

EZEKIEL 16 UNFAITHFULNESS REPAID TO DIVINE MERCY

Having used the parable of the vine in the last chapter as an introduction, the prophet now proceeds to make an application of its principles to God's people. In this allegorical narrative, the covenant-people are personified as an individual – a daughter by the name of Jerusalem. And in the description of her life, the most vivid picture is presented of the history of God's connection with His people, and of their behavior toward Him. It will be best to consider this picture in the successive stages of the metaphorical life of this young woman.

In verses 3-7, we have unfolded to our view the beginnings of God's chosen people, when they were struggling into national existence. This part of the picture takes its commencement with the birth of the little girl-child, and it describes her growth and advancement to young womanhood. The two features that are brought prominently out in this portion of the history are the naturally helpless, unpromising, and polluted condition of Israel; and the wonderful mercy and lovingkindness of God in preserving her existence and bringing her to maturity. The girl-child that personifies the nation of Israel is here represented as a despised and neglected infant, who was denied the most common acts of parental care and love. In short, her very life and existence were a miracle; for immediately after her birth, she was cast out as a worthless and polluted thing upon the face of the earth, and mercilessly abandoned to the elements of nature. But the love of the Lord prevailed over all that was hopeless and repulsive in the condition of this infant, and fostered her weak and feeble life into full-grown maturity. And in all that is written in these verses concerning the humble beginnings of the nation of Israel, believers in every generation must see a picture of their own condition by nature – subject to the elements of pollution and death. It is only the word of our redeeming God that breathes life into our souls! Therefore, the first and last feeling in every regenerated heart must be a deep abasement and entire renunciation of self, which spontaneously yields the whole praise and glory to God!

The second stage of this allegorical history, exhibited in verses 8-14, represents the singular honor and glory conferred on the little girl-child, who had now grown into young womanhood. She was exalted to the privileged position of the Bride of the King of Zion Himself! Here, again, everything is fragrant with the matchless grace and lovingkindness of God! She had nothing of her own that would entitle her to such an ennobling distinction, and she had no-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The mercy of God toward the outcast daughter of Israel – verses 1-7*
- ❖ *She is elevated to the position of the Bride of the King Himself – verses 8-14*
- ❖ *Her ungratefulness and unfaithfulness toward her Husband – verses 15-34*
- ❖ *The Lord's just judgment is pronounced upon her – verses 35-52*
- ❖ *A word of promise and a gleam of hope – verses 53-63*

thing of her own to adorn herself for it. She became His, in the same sense in which a woman becomes a man's beloved bride, when she is united with him in the holy and lifelong bonds of the marriage-covenant. No other earthly relationship besides that of marriage can so well resemble the nature of that relationship whereby the Lord confers upon His people a rich dowry of temporal blessings, and also maintains with them a most warm and endearing interchange of love!

In the next portion of the chapter (verses 15-34), Ezekiel displays – in the most pungent terms – the ungrateful and treacherous conduct of Israel toward God. The greatly-beloved Bride – who had been treated with such high honors, and blessed with so many precious and costly gifts – proved to be unfaithful to her Husband. Alas! Instead of seeking to promote her Husband's credit and live up to His good name in the world; she acted as if her only objective in life was to show just how low a place He held in her esteem, and how much she loved others instead of Him. When she was blessed with a fullness of worldly comforts, the nation of Israel so often gravitated to the worship of idols instead of Jehovah; like an unfaithful spouse, she broke loose from the holy restraints of wedlock, and yielded herself to the service of impure idols. But this conduct in the daughter of Israel was simply one example of the bad effect that the world naturally has upon the human heart in general.

The next part of this allegorical picture (verses 35-52) is chiefly occupied with the denunciation of judgment; although at different places – especially toward the close of the chapter – the peculiar greatness of Israel's sin is again brought into view, in order to justify the awful severity of the punishment. God's holiness would unfold in measures of justice toward His apostate people, who had shamefully departed from Him – justice which would be most appropriate for their extreme and incorrigible wickedness toward Him. But the last portion of this chapter (verses 53-63) adds a word of promise to the long series of expostulations and threatenings, and it lets in a gleam of hope as to the future condition of God's people. No matter how severe the judgments of God were against the apostacy of His people, they were not to be utterly exterminating; He would still preserve a remnant of His people for honor and blessing. In spite of all her guilt and wickedness, the repentant Bride of Christ is still blessed with the Covenant of God – which has never been repudiated by Him!

The more that everything is traced back to the grace and lovingkindness of God, the more reason there is for the partakers of the blessing to bow the knee in humility – especially when they consider the freeness with which His grace sheds forth its abundance upon the vilest of sinners!

Lord, let the humbling lessons in this chapter take deep hold of our hearts, so that we may never make such an ungrateful return for You for the Covenant blessings which You have bestowed on us. Amen.

