

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“The Lady is a Tramp”

16:1-34

Eliot Spitzer’s former “Manhattan Madam” is running for the seat he vacated due to his antics with her hookers.

One of the questions Sean Hannity asked her was whether or not she would want her daughter to become a prostitute. Unhesitatingly she said “Yes, if that’s what she chose.”

I find that incredible to believe. To the extent she might actually be telling the truth, it shows just how base our personal morality can become.

We’re going to encounter something like this in Ezekiel chapter sixteen. The Lord is going to compare the Jews to a prostitute. Worse than a prostitute, really, because at one point He will point out that she doesn’t even ask for any payment. Instead she pays bribes to those with whom she commits her immoral acts.

The “Manhattan Madam” didn’t start off that way. Neither did the nation of Israel. In an emotional and graphic parable, the Lord told Ezekiel how His beloved nation had sunk to such a low place.

Ezekiel 16:1 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying,
Ezekiel 16:2 "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations,

Chapter sixteen is the longest chapter in Ezekiel. By itself it is longer than six of the Minor Prophets.

It was intended to “cause Jerusalem to know her abominations.” Illustrations, comparisons, parables, metaphors, similes and the like are a powerful way of communicating truth. They can cause you to see the extent and the effect of a truth.

The Lord wanted the Jews to know the extent of their “abominations.” Let’s pause for a moment to discuss the word “abomination.” It has become a point of debate for those who profess Christianity but promote an unbiblical sexuality. Usually they point out that other behaviors in the Bible which were forbidden are no longer considered sinful. Twenty-first century Christians are free to have tattoos, eat shrimp, lobster, pork or meat cooked rare, wear polyester-cotton blends, seed their lawns with a grass mixture, and get their hair cut. They put sexual behaviors into those same categories.

The simple answer to them is that we distinguish between God’s ceremonial laws and His moral laws. The ceremonial laws that deal with things like dress and diet and days are no longer binding. God’s moral laws are; they never change.

The important distinction between these laws is reflected in the Old Testament penalty for breaking them.

- Disobedience to the ceremonial laws resulted in uncleanness (Leviticus 11:24ff).
- Breaching the moral law meant death (Leviticus 20:2ff).

God left no ambiguity in His description of homosexual acts. They are an "abomination" (Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13, NAS).

The illustration begins in verses three through six where the nation of Israel is compared to an abandoned infant.

Ezekiel 16:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.

Ezekiel 16:4 As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.

Ezekiel 16:5 No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for 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.

Ezekiel 16:6 "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'"

There's an expression theologians use, and it goes like this: "Parables should not be made to walk on all fours." It means that we can get too deep into the details of a parable, or an illustration, and miss the point.

God wasn't giving us the lineage of Abraham and Sarah by saying Israel was born from an "Amorite" and a "Hittite." These were the prominent peoples in the land of Canaan at the time Abraham was called to follow the Lord and Israel was "born" as a nation.

Think back on Abraham. He was a wanderer, a pilgrim, a stranger. He had been promised a land but never occupied it. From the world's viewpoint it looked as though he had been abandoned as an infant in a field.

But God had said, "Live!" And live he did.

Ezekiel 16:7 I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare.

This would correspond historically to the time of the Patriarchs - to Isaac and Jacob. The nation grew but still, from the world's point of view, it owned nothing of its promised land.

Ezekiel 16:8 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so 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," says the Lord God.

Keeping with the illustration, this depicts a marriage. Historically we're at the period of the exodus and the giving of the Law to Moses. That's the "covenant" alluded to.

Ezekiel 16:9 "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil.

Ezekiel 16:10 I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk.

Washings with water, washing off blood, and anointing with oil represent the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Tabernacle. Three of the four materials mentioned in verse ten were prominent in the construction of the Tabernacle.

Ezekiel 16:11 I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck.

Ezekiel 16:12 And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.

Ezekiel 16:13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty.

Ezekiel 16:14 Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord God.

In these verses we see the splendor of King David and then his son, King Solomon. David united the nation and for the first time the Jews conquered Jerusalem and had it as their capital. Solomon brought Israel to a glory that was celebrated throughout the known world.

Can you see in this illustration your own story as a believer in Jesus Christ?

- The human race - all of us - are described as being born dead in our trespasses and sins. We are born spiritually dead but physically alive and soulishly active.
- We're born into the world, the fallen world of men, of the Amorite and the Hittite.
- Thus it is as if we are helpless, abandoned in a field. We're in our own blood, as it were, doomed to die in our sins.

- But the Lord says “Live!” and He gives us life by His grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Our salvation is described even as a Bridegroom’s love for His bride.
- We’re given splendid things, all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. We are the King’s kids, promised a far greater inheritance than any of our spiritual ancestors.

How I wish the story ended in verse fourteen.

Ezekiel 16:15 "But you trusted in your own beauty, played the harlot because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who would have it.

Ezekiel 16:16 You took some of your garments and adorned multicolored high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them. Such things should not happen, nor be.

Ezekiel 16:17 You have also taken your beautiful jewelry from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them.

Ezekiel 16:18 You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them.

Ezekiel 16:19 Also My food which I gave you - the pastry of fine flour, oil, and honey which I fed you - you set it before them as sweet incense; and so it was," says the Lord God.

The seeds for idolatry were sewn in Solomon’s reign. Immediately after he died the kingdom split in two - ten tribes in the north, called Israel, and two in the south, called Judah. First Israel then Judah began to go after the religions, after the idols, of the surrounding nations.

Their behavior was compared to that of an adulterous wife “playing the harlot.” Spiritual adultery is how God saw it.

Ezekiel 16:20 "Moreover you took your sons and your daughters, whom you bore to Me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your acts of harlotry a small matter,

Ezekiel 16:21 that you have slain My children and offered them up to them by causing them to pass through the fire?

Molech. Infants and children were offered to him as sacrifices by the Jews.

A little idolatry goes a long way! I'm sure that during the time of Solomon, or at the beginning of the divided kingdom, had you predicted that Jews would participate in child sacrifice they would have thought it impossible. Stray just a little and you will end up where you never dreamed it was possible.

Ezekiel 16:22 And in all your abominations and acts of harlotry you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood.

In other words, they had forgotten the grace and the mercy of God.

Ezekiel 16:23 "Then it was so, after all your wickedness - 'Woe, woe to you!' says the Lord God -

Ezekiel 16:24 that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street.

Ezekiel 16:25 You built your high places at the head of every road, and made your beauty to be abhorred. You offered yourself to everyone who passed by, and multiplied your acts of harlotry.

Ezekiel 16:26 You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians, your very fleshly neighbors, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger.

Ezekiel 16:27 "Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behavior.

Ezekiel 16:28 You also played the harlot with the Assyrians, because you were insatiable; indeed you played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied.

Ezekiel 16:29 Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied.

The god's of Egypt, Assyria, and the Chaldeans (Babylon) became prominent in their later idolatry. Assyria eventually conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. After the southern kingdom of Judah tried to ally with Egypt, the Chaldeans would come for a third and final siege of Jerusalem.

A couple of things to notice:

- The nonbelieving nations were "ashamed" of Israel's "lewd behavior." Sin is worse when it is practiced by a believer! Nonbelievers look upon you and can only feel shame and contempt.

- No matter how much they borrowed from the pagans, the Jews could not find satisfaction. Sin never ultimately satisfies. And especially for the believer, it leaves you empty. In one of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, Captain Barbossa, who at the time is cursed, described that because of the curse he couldn't feel a thing (not wind, not woman, not food). The quote goes like this: "Drink would not satisfy...food turned to ash...all the pleasure in the world couldn't slake our lust..."

Ezekiel 16:30 "How degenerate is your heart!" says the Lord God, "seeing you do all these things, the deeds of a brazen harlot.

Ezekiel 16:31 "You erected your shrine at the head of every road, and built your high place in every street. Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned payment.

Ezekiel 16:32 You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband.

Ezekiel 16:33 Men make payment to all harlots, but you made your payments to all your lovers, and hired them to come to you from all around for your harlotry.

Ezekiel 16:34 You are the opposite of other women in your harlotry, because no one solicited you to be a harlot. In that you gave payment but no payment was given you, therefore you are the opposite."

The title "adulterous wife" would have been a compliment to describe the Jews. They were beneath even the harlots in that they received nothing in return for their abominable acts. It was even worse than that. No one solicited them; they solicited the idolaters, they paid "bribes" to them to commit their immoral acts.

It's one thing to tell someone that God will be displeased with his or her sin. It's another to give them an example by saying, "It's like your spouse paying others to have sex with them." Or, "It's like you murdering your children, burning them on the arms of a molten-hot idol of Molech."

When I was a kid my dad drove me into a neighborhood in San Bernardino called Waterman Gardens. It was a notorious area for gangs and crime. The people there were poor and violent. He wanted to show me how I would end up if I started doing drugs and such.

I had already started down that road! I thought my dad was an idiot. I believed I could drink, do drugs, have sex, and still maintain everything else I wanted in terms of outward success.

Along the way I saw other lives ruined. Never thought it could happen to me; I was in control of my out-of-control behavior.

Then, when my life was ruined and I didn't even know it, when I was struggling in my own blood left to die eternally, the Lord said, "Live!"

He washed me in the water of His Word, cleaning off the blood by His own blood shed for me at Calvary. He anointed me with the oil of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I'm espoused to Him, promised every spiritual blessing now and to be united with Him in a glorious eternity.

Stray but a little and I - each of us - can end up so far from His blessing we don't really believe it's possible.

Let's walk in ways that please the Lord. Let's keep turning to God and from the idols that are all around us - the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.

After all, drink will not satisfy...food turns to ash...all the pleasure in the world cannot slake our lust.

The Lord alone is our satisfaction. As a deer pants after the watering brook, may our souls thirst for Him and Him alone.