

Ezekiel 16  
Psalm 45  
Revelation 18

“The Fairy Tale Nightmare, Part 1”

August 29, 2010

*Before reading Ezekiel 16*

Ezekiel 16 can be hard to listen to.

Not only is it a long passage,  
but it is a shocking passage.

God wants to shock you.

He wants you to understand how horrific *your* idolatry is.

As I read, I want you to listen for the way in which Ezekiel weds  
the language of idolatry and the language of adultery –  
the language of worship and the language of sex –  
the language of the temple in Jerusalem and the language of prostitution,  
both sexual and political.

In short, you need to hear this as Jerusalem in Babylon.

Every time the graphic language starts to get to you,  
remember that we are talking about Jerusalem –  
we are talking about the holy city, the bride of Christ – the people of God.  
And you are the holy bride – you belong to Christ –  
and yet you live in the midst of Babylon,  
with all its temptations to harlotry.

We have asked throughout Ezekiel,  
what does it mean to be Jerusalem in Babylon?

Ezekiel 16 is describing how Babylon has come to reside in the heart of Jerusalem!

*Read Ezekiel 16*

There are several themes here – but the one that we will highlight today  
is the bride/city/temple theme –  
and we hear of this in Psalm 45, the royal wedding Psalm.  
Psalm 45 is all about the King and his bride –  
the royal princess.  
But the inclusion of this song in the Psalter  
transforms it and you see the connections to Christ and his bride, the church –  
as well as Ezekiel’s vision of Yahweh and his city, Jerusalem.  
And particularly after the horrific impurity of Ezekiel’s vision,  
we need to hear of the radiant beauty of the bride of Christ!

Sing Psalm 45  
Read Revelation 18

Did you hear the connections with Ezekiel 16?

Revelation 18 describes Babylon in the language of Ezekiel's Jerusalem.  
Ezekiel sees that Jerusalem is no better than Babylon.

The exiles don't see it yet.

They still think that Jerusalem is the holy city –  
the bride of Yahweh –  
the pure and holy sanctuary where God dwells with man!  
They believed that Jerusalem was indestructible –  
that the covenant was unbreakable –  
*never* would Jerusalem fall before her enemies.

And so Ezekiel will retell Israel's story in a particularly shocking way  
to show that Jerusalem is no better than Sodom.

"These are deliberate shock tactics on a scale probably unsurpassed  
in the whole arsenal of prophetic assault and battery weapons." (Wright, 127)

Ezekiel 16 is something like someone telling the story of the United States,  
with the American Revolution as a tragic mistake,  
and the United States of America as the great whore of Babylon.

Listen to how Ezekiel begins:

**1. The Charge: Jerusalem's Abominations (16:1-34)**

**a. The Fairy Tale City (16:1-14)**

*16:1 Again the word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations,*

This is not a promising start!

*3 and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth are of the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.*

This is simply a matter of fact.

After all, Jerusalem was founded by Canaanites.

Jerusalem was a Jebusite city before David captured it and made it his capital.  
The Amorites and Hittites were two of the leading tribes of the Canaanites –  
and those three names would emphasize the wickedness and depravity  
of Jerusalem's origins.

Ezekiel is reminding Jerusalem that Jerusalem is an adopted city.

But her birth parents were so depraved  
that they followed none of the standard birth practices,  
but left Jerusalem abandoned in the field.

*4 And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. 5 No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.*

You were treated like dirt by your parents.

They abhorred you – they rejected you – they thought you were worthless.  
And so they abandoned you and cast you out.

But God had compassion you –  
the eye of the LORD pitied you:

*6 “And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’*

The repetition of the phrase,

“I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’”  
is best understood as an adoption oath.

The Code of Hammurabi states:

“If a man has adopted an infant while still in his amniotic fluid and raised him up,  
that adopted child may never be reclaimed.” (Block, 481)

Yahweh is claiming the child as his own forever.

In the ancient world, exposed infants were rarely adopted –  
and when they were, it was often by unscrupulous characters  
who would adopt female infants for the purpose of turning them into prostitutes.  
The compassion and love of God for this abandoned infant  
would have struck Ezekiel’s hearers as a remarkable thing.  
It would also have emphasized the importance of her response of gratitude and obligation

God’s compassion for the abandoned infant, Jerusalem,  
God’s love and pity for this little foundling,  
has served as the foundation for Christian attitudes towards adoption –  
rescuing the abandoned little girls of the Roman world,  
and offering to take in the unwanted children of today.  
I would not say that this is the *point* of the text here,  
but rather it is a *proper* application.  
We ought to have the same sort of compassion for those who are abandoned.

Verses 6-22 have a very tight chiasmic structure that shows God’s care for Jerusalem,  
and Jerusalem’s lack of care for God.

I’ve included this structure in your bulletins:

“wallowing in your blood” (v6)  
“you were naked and bare” (v7)

God's covenant and vow (v8)  
     "declares the Lord Yahweh" (v8)  
         Yahweh's gifts of clothing and food (v9-13)  
         The "renown" of Jerusalem (v14)  
             "because of your beauty" (v14)  
                 "declares the Lord Yahweh" (v14)  
                 "because of your beauty" (v15)  
                 the "renown" of Jerusalem (v15)  
         Yahweh's gifts of clothing and food betrayed (v16-19)  
         "declares the Lord Yahweh" (v19)  
         Jerusalem's sacrifices and abominations (v20-21)  
         "you were naked and bare" (v22)  
         "wallowing in your blood" (v22)

In verse 7 God describes how Jerusalem went through puberty:

*7 I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown [literally, "sprouted"]; yet you were naked and bare. 8 "When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness;*

You may remember Ruth, who lay down at Boaz's feet,  
     and said to him, "spread the corner of your garment over me" –  
         in other words, "marry me" –  
         "claim me as your own."  
 And the Ruth connection is also important because Jerusalem attained the "age for love"  
     when David made her his capital city.

God had legally adopted Jerusalem at the time of her birth –  
     but he only entered into a marriage covenant with her in the time of David.

*I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. 9 Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil.*

The first time, Yahweh cleansed her of the blood of her afterbirth.  
     This time the blood is probably the blood that proves her virginity.  
     He cleanses her and anoints her with oil,  
         bringing her into his royal palace as a queen (as seen in verses 10-14):

*10 I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. 12 And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14 And your renown went forth among*

*the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.*

Throughout this chapter, *never* forget that what we are talking about is a *city* –  
the city of Jerusalem.

That's why you may not forget Ruth.

The foundling of Jerusalem – when God adopted her – was in the days of Joshua.

The marriage of Jerusalem – when God brought her to himself – was in the days of David

And what of the clothing of Jerusalem with splendor?

When did the perfection of Jerusalem's beauty come?

With the building of the temple.

In v10, the clothing of Jerusalem is the fabric of the tabernacle

(Ex 25:5; 26:14; 35:7, 23; Num 4:6-10),

and her food (fine flour, honey and oil) are offerings prescribed for the tabernacle.

You also have the language of Psalm 45 – the royal bride, adorned for the king.

Bride, city, temple – all come together in the picture of Jerusalem's splendor!

And all this was *bestowed* upon Jerusalem.

All of this splendor was a gift.

And if the exiles are correct,

then our fairy tale is now over!

Cinderella has been rescued by her Prince Charming,

and they will live happily ever after...

O! that it were so!

Why do fairy tales end, "and they lived happily ever after"?

I like fairy tales.

Fairy tales often have a cruciform shape:

the prince (and often the princess)

must endure the cross for the sake of the other

in order to pass through suffering to glory.

And so fairy tales teach us to think eschatologically –

to think with a last days mindset (that there will be a "happily ever after").

But fairy tales (especially in the Disney versions) rarely deal honestly with sin.

Oh, sure, there is invariably the wicked stepmother, the witch, the Big Bad Wolf –

but what if the problem isn't that someone "out there" is out to get me?

What if the problem is me?

What if the problem is that Cinderella is a whore?

And so we come to the fairy tale run amok:

**b. The Fairy Tale Run Amok (16:15-22)**

*15 “But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his.*

Remember that verses 15-22 play on the other half of the chiasm (in your bulletin).

The first half of the chiasm moved from blood to beauty.

The second half moves from beauty to blood.

Yahweh had been the first to pass by – and he had given Jerusalem her great beauty –  
but now *every* passerby receives her beauty.

The word “whore” is the key word in this section.

The verb “to play the whore” and “whoring”  
are used at least 18 times in the next 20 verses.

This is not just “adultery” –

adultery would be a minor infraction compared to this!

This is “Jerusalem’s unrestrained nymphomaniacal adventures with her lovers”  
(Block, 465).

This was supposed to be the fairy tale ending –

the prince has rescued Cinderella and we thought they would live happily ever after –  
but then Cinderella became a porn star.

Jerusalem takes all of God’s gifts and uses them for her own debaucheries.

I can’t sugarcoat this!

Because God doesn’t.

There is no “polite” word for *sin*.

And there is no politically correct way to say that God’s judgment is coming against it!

I’ll just say that verses 16-19 are every bit as bad as you think.

God established his temple in Jerusalem,

and yet she publicly prostitutes herself to the nations.

She takes the good gifts of God and uses them for her own perverse cravings.

*16 You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. 17 You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. 18 And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. 19 Also my bread that I gave you—I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey—you set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord God.*

And, forgetting whence she came,

forgetting that she was abandoned in her infancy,

she sacrifices her own children for her own pleasure! (verses 20-21)

*20 And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter 21 that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them? 22 And in all your abominations and your whorings you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, wallowing in your blood.*

Jerusalem has forgotten whence she came.  
She had been abandoned in her infancy –  
and yet now she sacrifices her own children!  
Jerusalem has forgotten that all that she has, was a gift!

And remember that Ezekiel is speaking to “Jerusalem in Babylon” –  
he is speaking to the exiles, who still think of themselves as “Jerusalem.”  
They are not hearing this as “those horrid people in Jerusalem” –  
they are hearing this as the expose of *us* –  
this is *our* history!

When you put your hope in political parties –  
when you find your meaning and purpose in life in your work (or your play) –  
when you take the *good gifts of God*  
(and political life, work and play are all good gifts)  
but when you take them and devote them to someone or something other than God,  
then you are a whore.

And for you who are parents,  
one way that you can tell when you are doing this,  
is by how you treat your children.  
What do you sacrifice them for and to?  
If I make pastoral ministry my god –  
so that my children only hear me say “Daddy has to work on sermons” –  
then I would be a whore in God’s temple, sacrificing my children to my idols.

God says “you slaughtered *my children*” –  
Jerusalem’s children belong to God –  
because God is their father, Jerusalem is their mother.  
So we’re not just talking about biological children here.  
We are also talking about spiritual children.

Jerusalem is the church.  
How is the church caring for her children?  
How are we caring for one another?

Verses 23-29 reach the nadir of Jerusalem’s filth and perversion.  
It is here that we see that in modern terms Jerusalem is not just a whore.  
In our world, prostitutes are illegal and stay out of site.  
Jerusalem is not just a prostitute – Jerusalem is a porn star. [read 23-25]

**c. The Fairy Tale Whore – Chasing the Nations without Pay (23-34)**

*23 “And after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! declares the Lord God), 24 you built yourself a vaulted chamber and made yourself a lofty place in every square. 25 At the head of every street you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring. 26 You also played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger. 27 Behold, therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion and delivered you to the greed of your enemies, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior. 28 You played the whore also with the Assyrians, because you were not satisfied; yes, you played the whore with them, and still you were not satisfied. 29 You multiplied your whoring also with the trading land of Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied.*

As the ESV footnote points out, verse 25 says that Jerusalem is  
“spreading your legs to any passerby.”

In verse 26 it literally reads, “the Egyptians, your neighbors with large flesh.”

(That is the one nice thing about Hebrew – It is very graphic –  
but in a euphemistic sort of way!)

It’s so bad that even the Philistines are ashamed of Jerusalem’s lewd behavior.

I know this is shocking.

It’s supposed to be shocking.

God wants you to be shocked by sin.

But he also wants you to see that this is *you*.

Ezekiel names three of Jerusalem’s lovers (Egypt, Assyria, and Chaldea – or Babylon).

Ahaz (the father of Hezekiah) had entered into a treaty with Assyria (2 Kings 16:7),  
and even built an Assyrian altar in the temple.

Hezekiah himself had allied with Babylon (the Chaldeans)  
and Zedekiah trusted in Egypt.

These alliances had been expensive in terms of tribute –  
and only rarely did the alliance provide the promised protection!

But Ezekiel sees these political alliances as treasonous – indeed as lecherous –  
as a form of spiritual adultery and harlotry.

A few years ago I taught a series on Sex and the City of God –  
followed up by Economics and the Household of God –  
my next series (hopefully soon) will be Politics and the Kingdom of God.

You can see how Ezekiel 16 weaves these three themes together:

sex, economics and politics –  
and all connected together by worship.

Pleasure, money, power – all these things are disoriented through worshiping idols.

There’s nothing wrong with sex, money, or power.

All three are good gifts from God!



But as v29 points out – disoriented worship never satisfies.

If you worship “wealth and stuff” – then you keep accumulating stuff,  
but it never satisfies – you never have enough stuff.

If you worship sex or pleasure – then you are always looking for experiences,  
but it never satisfies – you are always looking for the next thrill.

If you worship power – then you are always trying to be in control,  
but you never get there – and you always feel out of control.

But pleasure, money, power –

none of these things were designed to satisfy us!

They are gifts – they are tools – they are things that God has given us

to be used for his glory – to be used in worshiping him!

And in verse 30 God addresses Jerusalem:

*30 “How sick is your heart [or possibly, “how furious I am with you!” – the Hebrew is a little difficult here], declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute, 31 building your vaulted chamber at the head of every street, and making your lofty place in every square.*

In Proverbs, the father warns his son against the “foreign woman” – the adulteress –

and here Jerusalem is compared to “Dame Folly” from Proverbs 9 –

she is a prostitute – and *worse* than a prostitute!

*Yet you were not like a prostitute, because you scorned payment. 32 Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! 33 Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but you gave your gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from every side with your whorings. 34 So you were different from other women in your whorings. No one solicited you to play the whore, and you gave payment, while no payment was given to you; therefore you were different.*

If you think about what Ezekiel is referring to –

Jerusalem engaged in making treaties with other nations

(not trusting that God would protect the city).

In these treaties, Jerusalem paid out large sums of money as tribute –

and what did they get in return?

Nothing.

They abandoned the LORD their God – and received nothing in return.

Therefore, judgment will come:

Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the LORD!

## **2. The Judgment: A Fairy Tale Nightmare (16:35-43)**

*35 “Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord: 36 Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them,*

There are four reasons for judgment in verse 36:

- 1) *Because your lust was poured out* (literally, the word means she was moist)

In other words, Jerusalem was really into this.

She was not just going along passively.

She was aroused by her passion for things other than God.

I know that this is uncomfortable language –

but God put it here to make you uncomfortable.

He put it here because there are things that *arouse* you  
that should *repulse* you.

And the fact that some of you are getting a little aroused by Ezekiel's language  
should scare the living daylights out of you!

You are aroused by things that will destroy you.

You love death!

- 2) Second reason for judgment:

*your nakedness was uncovered in your whorings with your lovers*

There was the innocent nakedness of the exposed infant –  
which God cleansed and washed.

There is the beautiful nakedness of the virgin whom God covered  
and took to himself as his holy bride.

There is the brazen nakedness of the whore  
who paraded herself before all the nations of the earth.

And now there is the shameful nakedness of judgment  
where the prostitute is humiliated before her lovers,  
and before “many women” (v41).

In the context of a husband and wife,  
nakedness is a beautiful thing.

But when the bride becomes a whore and parades her nakedness before others,  
she will be shamed and humiliated with a punishment that fits the crime.

- 3) *and with all your abominable idols*

It is not just your “lovers” (the nations) but your “idols” as well –

and remember that Ezekiel's word for idol is not the normal word for idol.

She is having affairs with the nations – and with their abominable dung pellets.

I know.

The mental picture is downright awful (offal?).

But again – this is how bad sin is.

- 4) *and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them*

because you worshiped other gods,

you destroyed your children.

Yes – you should think of this as parents

and how your idolatry can destroy your children –  
but remember that Ezekiel is speaking to Jerusalem – to the church:

when the church forgets her God –  
when the church does not love her heavenly bridegroom,  
and runs after the gods of the nations,

then the blood of her children will be upon her head!

I tremble to think of what Jesus must see in his bride today!

It will not do to say “the PCA is better than most!”

Because Jesus is not a polygamist.

He has but one bride!

Our denominational divisions are entirely beside the point!

Churches of all denominations are running after the gods of the nations!

And even as there were four reasons for judgment,  
so are there four judgments:

First, God will assemble the nations:

*37 therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated.*

Second,

*I will gather them against you from every side and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness.*

Block points out the irony:

“She who bared herself before them will finally have her fill of exposure.” (501)

God will gather all her lovers together for a public humiliation.

In the ancient world, the public stripping of one’s wife symbolized divorce,  
as Hosea had put it a couple hundred years before:

“Plead with your mother; plead – for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband –  
that she may put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts,  
or I will strip her naked, and expose her as in the day she was born,  
and make her like a wilderness, and turn her into a parched land,  
and kill her with thirst.” (Hosea 2:2-3)

Ezekiel takes Hosea’s image and expands upon it.

God is going to divorce Jerusalem!

Third,

*38 And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy.*

Let me ask: how are women judged who commit adultery and who shed blood?  
Death.

Even as nakedness has taken on different meanings – so now blood:  
there was the blood of childbirth in the beginning (v6);  
there was the virginal blood of the wedding day (v9);  
there was the blood of her children, sacrificed to idols (v36);  
and now the blood of wrath and jealousy will come upon her.

The punishment will fit the crime.

And so in verses 39-43 we hear of Jerusalem's final judgment:

*39 And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful jewels and leave you naked and bare. 40 They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. 41 And they shall burn your houses and execute judgments upon you in the sight of many women. I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more. 42 So will I satisfy my wrath on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you. I will be calm and will no more be angry. 43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have enraged me with all these things, therefore, behold, I have returned your deeds upon your head, declares the Lord God. Have you not committed lewdness in addition to all your abominations?*

Everything God gave her will be stripped from her.  
She will be returned to the nakedness of her infancy –  
but this time because of her own sin.

She has forgotten the God who gave her everything –  
and so God will remove everything –  
and the little baby girl whom he had saved from death –  
the fairy tale princess who turned into the monstrous whore –  
will die.

As Block says so well,  
“The hell that awaited her was not the creation of some demonic force or external power,  
but of her own making.” (504)

God's judgment against Jerusalem  
must be seen against the backdrop of God grace and mercy to Jerusalem.

### **3. The Two Ugly Stepsisters (16:44-58)**

### **4. Shame and Atonement: an Everlasting Covenant (59-63)**

There is too much in Ezekiel 16 for one sermon –  
but I wanted to get through the most graphic parts in one day.

I will conclude for today simply with a stark contrast, by reading Ephesians 5:25-33

You probably thought that you knew Ephesians 5 before.

Listen to it now that you have heard about Jerusalem – the bride of Yahweh:

*25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,  
26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,  
27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor,  
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,  
that she might be holy and without blemish.  
28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.  
He who loves his wife loves himself.  
29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,  
just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body.  
31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,  
and the two shall become one flesh.”  
32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.  
33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself,  
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,

we come to you, and we marvel at your steadfast love –  
we acknowledge that we were Jerusalem,  
for we have whored after other gods –  
but you have been so gracious to us!

For you sent your only-begotten Son to give himself up for us –  
that he might sanctify us, cleansing us by the washing of water with the word.

We thank you that in your Son you have cleansed and anointed us,  
that we might be yours forever!

We thank you for your Holy Spirit,  
whom you have given us as the guarantee  
that you will bring us to the glorious wedding supper of the Lamb!  
Have mercy upon us, and give us the grace, the strength, and the wisdom we need  
to walk before you – in Jesus’ name. Amen.