation
- After he reached the community of Jewish exiles now living in Babylon, Ezekiel was called by God to be their prophet (*see Chaps 1 & 2*)
 - Along with Ezekiel serving the exiles, the Lord also sent His people Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Daniel in Babylon
 - The ministries of these prophets testifies to the Lord's continuing grace for His people even as they came under His wrath
 - To the exiles in Babylon, the Lord gave them Ezekiel to explain what was happening and why it was happening
 - To protect the exiles while in captivity, the Lord raised Daniel up to assume a high government position in Babylon
 - And for those Jews who remained back in the land for a time, the Lord gave them Jeremiah to warn them to repent
- So our study of Ezekiel considers important things God said to His people as they lived in exile as captives of their enemy, Babylon

- The Lord had two principle purposes in speaking to His people through Ezekiel
 - First, the Lord explained to Israel why they were suffering in such difficult circumstances, and in a word the reason was rebellion
 - In the previous chapters of this book, the Lord chronicled Israel's rebellion against Him and the covenant
 - For centuries, the people of Israel had disobeyed the word of God, ignored the Law and engaged in gross idolatry
 - They had even brought prostitution into the temple and engaged in child sacrifice to Molech and Baal
- So the Lord tells His people through Ezekiel that a reckoning would now be required, one that would purge the nation of idolatry forevermore
 - That judgment would begin with the destruction of their previously-unconquered city
 - Babylon would rob and destroy the temple, flatten the walls, kill Israel's corrupt leadership and purge the nation of rebels
 - Finally, all the people would be exiled, taken out of the land and made to serve their enemy
- The Lord promised Israel that after the nation was permitted to return to her land, idolatry would never again return
 - Through Ezekiel the Lord promised to bar the return of corrupt leaders so that a new generation of godly leaders could take their place
 - History records that men like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah lead the people back to obedience, at least for a time
- And remarkably, in the 2,500 years since Israel returned to her land, the nation of Israel has never again tolerated idol worship
 - They may have tolerated other sin of various kind – chief among them, rejecting the Messiah – but idolatry has never returned
 - That is one of the lasting effects of the Babylonian captivity, just as God promised through Ezekiel
- But the Lord had a second purpose in speaking to His people, one that extends into future generations of Israel

- The Lord used Ezekiel to provide Israel with a preview of their coming glory in a promised Kingdom
 - That their judgment in Babylon didn't mean God was forsaking the nation or withdrawing His promises of blessing
 - Ultimately He would fulfill all His promises to His people, including bringing Israel into the Kingdom
 - But first, they must undergo a refining, a purging, a testing, an atoning for their sins
 - Because the same covenant that promised Israel a glorious future also promised the present judgments for disobedience
- So the first half of the book emphasizes the severity of God's judgment made necessary by Israel's sins
 - While the second half reveals the magnitude of Israel's future glory made possible by the God's faithfulness
 - In that day rather than being a captive of their enemies Israel will reign over all their enemies
 - Their flattened city will rise again, and a new temple will be built
 - And more than merely restored, these things will become far greater in the Kingdom
- And at the juncture between the first and second parts, we find a new promise from God to Israel
 - A new covenant, to be specific, that would make the transition from judgment to blessing possible
 - That new covenant promises Israel a new heart, one that will finally fully obey and serve the Lord
- But before all that, the Lord must convince the Jews that they were, in fact, experiencing God's judgment and that a rescue wasn't coming
 - Because as crazy as it sounds, even after several years in Babylon, the exiles still clung to the belief that God was going to save Jerusalem
 - At the point of chapter 16, Jerusalem had already experienced two waves of attack by the Babylonians

- Jerusalem had suffered great destruction and many of its inhabitants were already in exile in Babylon
- But the walls still stood at least partially and the temple still operating and the city was still occupied at least for now
- So the exiles still assumed God would preserve the city in the end and defeat Babylon and rescue them from captivity
 - It was a vain hope centered on the delusion that Israel's covenant with God tied His hands
 - The people assumed the Lord was obligated to save them from this calamity because He had made promises of glory to them
 - They thought the covenant relationship obligated God to favor Israel regardless of how Israel behaved
- In a way, Israel's thinking was correct
 - The Lord *did* commit Himself to preserving the nation, including ensuring Israel triumphed over their enemies in the end
 - But Israel conveniently overlooked that their covenant had multiple terms
 - It also obligated God to bring judgments against Israel to their disobedience to its commandments and statutes
- And God could no more overlook the covenant's requirements for judgment than He would ignore its promises of blessing
 - If Israel was so sure God would ignore His word concerning judging Israel, how could they be so certain He would keep His promises concerning blessing Israel?
 - But the Lord is faithful to His word in all cases, so He brought Israel under severe discipline just as He promised for a time
 - In fact, later the nation will be restored to their land for a time, and much later they will receive the glory God promised
- But for now, they must experience the judgment God promised for their disobedience
- Today we start chapter 16, which is part of a section I've called Israel's excuses

- When Ezekiel told the exiles they were enduring God's judgment for disobedience, the people responded by saying Ezekiel got it wrong
 - And they offered alternative explanations – or excuses – for why they need not be worried despite all that had come against them
 - Altogether, the people offered eight excuses or reasons why they could safely ignore the prophet's warnings
 - And for each excuse, the Lord gave Ezekiel a response refuting the exile's reasoning
- The Lord's eight responses are found in chapters 12-19
 - Today we're at chapter 16, which means we're dropping into the middle of the excuses
 - Specifically we're looking at the fifth excuse in chapter 16
 - And the Lord's response to the fifth excuse actually started back chapter 15 and continues into chapter 16
 - So before we can dive into chapter 16, we need a few more moments of review in chapter 15
- First, chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in Ezekiel while chapter 16 is by far the longest chapter in the book
 - In fact, Chapter 16 is the longest single prophecy in the Old Testament and the longest allegory in all the Bible
 - Chapter 15 also contains an allegory
 - And both these allegories work together to paint a vivid and graphic picture for the people of Israel
 - The Lord's point is that Israel should stop fooling themselves by thinking God is obligated to protect them because of the covenant
 - That the Lord won't allow His city, Jerusalem, to be captured
 - Or that He won't allow His temple to be destroyed or His people to be taken completely out of the land
 - Despite the fact that these things had already happened twice, the people were so stubborn and rebellious they still told themselves they would be ok

- The cavalry would soon arrive
- The Lord would protect them, protect the city and defeat Babylon for them
- And why? Because they were God's covenant people
- So the fifth excuse Israel offered for why Ezekiel's warnings weren't to be believed was because God was obligated by His covenant to save them
 - Back in chapter 15, the Lord used a simple allegory to correct this bad assumption
 - And since the chapter is so short, let's re-read it

Ezek. 15:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 15:2 "Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?"

Ezek. 15:3 "Can wood be taken from it to make anything, or can men take a peg from it on which to hang any vessel?"

Ezek. 15:4 "If it has been put into the fire for fuel, and the fire has consumed both of its ends and its middle part has been charred, is it then useful for anything?"

Ezek. 15:5 "Behold, while it is intact, it is not made into anything. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it still be made into anything!"

Ezek. 15:6 "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem;

Ezek. 15:7 and I set My face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set My face against them.

Ezek. 15:8 'Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,'" declares the Lord GOD.

- If you want a full explanation of this allegory, please revisit Lesson 15, but for now, I can summarize it for you quickly
 - The allegory begins with a grapevine alone in a forest
 - It is surrounded by much more stately trees in the forest
 - Those trees are far grander, far more powerful than a grapevine
 - Moreover, the wood of a grapevine is of poor quality
 - It's weak and good for nothing especially when compared to the strong wood of old growth trees

- And to make matters worse, this grapevine has been burned on both ends leaving only the middle of the vine wood untouched
 - Now that vine was utterly useless even before it was burned
 - But now that the ends are charred, it's even weaker and less majestic
- That vine represented Israel in Ezekiel's day
 - Israel is commonly pictured in Scripture as a grapevine, something God plants and cultivates to produce fruit
 - But when compared to the strength of it's surrounding neighbors, Israel was a weak nation
 - Israel was small and insignificant, while its neighbors like Assyria and Babylon were much more numerous and mighty
 - The only thing that allowed Israel to contend with such powers was God's might acting on their behalf in protecting them
- But what if God were to withdraw His protection? What chance did Israel stand against such powerful adversaries?
 - Israel had no inherent strength, no inherent worthy or value that could assure its safety
 - And in fact, as the allegory depicts Israel had already been twice-burned by Babylon
 - Two-thirds of the city have been captured and exiled
 - Only one third remained in what was left of Jerusalem, so as weak as the nation had been to start, it was far weaker now
- The message of chapter 15 was very straightforward...the exiles had no reason to be so confident of their future success against Babylon
 - First, it's obvious they have no internet strength or ability to fight
 - Israel was decimated and Babylon was the most powerful nation on earth at that time by far
 - If they had already lost twice, there was no reason to expect Israel to prevail in the third battle that Ezekiel promised was coming

- That meant Israel's only chance to prevail against Babylon was if the Lord fought on their behalf
- Which leads Israel to the second conclusion of chapter 15
 - If the nation was too weak to prevail even in the first battle, then clearly they lost because the Lord withdrew His hand of protection
 - Clearly, the Lord was not protecting them, and after two defeats they had no reason to assume He would give them victory in the third attack
- As the Lord says in v.6. Babylon was the forest fire the Lord was using to consume His people and their city
 - The Lord says He has given the inhabitants of Jerusalem over to Babylon as fuel for a fire
 - And He will make the land desolate as a testimony against them
 - So chapter 15 refuting the first part of the excuse, which said that God would always protect His people
 - Self-evidently, that wasn't true...there are times when God allows His people to feel the weight of their sin
- But God still needs to deal with the misconception that a covenant relationship with God obligates Him to deliver His promises on our terms
 - In chapter 16 the Lord uses a second allegory to explain why Israel's covenant relationship wasn't a shield for the exiles but rather assured their defeat
 - The Old Covenant promised Israel great blessing in a future Kingdom
 - But it also included severe penalties for the nation should they fail to keep the terms of the Law
 - Now by Ezekiel's day, Israel had already failed for centuries to keep the Law
 - They had rebelled despite the Lord repeatedly giving them time to repent and issuing warnings about what was coming
 - So in chapter 16 uses another type of covenant, a marriage covenant, to make an illustration

- The Lord compares His relationship with Israel to that of a husband to an adulterous wife
 - In the allegory, the Lord is the husband and Israel is His wife, called the wife of Jehovah
 - The Lord is portrayed as a Husband Who has graciously and lovingly extended a marriage covenant to His wife
 - Nevertheless, the wife spurns His love and deals treacherously with Him repeatedly and in the worst possible manner
 - And so the Lord responds to his wife's treachery with a harsh but just response intended to restore her in repentance
- Finally, a brief warning....this allegory is famous for its uncharacteristically rough language
 - Some have even called this chapter "semipornographic" for Ezekiel's graphic descriptions
 - I believe the language is so strong because the Lord wanted to make a strong impression, but it may offend sensitive ears

Ezek. 16:1 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

Ezek. 16:2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations

Ezek. 16:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.

Ezek. 16:4 "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths.

Ezek. 16:5 "No eye looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you. Rather you were thrown out into the open field, for you were abhorred on the day you were born.

- The allegory begins with the Lord reminding Israel of their humble origins by describing the birth of an unwanted child
 - The child pictures the inhabitants of Jerusalem
 - The Lord says specifically in v.3 that He is speaking to those in Jerusalem
 - But obviously all Israel is in view as well

- But the city of Jerusalem is singled out because it is the capital of the nation and because it will be the focus of the third and final attack
- The Lord says Israel and her capital city were born out of Canaan
 - He says Jerusalem had an Amorite for a father and a Hittite for a mother
 - Now we know the city was initially a Jebusite settlement, another of the Canaanite peoples
 - And in the table of nations in Genesis 10, the Jebusites are listed between the Amorites and the Hittites
 - So in effect the Lord is emphasizing that the city was a Canaanite city through-and-through without a hint of redeeming qualities
- Jerusalem was so worthy of disdain that the Lord compares the city's origins to an abandoned child
 - In those days if a woman didn't want her child, she might go out into the wilderness to give birth
 - There she would leave the child to die exposed to the elements
 - That's the situation the Lord is describing here
 - The baby hasn't had its cord cut off, nor has the body been washed and sanitized...all normal procedures to protect a child after birth
 - Instead, the Lord says in v.5 that no one looked with compassion upon this child
 - Jerusalem was like a child thrown into an open field, abhorred in the day it was born
 - So Israel's capital was birthed out of ungodly peoples and circumstances, not from a place of privilege or blessing
 - The city was not valuable or even desirable
 - Remember, that when Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised land, they completely overlooked Jerusalem
 - They never tried to take it nor thought much of it, probably because it was a despised place

- It was only centuries later when the Lord directed David to take the city and make it Israel's capital that it became beloved
- Had the city been left to itself, it would have eventually died, like a child abandoned in a field
 - Only because the Lord took pity on it and determined to rescue it and make it something special did the city prosper

Ezek. 16:6 “When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you while you were in your blood, ‘Live!’

Ezek. 16:7 “I made you numerous like plants of the field. Then you grew up, became tall and reached the age for fine ornaments; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown. Yet you were naked and bare.

- The Lord says He passed by and took note of the city squirming in its blood and determined that the city should live
- But as an act of His grace, the Lord determined to make Jerusalem something special
- He prepared a people to occupy the city and made the people numerous like the plants of the field
 - Like a young girl, the city and its people grew up and matured
 - And at a certain point the people of Israel reach marrying age, which the Lord pictures as the child reaching puberty
 - This part of the allegory pictures Israel begin formed out of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - And then later being incubated in Egypt in slavery
- Then at a point, the people of Israel had grown to the point that the Lord was ready to form her into a nation
 - The says that as Israel reached this point, she was naked and bare, which at first sounds provocative and even risqué
 - But notice the Lord says “yet you were naked and bare”
 - He's not speaking about something attractive or enticing but rather something shameful
- Going back to the fall of Adam and Woman in Garden, nakedness is associated with shame for sin

- Sin places us in a position of debt before God
 - Our sin debt requires a payment, specifically a payment of death
 - So at the moment of the first sin, Adam and Woman developed an instinctive sense of their jeopardy before a just and holy God
 - And that instinct manifested within them as feelings of shame for being naked in public
 - We inherit the sin nature of Adam and so we also inherit our instinct feelings of shame for nakedness
- But as Israel was ready for a suitor and required someone to cover the shame of their sin, the Lord came in mercy and grace

Ezek. 16:8 “Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 16:9 “Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.

Ezek. 16:10 “I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

Ezek. 16:11 “I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck.

Ezek. 16:12 “I also put a ring in your nostril, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

Ezek. 16:13 “Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your dress was of fine linen, silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey and oil; so you were exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty.

Ezek. 16:14 “Then your fame went forth among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect because of My splendor which I bestowed on you,” declares the Lord GOD.

- The Lord is speaking of establishing Israel as a nation and entering into the covenant He made with them at Sinai
 - By the time the nation had endured hundreds of years in Egypt they had become as numerous as the plants of the field
 - They had matured to the point that the Lord was ready to make them a nation, give them His law and enter into a covenant with them

- This covenant would bring them blessing and it would give a way for Israel to cover their sin and shame
- But the describes that process using a marriage ceremony
 - The Lord acted as a husband to Israel, spreading His skirt over Israel, which was a way of making a marriage proposal
 - You can see she a moment in the story of Ruth and Boaz

Ruth 3:8 It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

Ruth 3:9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.”

Ruth 3:10 Then he said, “May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.

- The Lord covers Israel’s nakedness, redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt and giving her a covenant as a man enters into a covenant with his wife
 - Israel, above all peoples of the earth, would be God’s people, His wife
 - He placed Israel in a privileged and unique place, completely underserved and for no reason except His grace
 - Metaphorically, the Lord describes this moment as someone passing by who washes the abandoned infant
 - The Lord in effect elected to become Israel’s caretaker and provider
 - And then later He anointed the young lady in oil in preparation for her marriage ceremony
 - He clothed her in fine linen and silk and expensive leather sandals
 - He gave her tokens of marriage like bracelets, rings and ornaments that made her even more beautiful and signified a covenant was established
 - The nation received the wealth of gold and silver and ate the best of the land
 - The Lord even crowned Israel as the greatest of all nations

- That refers to the Solomonic period, when Israel reached the apex of her glory in this age
- No nation before or since has equalled Israel's strength and glory and riches in Solomon's day
- She was exceedingly beautiful and her fame went before all the nations
 - We remember the Queen of Sheba traveling from far away to see Solomon's kingdom it was so impressive
 - The Lord says He bestowed all these things upon His people as a sign of His love and as a result of His covenant relationship
 - The nation's rise to beauty and glory were entirely the result of God's power and grace
 - Apart from God, the city would have died out and the people would never have survived or even existed
- Then notice in v.13 the Lord adds that the nation was "advanced to royalty"
 - That's a confusing way to translate the Hebrew
 - A better translation would be "headed to Kingdom prosperity"
 - In other words, Israel was well on her way to seeing the glory of the Kingdom that they were promised by the covenant
 - Ince Israel's Messiah arrived and set up the Kingdom, Israel would have entered ready to receive all the blessings God has promised
- So things were going really well for Israel at that point, all because of God's mercy and grace...but then the wheels fell off and the good times came to an end

Ezek. 16:15 "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing.

Ezek. 16:16 "You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen.

Ezek. 16:17 "You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them.

Ezek. 16:18 "Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them.

Ezek. 16:19 “Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 16:20 “Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter?

Ezek. 16:21 “You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire.

Ezek. 16:22 “Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.

Ezek. 16:23 “Then it came about after all your wickedness (‘Woe, woe to you!’ declares the Lord GOD),

Ezek. 16:24 that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square.

Ezek. 16:25 “You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable, and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry.

Ezek. 16:26 “You also played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry.

Ezek. 16:27 “Behold now, I have stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations. And I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd conduct.

Ezek. 16:28 “Moreover, you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied; you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied.

Ezek. 16:29 “You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, yet even with this you were not satisfied.””

Ezek. 16:30 “How languishing is your heart,” declares the Lord GOD, “while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot.

Ezek. 16:31 “When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square, in disdain of money, you were not like a harlot.

Ezek. 16:32 “You adulteress wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband!

Ezek. 16:33 “Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotries.

Ezek. 16:34 “Thus you are different from those women in your harlotries, in that no one plays the harlot as you do, because you give money and no money is given you; thus you are different.”

- As we’ve heard before, pride goeth before the fall
 - Israel’s ascent to her place of privilege among the nations led to pride
 - Because of her fame, the nation played the harlot, the Lord says
 - The world harlot means a prostitute, so we’re not simply talking about a wife being seduced by another and committing adultery

- The Lord is talking about something even more depraved and senseless
 - He's describing Israel selling herself out to others rather than remaining faithful the Husband Who has done so much for her
 - Israel was rescued from abandonment and adorned with the best of everything by an adoring, loving husband, turned away from him
 - And instead of honoring him for his love, she rents herself out to anyone who might be willing to have her the Lord says in v.154
 - It's the most absurd turn of events, senseless and self-destructive
- Israel's harlotry is a picture of her idolatry, of worshipping other gods rather than Jehovah
 - The Bible commonly compares idolatry to prostitution because the comparison works on numerous levels
 - First, it reminds us that our relationship with the Lord is the only proper worship relationship we should pursue
 - Like a wife who remains devoted to her husband, we should have eyes for no one else
 - But if we stray into worshipping other gods, we are playing a harlot
 - We're not merely committing adultery, cheating on God
 - But more specifically, we're playing the part of a prostitute
 - Because like prostitution, idolatry is never about love
 - Remember, love in the Bible is a verb, not a noun
 - It describes selfless actions, not warm fuzzy feelings
 - And false idols can't show us love..they can't serve us or do anything for us
 - They can't show us love and therefore we don't respond to them out of love
 - Rather, we pursue idols out of greed and pride and selfishness
 - We seek something from them, just as a prostitute seeks payment for her services

- It's a counterfeit relationship, one that gives the appearance of genuine love and affection but lacks the substance
- It's a transaction, one that trades the infinite love and grace of the true God for the temporary and vain promises of earthly gain
- But in the case of Israel's idolatry, the situation was even worse, the Lord says
 - Because in her folly Israel didn't receive anything for her prostitution but instead she paid her clients
 - In vs.31-34 the Lord describes how men typically have to pay their harlot
 - But Israel paid her lovers, bribing them to come to her, doing something completely absurd, gaining nothing in return for what she traded away
 - Back in v.16 the Lord describes those gifts saying Israel took her good things from the Lord and used them to honor idols
 - In each of these details the Lord is alluding to aspects of the temple worship
 - For example, Israel took her fine linens and used them to make the high places of idol worship
 - The Lord compares it to bedding for her sexual acts
 - And Israel took her precious gifts of gold and silver to make the male images she then fornicated with, spiritually speaking
 - Israel took the embroidered cloth and incense of the temple to adorn and worship their idols
 - The showbread and the produce of the land were dedicated to these gods rather than to the true God Who gave them to His wife
 - And perhaps worst of all, Israel reached a point of depravity where they willingly sacrificed infant children to pagan gods
 - The nation's suitors included her worst enemies, the very nations that the Lord had been protecting her from and giving her power over
 - Israel gave her wealth and allegiance to the false gods of Egypt and Assyria and Babylon

- So not only did Israel disregard her Husband's kindness, but she returned that kindness by making friends with His enemies
- So the Lord says Israel has already been suffering under penalties brought about by these insults
 - In v.27 He says that the nation will see its rations reduced
 - The Lord is alluding back to a husband and wife allegory
 - In ancient times, a husband serves as a master over his household, including his wife
 - His authority was absolute to the degree that if a wife openly disobeyed her husband, he could impose penalties
 - One such penalty might be reducing her food rations
 - It was like us sending a child to bed without supper
 - In the case of Israel, though, the Lord was talking about the deprivation they would suffer as captives in Babylon
 - He goes on to say they would be delivered into the hands of those who hate you, a reference to their coming captivity
 - The people would not have the plenty they had known but only starvation rations at times
 - But this reference to being delivered into the hands of enemies also has a marriage parallel
 - Because another possible penalty for a disobedient wife, and perhaps the harshest penalty, was to be put out of the house
 - A husband could literally bar a wife from her home for a time, forcing her to live off the street or to be taken in by others
 - And typically the only type of person who would give shelter to a disgraced wife were men willing to take advantage of her...me who would treat her as a harlot
 - And that's what the Lord means by turning Israel over to her enemies, to the very people whose gods Israel had found so attractive
- Back in v.20, the Lord asks rhetorically if such harlotries should be seen as a "small matter?"

- Obviously, they are a huge matter, so how could Israel not expect the Lord to respond in some way?
 - Remember, the people were using the excuse that the Lord wouldn't bring the judgments Ezekiel was promising because they were God's covenant children
 - So now the Lord is reminding Israel of how they spurned that special relationship over centuries of idolatry
 - They took everything good that they received and threw it in God's face
- And in v.22 the Lord says it all began because the people of Israel forgot their origins
 - They forgot that they were nothing with Him
 - They overlooked how vulnerable, and they lost a sense of gratitude and awe for all that God had done for them
 - And as a result, pride crept in and turned their perspective upside down
- This is the classic and enduring pattern in all Creation
 - First comes God's provision of grace
 - He assigns privilege and blessing through a relationship He establishes
 - And at first, things are glorious and perfect
- But then at a point, the creature loses sight of its dependence and connection to its Creator
 - He begins to see himself as inherently glorious, inherently powerful and worthy of glory
 - And in that moment, pride is born and sin is conceived
- Later in this book we'll study the fall of Satan in detail, but it's easy to see this pattern reflected in his situation in just a few verses from chapter 28

Ezek. 28:14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.

You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:15 “You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek. 28:16 “By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;
Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek. 28:17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
I put you before kings,
That they may see you.

- Satan was given the most privileged place in all God’s creation, guarding God’s glory in the Heavenly tabernacle
 - But because of his high privilege, the abundance of his trade or assigned position
 - And in the end, pride took Satan down
- Man’s fall in the Garden took a similar course
 - Adam was the highest creature on Earth, blessed with perfect surroundings and everything he could desire
 - And had dominion over everything
 - But because of his freedom and place of honor, he took advantage of that freedom to act against God’s direction
 - To act independently from God and from God’s word
- In effect, the nation of Israel collectively repeated this pattern, God declares in v.22

- They did not remember from where they came, meaning they lost sight of their dependence on God and His grace and mercy
- They acted as if they could sin with impunity and define for themselves a Kingdom
- What Satan did, what Adam did, what Israel did, we too do from time to time
 - The way we sin will differ, but the engine for our sin is always the same: pride
 - It begin when we begin to think we can exist and act and prosper independent from God
 - As if we have inherent worth and power and glory
 - Assuming we answer to no one but ourselves and the gods we sell ourselves to
 - When believers fall into the trap of pride, we will inevitably begin to sell ourselves to something in the world just Israel did
 - It's the nature course, because if you do not serve God through your obedience, then you are left with nothing else to serve expect the world
 - And the prince of this world knows how to manipulate our pride to bring us into all manner of sin
 - If this happens, don't be surprised that the Lord may begin to treat us like a husband dealing with a rebellious wife
 - He acts in measured ways to bring us to repentance so that the relationship may be restored
 - He never puts an end to our relationship, of course, but He may it to pass through some difficult times in order to purify us
 - To purge rebellion out of our spirit just as He purged rebels from Israel