

Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 6

The Symbolic Image of Jerusalem/Israel the Unfaithful Bride in Ezekiel Chapter 16

Image Group	Part I Covenant relationship	Part II Rebellion	Part III Redemptive Judgment	Part IV Restoration Promised*
Covenant Marriage	Israel Bride of Yahweh Ezekiel 16:8-14	Unfaithful adulteress/harlot Ezekiel 16:15- 34	Humiliated, abused & abandoned by lovers/false gods Ezekiel 16:23-59	The Bride restored to her Bridegroom Ezekiel 16:60-63

* Restoration is only promised in the Old Testament and not fulfilled until the New Covenant in Christ Jesus, the divine Bridegroom of His bride, the new Israel of the Church (CCC 877).

There are four parts to the covenant marriage imagery:

Part I: Yahweh and his people enter into a covenant relationship like a marriage covenant. Yahweh will bind His people to Himself like a beloved wife in the blessings of security and prosperity in return for faithfulness to Yahweh, the Divine Spouse.

Part II: The Covenant people ignore the Laws of the Covenant. They become like an unfaithful and adulterous wife in forming relationships with false gods.

Part III: God sends His holy prophets to call His people back to Him. Failing in this mission, the prophet calls down a covenant lawsuit which results in covenant curses in the form of punishments meant to bring about repentance and restoration. Israel, the unfaithful bride, is abused and abandoned by her lovers/false gods.

Part IV: Yahweh promises to restore His Bride and to take His people back into the covenant relationship they had first enjoyed with God as the Divine Bridegroom.

Chapter 16 is the longest prophecy in the Book of Ezekiel. It divides into three parts after the introduction in verse 1 and an arraignment or bill of indictment against Israel/Jerusalem for her adulteries in verse 2. Each part ends with the formula statement “declares the Lord Yahweh” that affirms the divine authorship of the passage and its divine pronouncements and consequences.

1. Verses 3-43: An extended metaphor of rescued and unfaithful Israel/Jerusalem.
2. Verses 44-58: Comparisons of Jerusalem with her “sisters” Samaria and Sodom.
3. Verses 59-63: The promise of forgiveness and restoration in an eternal covenant.

The parable in Chapter 17 concerns three historical events:

1. King Jehoiachin’s exile to Babylon (2 Kng 24:8-12; 2 Chr 36:9-10).
2. The elevation of his uncle Zedekiah as the Babylonian vassal king of Judah (2 Kng 24:17).
3. Zedekiah’s death after he revolted against the Babylonians and allied himself with Egypt (2 Kng 24:20-25:7).

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The Symbolism of the Parable of the Two Eagles and the topmost shoot in Chapter 17:

1. The first eagle (verse 3) is the king of Babylon.
2. The “top branch” (verse 4) is Davidic King Jehoiachin, deposed and carried away to Babylon (2 Kng 24:11-16) six years before Ezekiel utters the parable.
3. The “seed” (verse 5) planted by the eagle/King of Babylon is King Zedekiah (2 Kng 24:17).
4. The second eagle is Pharaoh Psammetichus II (595-589 BC) of Egypt (verse 7) with whom Zedekiah sought to make a treaty and to break the hold of the Babylonians on Judah. For his treachery, the Babylonians capture Zedekiah, blind him, take him away into exile to Babylon, and destroy Jerusalem (verses 13-21).

The Symbolic imagery in Ezekiel 17:22-24, the Parable of the Second Shoot:

1. The great cedar tree is the House of David (verse 22a).
2. The “shoot” is the Davidic Messiah (verse 22b).
3. The “shoot planted on a high mountain in Israel is Jesus on the Cross outside the gates of Jerusalem, a city 2,500 feet above sea level on Mt. Moriah (verse 23a).
4. The “tree” that grew from the “shoot” is the Church of Jesus Christ (verse 23b).
5. The “trees of the field” are all the people of the earth (verse 24a).
6. To bring low the “high tree”/“green tree” is the humbling of the wealthy, proud and arrogant, while the lifting up of the “lowly tree”/“withered tree” is the salvation of the humble and dispossessed (verse 24b).
7. It is God’s divine will that the Church of Jesus Christ will surpass the Kingdom of David to become a new creation and a new Kingdom that will offer shelter to all peoples of all nations and have dominion over all the earth (verse 24c).

In Chapter 18, we read about the unique connection between God’s forgiveness and personal repentance, contrition, and conversion (turning back to God). The Council of Trent quotes from Ezekiel 18:30-31 in section 14 paragraphs 1 and 4 concerning the Sacrament of Penance:

1. “... at all times, the practice of penance in order to obtain grace and attain righteousness was necessary for all those who fell into mortal sin, even those who sought to be washed clean by the waters of baptism, so that, when sinfulness has been purged and set to rights, they would detest any offence against God through their hatred of sin and the sorrow of their souls. Thus says the Prophet: *Repent and turn from all your transgressions. Lest iniquity be your ruin* (Ezek 18:30)” (Council of Trent, Session 14, 1).
2. “This Council declares that contrition encompasses not only the end of sin and the beginning of new life, but the reparation of the old, sinful life, as it was written: *Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!* (Ezek 18:31)” (Council of Trent, Session 14, 4).