

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 6: The Useless Vine and the Unfaithful Bride -- Ezekiel 15:1-16:63

Walk through a vineyard and you will not find anyone carving furniture out of the vines. Vine wood is crooked, soft, and useless for building anything. It has exactly one purpose: to bear grapes. If a vine stops bearing fruit, it is good for nothing but the fire. God seizes on that homely fact to ask a piercing question about His people. What is the wood of the vine more than any tree? Israel was chosen not because the nation was naturally strong or beautiful, but to bear fruit for God. And a fruitless vine, God says, is fit only for burning. The whole short parable is a sober reminder that being chosen is not the same as being faithful, and that a people who exist for fruitfulness become worthless when they stop bearing it.

Then chapter 16 unfolds one of the longest and most emotionally charged allegories in all of Scripture. God tells the story of Jerusalem as the story of a baby. She was born unwanted, cast out into an open field on the day of her birth, still in her blood, with no one to pity her or care for her. And God passed by. He saw her kicking in her blood, and He said, Live. He washed her, clothed her, raised her, and when she was grown He entered into covenant with her and she became His. He adorned her with jewels and fine linen until her beauty was perfect, for it was the splendor He had given her. It is a tender, almost overwhelming picture of grace, of a God who rescues the helpless and lavishes love on the undeserving.

But the story turns, and the turn is devastating. The bride God had rescued and married trusted in her own beauty and played the harlot. She took the gifts He had given her, the gold, the garments, the very food from His hand, and used them to chase after other lovers. She was not even like a common prostitute who takes payment; she paid her lovers to come to her. This is the shock at the center of the chapter: covenant unfaithfulness so brazen that it shames the imagination. God designed marriage as a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union, and that design is exactly what makes spiritual adultery so grievous. Israel's idolatry was not a minor lapse; it was a wife breaking faith with the husband who had given her everything.

We must handle this chapter frankly but with pastoral care, because its frankness is the point. God will not let His people sentimentalize their sin or hide behind respectability. Yet the chapter does not end in the fire. After exposing the betrayal in full, God makes an astonishing promise: I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. He promises to atone for all that she has done, so that she will remember and be ashamed and never open her mouth again because of her shame. The same God who exposed the sin pledges to forgive it. As we study, we are meant to feel both the weight of the betrayal and the wonder of a love that remembers its covenant even when we have broken ours.

Group Discussion: Ezekiel 15 teaches that Israel was like vine wood, valuable only for bearing fruit and worthless when fruitless. How should this shape the way the Lord's church and each of its members think about the purpose of being chosen by God, and what does fruitfulness look like for a Christian today?

Personal Reflection: God rescued Jerusalem when she was helpless and gave her everything, yet she used His gifts to pursue other lovers. Are there gifts and blessings God has given you that you have turned toward something other than Him, and what would faithfulness look like instead?

Read Ezekiel 15:1–16:63

Study Questions

1. In Ezekiel 15:1–8 God compares Israel to the wood of the vine, useful for nothing but bearing fruit and fit only for the fire when it is fruitless. What does this parable reveal about the purpose for which God chooses a people, and why being chosen never excuses fruitlessness?
2. The vine had value only as it bore fruit (Ezekiel 15:2–4). Where in your own walk with God are you tempted to rest in your standing or background rather than actually bearing fruit for Him?
3. In Ezekiel 16:1–14 God describes Jerusalem as an abandoned infant He rescued, cleansed, raised, and entered into covenant with, adorning her with beauty that was His gift. What does this allegory reveal about the nature of God's grace and the truth that everything good in His people is His own gift and not their merit?
4. God said to the helpless infant, Live, and made her flourish (Ezekiel 16:6–7). When you consider how undeserving you were when God showed you mercy, how should that memory shape your humility and gratitude today?

5. In Ezekiel 16:15–34 the bride trusts in her own beauty, plays the harlot, and even pays her lovers, using God's own gifts to pursue idols. What does this expose about the nature of idolatry as spiritual adultery, and why is covenant unfaithfulness such a grievous betrayal of the God who has given us everything?
6. Jerusalem turned the very gifts God had given her toward other lovers (Ezekiel 16:17–19). What blessings from God's hand, your time, talents, relationships, or resources, are you in danger of using to pursue things other than Him?
7. In Ezekiel 16:35–43 God announces judgment on the unfaithful bride, exposing and shaming her for breaking the covenant. How does God's design for marriage as a lifelong, exclusive, one-flesh union illumine the seriousness of His response to His people's unfaithfulness?
8. God's judgment on Jerusalem flowed from a wounded, covenant love (Ezekiel 16:38). How does seeing sin as a betrayal of the One who loves us, rather than merely breaking a rule, change the way you grieve and repent of your own sin?
9. In Ezekiel 16:59–63 God, after exposing the full extent of the betrayal, promises to remember His covenant and establish an everlasting covenant, atoning for all she has done so that she is ashamed and silenced. Drawing the whole chapter together, what does this astonishing promise reveal about the depth of God's grace, and how is it ultimately fulfilled in the new and everlasting covenant in Christ?

10. Looking back across these two chapters, name one specific way the God who calls His people to fruitfulness and faithfulness, and who atones for the unfaithful, is calling you to respond in repentance and renewed devotion this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 15:1–8, Jesus the true vine and His disciples the branches, called to abide in Him and bear much fruit, for a branch that bears no fruit is cast out and burned.; Hosea 1–3, God’s command to love an unfaithful wife, picturing His covenant love for an adulterous people and His pledge to betroth them to Himself forever.; Ephesians 5:25–32, Christ’s love for the church as a husband for his bride, the lifelong one-flesh union pointing to the great mystery of Christ and His church.; Hebrews 8:6–13, the new and better covenant established on better promises, in which God remembers our sins no more, fulfilling the everlasting covenant promised here.; Titus 3:3–7, we were once foolish and enslaved, but God in His mercy saved us, washing and renewing us, not because of works but according to His grace.

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