

Ezekiel 15:1-16:63—The Fruitless Vine And God’s Covenant Love For Israel

Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Today we cover two chapters:

1. The parable of the fruitless vine (chapter 15)
2. God’s Faithfulness and Compassion Towards Israel Despite Persistent Unfaithfulness (chapter 16)

1. The parable of the fruitless vine (15:1-8)

In Isaiah 5, Israel is likened to a vine that brought forth wild grapes. In Hosea 10, she’s likened to an empty vine. Here in chapter 15, the Lord likens her to a worthless vine... (Jon Courson)

The vine metaphor is a great one as it shows us that, in and of ourselves, we have no value and can do no useful work—the wood of the grapevine is useless for construction or even burning. Just like the branches can only produce fruit when they are connected to the vine, so we can only produce fruit (e.g. love), when we are connected to and in fellowship with Jesus (see John 15:5). The whole point of this parable is that we exist for one purpose only—to glorify God by bearing much fruit for Him. The parable finishes by giving us the reason that we become unfruitful, something we learned about last time—persistent unfaithfulness.

Ezekiel 15:1-8 NKJV

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² “Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³ Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on? ⁴ Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? ⁵ Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

⁶ “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷ and I will set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. ⁸ Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,’ says the Lord God.”

The wood of the grapevine is useless (1–3)

Ezekiel 15:1-3 NKJV

Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ² “Son of man, how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³ Is wood taken from it to make any object? Or can men make a peg from it to hang any vessel on?

v 1 **how is the wood of the vine better than any other wood:** What is the first thing you think of when you think about a grape vine? Grapes, fruit! Did you notice any mention of fruit in this parable? No. The silence is deafening. There is no mention of fruit because Israel as a nation has ceased bearing (good) fruit because of their persistent unfaithfulness (v 8).

So given that there is no fruit, the only thing remaining that *may* have value is the actual wood of the vine. So here God compares the value or usefulness of the wood of the vine to the wood of other trees?" The first question God asks is, "What can you make with the fruit of the vine?"

v 3 **Is wood taken from it to make any object?** The wood from a dead tree can be used for making furniture, tools, or for building a house. However, the wood of the vine is useless for any of these tasks.

"Because the vine is crooked, it cannot be used for building. Because it burns so rapidly, it is of little value for fuel. Because it is soft, it cannot be employed where anything needs to hang on it." (Feinberg)

"Savourless salt is good for nothing: fruitless vines are utterly useless: professors [of Christ] who bear no fruit are worse than useless, they cumber [use up] the ground. Let us abide in Christ, that He may bear fruit through us." (Meyer)

"Ezekiel's contribution to the 'vineyard story' is to point out the worthlessness of the vine if it doesn't bear fruit. If a tree becomes useless, you can at least cut it down and make something useful out of the wood; but what can you make out of the wood of a vine?" (Wiersbe)

v 3 **Peg:** "It developed the meaning of someone who could be relied upon, as in Isaiah 22:23, Zechariah 10:4, and Ezra 9:8. Israel was neither useful nor dependable." (Taylor)

Application—Being faithful: Just as God is faithful, and we trust in and rely on His faithfulness, so God is looking for faithful people who will be available to follow and obey when God calls us to ministry. In practice, this will be very different for each of us as we are all different parts of the body and so have different roles to play. However, whatever our calling or role, if we are going to be dependable, we must have the attitude that Isaiah had, being willing to leave everything else behind, and also the attitude that Paul had, being willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

Isaiah 6:8 NLT paraphrase

Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for Us?"

I said, "Here I am. Send me."

1 Timothy 1:8-9a NLT paraphrase

So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don't be ashamed of me, either, even though I'm in prison for him. **With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News [Gospel].** ⁹ For God saved us and called us to live a holy life.

The wood of the grapevine is burned (4-5)

Ezekiel 15:4-5 NKJV

4 Instead, it is thrown into the fire for fuel; the fire devours both ends of it, and its middle is burned. Is it useful for any work? ⁵ Indeed, when it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?

v 4 **It is thrown into the fire for fuel:** What do we do with wood that can't be used for any construction purpose? We burn it.

v 5 **When it was whole, no object could be made from it. How much less will it be useful for any work when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned?:** The illustration here is that the wood of the vine has been partially burned. If it was useless before it was burned, how much more useless is the burnt wood of the vine?

“God, the Divine Carpenter, has not been able to make anything out of the vine nation. Now that it has been partly charred by the fires of judgement, it is even more useless, and it must be burnt up.” (Wright)

“Ezekiel takes a traditional figure connoting the ‘messianic’ character of Israel as the repository of God’s favour and turns it against itself in almost cynical fashion as a symbol of discarded worthlessness.” (Vawter and Hoppe)

“A vine would never be cultivated for the sake of its *wood*; it is really *worthless* but as it bears *fruit*. What is *Israel*? Good for nothing, but as God influenced them to bring forth fruit to his glory. But now that they have ceased to be *fruitful*, they are *good* for nothing, but, like a withered branch of the vine, to be burnt.” (Clarke)

God identifies the persistently unfaithful Jerusalem as the useless vine (6-8)

Ezekiel 15:6-8 NKJV

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ⁷ and I will set My face against them. They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I set My face against them. ⁸ Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have persisted in unfaithfulness,’ says the Lord God.”

v 6 **Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem:** After explaining why a fruitless vine is useless and is only good for burning, God now rebukes His people in Jerusalem, characterising them as being fruitless, and therefore worthless and useless.

v 7 **I will set My face against them:** When we sin against God, we grieve Him and invite His discipline. Instead of receiving God’s divine approval and blessing as we obey Him, we receive His divine disapproval and discipline as we rebel against Him. Our sin has separated us from God (see Isaiah 59:2), so our fellowship with God is broken.

v 7 **They will go out from one fire, but another fire shall devour them:** This is a picture of Judah and Jerusalem having already been invaded by the Babylonians twice before. Those two previous invasions were like partially burning the wood of the vine; they had weakened the nation, having less riches and people—the quality of the vine had already been degraded. This shows that God’s judgement or discipline is incremental, getting worse and worse until we finally respond. God will strip us of more and more of the things we love until we turn our hearts back to Him.

Did this have to happen? No. The people of Jerusalem thought that they had survived, that they had gotten away with their sin. However, because of their lack of repentance, God’s only recourse was to “burn” or discipline them again, referring to the total destruction of the city of the Jerusalem and the temple. They had failed to heed God’s clear warnings of coming judgement and their hearts became even harder; therefore God’s discipline became stronger or more intense. This is also true for us today.

v 7 **Then you shall know that I am the Lord:** Again, the purpose of prophecy is to demonstrate that God is in control, that He is sovereign over the comings and goings of the nations. When Jerusalem was finally fully destroyed, they would know that God had indeed predicted it.

v 8 **Thus I will make the land desolate:** Like in 14:13, God refers again to His judging of the land. To make the land desolate means that He will depopulate the land, removing His covenant people from their homeland.

v 8 **Because they have persisted in unfaithfulness:** Notice that this judgement is not coming upon them because of a single sin, but because of persistent sin, Judah stubbornly refusing to repent of their sin, continuing to love their sin more than God.

“The reason for this fiery judgment was once more made clear: Judah had been unfaithful to the Lord and his covenant. They had failed to be a blessing to the world.” (Alexander)

So we see here one reason that God must judge or discipline persistent unfaithfulness—because we can become *good for nothing except burning* (burning being a picture of God’s judgement or divine discipline). The other reason that the vine must be judged is that, if it is not bearing good fruit, it will necessarily be bearing bad or evil fruit (see Deuteronomy 32:32). This bad fruit, the fruit of our sinful nature (see Galatians 5:19-21 and Mark 7:20-23), will hurt and destroy both ourselves and those around us, and will bring much shame and dishonour to God’s holy name.

Application: Is God through with Israel? Is God through with me?

Reading this it may seem that, if I as a Christian persist in sin, then I will be destroyed; I will burn in the fires of Hell for eternity—I will lose my salvation. Fortunately, this is not the case. The fires of God’s judgment or discipline described here are not to destroy, but rather to cleanse, build up, and strengthen us (see Hebrews 12:10-13). Israel here, as a nation, was burned (disciplined) but not destroyed. The covenant (unconditional) promises given to Abraham, Moses, and David will continue—God is faithful to fulfil His promises. What happened to Israel after 70 years of captivity? God brought them back into the land, sans (without) idolatry, and Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt.

One thing to remember here is that throughout the book of Ezekiel, and also the other prophets, there is always a message of hope and future restoration—*God always remembers mercy in judgement* (see Habakkuk 3:2). The same is true with God’s dealings with His children under the New Covenant. Yes, we will be burned or disciplined if we sin, but it’s only because God loves us and doesn’t want to see us continue in that sin and end up being destroyed by it. As we learned last week, God does nothing without a good cause or purpose—that purpose being to bring us into a closer relationship with Him and conform (or restore) us to the image of Christ.

Application: Fruitfulness and abiding in Christ—see past message on John 15.

In John 15, Jesus gives a very important message linking faithfulness, discipleship, obedience, abiding in God’s love, fruitfulness, joy, and glorifying God. I encourage you to go to the Calvary Chapel Esperance website or podcast and listen to this message. It really builds on today’s message and will encourage you to “keep yourselves in the love of God” (see Jude 21), so you can experience the joy of abiding in Christ and living a fruitful life that brings both joy to the believer and glory to God.

2. God's Faithfulness and Compassion Towards Israel Despite Persistent Unfaithfulness (Ezekiel 16:1-63)

This parable like message could be called, "The Harlot Wife of Yahweh" (David Guzik). It is a beautiful yet sad metaphoric retelling of the history of Israel. Two things are readily evident: God's covenant or unconditional love for His people and His grace towards them, and secondly, their ungrateful and unfaithful response to God's love and goodness lavished on them.

Application: *This is a powerful message to us personally—we too had humble (sinful) beginnings, and have also undeservedly received abundant blessings from God. Yet, just like the Israelites, we so easily and so often forget and take them for granted. Instead of using what God gives us to bring glory to Him, we use His blessings and gifts for our own benefit. As we read through chapter 16, recognise that we have the same sinful nature that the Israelites have, which is why we are prone to respond to God's lovingkindness and grace in the same evil way they did and still are.*

Ezekiel 16:1-2 NKJV—The purpose of the parable

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

Through most of chapter 16, Jerusalem represents the entire nation of Israel, including the southern kingdom of Judah. This chapter continues the theme of God showing the nation their sinfulness and why they were so deserving of judgement.

Ezekiel 16:3 NKJV—A humble beginning

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.

"Amorite and Hittite were general names for the people of Canaan who occupied the land before Abraham.... Being the most powerful of the nations in Canaan, they represented them all." (Feinberg)

The land of Canaan was basically a byword for moral decadence, and the Amorite and Hittite nations were also known to be extremely evil and wicked (thus why God judged them so severely in the days of Joshua). Thus, God is describing the early days of the nation of Israel as being as wicked and as evil as the pagan nations that once lived in the land of Canaan. This is not a good way to start out, but it mirrors the way we all start out, being born with a sinful nature that is completely depraved and deserving of judgement.

Ezekiel 16:4-5 NKJV—An unloved and unwanted child

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. 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.

"Cutting the cord, washing, rubbing down with salt, and clothing the newborn were also customary legal acts of legitimation. In the neglect and abandonment of the infant in the open field, the parent legally relinquished all rights to and responsibilities for the child." (Block)

All the other nations hated Israel, and there was no one to look after her. Israel as a nation was like an abandoned child left for dead in a an open field. Without God she had no hope and no future—she would die. Again, the same is true for us today.

Ezekiel 16:6-7 NKJV—God as the Heavenly Father

“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!’ 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.

When there was no hope for this dying and unwanted child (a metaphor for the nation of Israel), God comes along and becomes their Heavenly Father, taking on Himself the responsibility of raising this wicked orphan child as His very own. Under God’s loving care the young child matures and grows up to become a beautiful young woman. This shows God’s grace towards Israel and us. This is brought out beautifully in:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 NLT paraphrase

“The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! ⁸ Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors.

“With the passing of the age of innocence and the arrival of sexual maturity, nakedness assumes moral overtones. Whereas the earlier nakedness had made the foundling vulnerable to the elements and marauding animals, now she stands exposed to dangers of a different sort.” (Block) *The young woman now needs a husband to look after her.*

Ezekiel 16:8 NKJV—God takes Israel to be His own people

“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.

As seen in Ruth 3:9 with Ruth and Boaz, **“I spread My wing over you”** is symbolic of a husband taking his wife under his protection. Here God takes Israel to be His wife, as she is described in many other Old Testament passages. To **“cover your nakedness”** refers to God provision for her. As the wife of Yahweh, Israel found both protection and provision.

Ezekiel 16:9-14 NKJV—God blesses His people with many gifts

“Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. 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. ¹¹ I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. ¹² And I put a jewel in your nose, 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, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. ¹⁴ Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendour which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord God.

God gave Israel only the best of the best. He didn’t hold back anything good from them: they received the tastiest foods, the costliest clothing, and the finest jewellery. He also made them beautiful and caused them to be honoured among the nations because of the splendour and majesty of God which was bestowed or conferred upon them. A good example of this is during the early days of Solomon’s reign over Israel. Under the New Covenant, the church receives even greater (spiritual) blessings (see Ephesians 1).

Ezekiel 16:15-21 NKJV—Israel rejects God like an unfaithful wife rejects her husband

“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. ¹⁶ You took some of your garments and adorned multicoloured high places for yourself, and played the harlot on them [worshipped other gods]. Such things should not happen, nor be [it’s unthinkable!]. ¹⁷ You have also taken your beautiful jewellery from My gold and My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images and played the harlot with them [pornography and sexual immorality]. ¹⁸ You took your embroidered garments and covered them, and you set My oil and My incense before them. 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.

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

We have looked at how Israel sinned against God previously: idol worship, child sacrifice, sexual immorality, pornography, materialism, etc. They took what God had given them and worshipped the gift instead of the Giver of the gift.

How does this look in our lives? God gives us families, jobs and careers, musical and sporting talent, money, health, cars, time, etc, and what do we do? We prioritise these things over God, making idols of them, and so end up worshiping the gift instead of the Giver. God has also given us a mind, body, and a mouth to use for His glory. Instead, what do we do? Like the other good things God has given us, we often use them for our own pleasure and gratification. This is incredibly selfish and entirely disrespectful. God lets us know what He thinks about it—“Such things should not happen, nor be.”

Ezekiel 16:9a, 22 NKJV—The cause of Israel’s unfaithfulness; forgetting God’s blessings and trusting themselves

⁹ But you trusted in your own beauty... 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.

If only we would continue to remember all the good that God has done for us, we would never turn away from Him. However, because of our sinful nature, we naturally don’t want to remember what God has done for us, and we also naturally want to trust in our own wisdom and strength. We have a sinful tendency to want to be self-reliant or independent of God. Thus, we must choose beforehand to remember, to make a deliberate and conscious decision to remember both who I was and where I was before God saved me, and secondly, all the good things that God has done for me. If I set my mind on these things, then I will naturally want to love and trust God. This is why we take communion regularly.

Luke 22:19-20 NKJV

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

²⁰ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.”

Ezekiel 16:23-34 NKJV—Israel persists and increases in unfaithfulness

“Then it was so, after all your wickedness—‘Woe, woe to you!’ says the Lord God —²⁴ that you also built for yourself a shrine, and made a high place for yourself in every street. 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. ²⁶ You also committed harlotry with the Egyptians [a type of the world—see James 4:4], your very fleshly neighbours, and increased your acts of harlotry to provoke Me to anger.

²⁷ “Behold, therefore, I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment [took away some of their land], and gave you up to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behaviour. 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. ²⁹ Moreover you multiplied your acts of harlotry as far as the land of the trader, Chaldea; and even then you were not satisfied.

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

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. ³² You are an adulterous wife, who takes strangers instead of her husband. 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. 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 [sin never benefits, it only costs us], therefore you are the opposite.”

v 27 **The daughters of the Philistines, who were ashamed of your lewd behaviour:** The nation of Israel was so corrupt and wicked that the pagan nations surrounding the Israelites found them to be disgusting, even to their low worldly standards.

v 27 **I stretched out My hand against you, diminished your allotment, and gave you up to the will of those who hate you:** This is the consequence that comes from persistent unfaithfulness. Instead of God being for us, He will be against us. Instead of receiving God’s blessings, He will be removing them from us. Instead of overcoming our enemies, they will be overcoming us; we will live a defeated life.

Ezekiel 16:35-42—The sin we loved will destroy us

³⁵ ‘Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord! ³⁶ Thus says the Lord God: “Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, ³⁷ surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, and all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. ³⁸ And I will judge you as women who break wedlock or shed blood are judged; I will bring blood upon you in fury and jealousy. ³⁹ I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewellery, and leave you naked and bare [the natural consequences of sin].

⁴⁰ “They shall also bring up an assembly against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. ⁴¹ They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you cease playing the harlot, and you shall no longer hire lovers [the purpose of God’s judgement is repentance]. ⁴² So I will lay to rest My fury toward you, and My jealousy

shall depart from you. I will be quiet, and be angry no more [God's anger or discipline does not last forever]. ⁴³ **Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things, surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head.**” says the Lord God. “And you shall not commit lewdness [sexual immorality, incest] in addition to all your abominations.

Sinning is like picking up a snake by the tail; you know that it will turn around and bite you eventually. It's like playing with a stick of dynamite and getting pleasure as the fuse burns down... The worldly things we love are poison to our soul, and surely but slowly, will kill and destroy us, robbing us of all that is actually of worth in our lives—our relationships with God and people, our reputation, dignity, honour, possessions etc. This is what the Scriptures mean when they say repeatedly that sin leads to death (e.g. Romans 6:21, 8:6).

v ⁴³ **Because you did not remember the days of your youth, but agitated Me with all these things, surely I will also recompense your deeds on your own head:** Again, God points out that their initial fault was that they didn't remember the goodness and grace that God had poured out on them. Forgetting the good that someone does for us is called *being ungrateful*. Ungratefulness is like smoke in the nostrils, it stinks and is very repulsive. If we get angry when our kids or others are ungrateful for the things we do for them, then how much more will God, who has freely given to us all [good] things to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:17). God describes His reaction to our ungratefulness as being **agitated**, meaning: worked up, enraged, perturbed, angry, irritated, astonished, and to be in anguish.

Remembering leads to gratitude, which leads to obedience, which leads to blessing.

Ezekiel 16:44-59—Religious Judah more wicked than other wicked nations

⁴⁴ “Indeed everyone who quotes proverbs will use this proverb against you: ‘**Like mother, like daughter!**’ ⁴⁵ You are your mother's daughter, loathing husband and children [unfaithful]; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and children; **your mother was a Hittite** [a slur or put down] and your father an Amorite.

⁴⁶ “Your [Judah's/Jerusalem's] elder sister is Samaria [northern kingdom of Israel], who dwells with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who dwells to the south of you, is Sodom and her daughters. ⁴⁷ You did not walk in their ways nor act according to their abominations; but, as if that were too little, **you became more corrupt than they in all your ways.**

⁴⁸ “As I live,” says the Lord God, “**neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done.** ⁴⁹ Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit.

⁵¹ “Samaria did not commit half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all the abominations which you have done. ⁵² **You who judged your sisters, bear your own shame also, because the sins which you committed were more abominable than theirs; they are more righteous than you.** Yes, be disgraced also, and bear your own shame, because you justified your sisters.

⁵³ “When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity among them, ⁵⁴ **that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them.** ⁵⁵ When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state. ⁵⁶ For your sister Sodom was not a byword in your mouth in the days of your pride [they would not even mention the name], ⁵⁷ **before your wickedness was uncovered.** It was like the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria and all those around her, and of the

daughters of the Philistines, who despise you everywhere.⁵⁸ You have paid for your lewdness and your abominations,” says the Lord.⁵⁹ For thus says the Lord God: “I will deal with you as you have done, who despised the oath by breaking the covenant.

Shame results when we persist in unfaithfulness, refusing to repent of our sin (v 52). If we refuse to repent, God will uncover our wickedness and we will be despised (v 57). It's interesting that one of the hallmarks of a backslidden or unrepentant person is that they are usually very critical of others (see v 52). One characteristic of our sinful nature is that we love to deceive ourselves by justifying our own sin, while at the same time condemning the same or lesser sin in others. Remember that the people of Judah were still very religious, keeping up with the worship, reading of the Scriptures, and temple offerings and sacrifices.

Ezekiel 16:60-63 NKJV—Once a child of God, always a child of God

60 “Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed, when you receive your older and your younger sisters; for I will give them to you for daughters, but not because of My covenant with you. 62 And I will establish My covenant with you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, 63 that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your shame, when I provide you an atonement for all you have done.” says the Lord God.’ ”

v 60 **Nevertheless I will remember My covenant [past promise] with you:** *Israel may forget God, but God won't forget Israel.* This long message is the most shocking, gory, and ugly description of anyone's sin in the Old Testament, yet at the end of it God reaffirms His covenant promises to Israel that they will always be His people. This is grace—God freely and willingly giving people what they absolutely don't deserve simply because He loves them. *How awesome is it to serve a God so loving and gracious as this! Because God remembers and keeps His promise to Israel, no matter how much they sinned, we know that He will keep His promises to us under the New Covenant no matter how much we sin.* However, this is not a licence to sin—there are still severe practical consequences for forgiven sin—read Romans 6 carefully and consider the suffering of the people of Judah.

v 60, 63 **I will [future] establish an everlasting covenant with you... when I provide you an atonement for all you have done:** Grace, grace, and more grace. This speaks of the New Covenant when the blood of Christ atones for our sin—*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* (Matthew 26:28). We also receive His Holy Spirit in us as proof of our adoption (Romans 8:14-17) and to overcome sin (Romans 8:12-13). This incredible gift given in the face of such heinous sin and persistent unfaithfulness is a perfect example of Romans 5:20-21:

Romans 5:20-21 NLT paraphrase

God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant [literally: super-abound].

²¹ So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.