

The Harlot Bride:

From Blood-Soaked Infant to Everlasting Covenant

A

1 ^{16:1} Again the word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, make known to **Jerusalem** her abominations, 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**.

2 ¹⁴ And your renown went forth among **the nations** because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had

B

1 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.

2 ¹⁵ "But **you trusted in your beauty** and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on

C

1 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!' 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; 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; 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. 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.

2 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

bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.

any passerby; your beauty became his.

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.

3²⁰ 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 ²¹that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?

3²² 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.

3²³ “And after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! declares the Lord God), ²⁴you 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.

4²⁶ 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.

4³⁰ “**How sick is your heart**, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute,

4³¹ building your **vaulted chamber** at the head of every street, and making **your lofty place in every square**. 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.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,

5³⁷ therefore, behold, I will gather all **your lovers** with whom you took pleasure, all those you

5⁴⁰ They shall bring up a crowd against you, and they shall stone

5⁴³ Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but have en-

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

6 ⁴⁴ “Behold, everyone who uses proverbs will use this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ ⁴⁵ You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children. Your mother was a **Hittite** and your father an **Amorite**. ⁴⁶ And your elder sister is **Samaria**, who lived with her daughters to the north of you; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you, is **Sodom** with her daughters. ⁴⁷ Not only did you walk in their ways and do according to their abominations; within a very little time you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. ⁴⁸ As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister **Sodom** and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.

7 ⁵³ “I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of **Sodom and her daughters**, and the fortunes of **Samaria** and her daughters,

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.

6 ⁴⁹ Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. ⁵⁰ **They were haughty** and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when **I saw** it. ⁵¹ Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed.

7 ⁵⁹ “For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have

raged 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**?

6 ⁵² Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which **you acted more abominably** than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous.

7 ⁶¹ Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and I give them to you as

and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, ⁵⁴that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. ⁵⁵As for your sisters, **Sodom and her daughters** shall return to their former state, and **Samaria** and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state. ⁵⁶Was not your sister **Sodom** a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, ⁵⁷before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become an object of reproach for the daughters of **Syria** and all those around her, and for the daughters of the **Philistines**, those all around who despise you. ⁵⁸You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the LORD.

despised the oath in breaking the covenant, ⁶⁰yet **I will remember my covenant with you** in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant.

daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. ⁶²**I will establish my covenant with you**, and you shall know that I am the LORD, ⁶³that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when **I atone for you** for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.”

(Ezekiel 13:1-23)

The Woven Harlot

Created between 1375-1382, *the Apocalypse Tapestry* is a large medieval set of tapestries commissioned by Louis II, Duke of Anjou, and woven in Paris. It depicts the story of the Apocalypse from the Book of Revelation in colorful images intertwined over six tapestries originally totaling 90 scenes some 20ft. x 460ft. These were created to decorate

the walls of his palace in Angers. One of these scenes (13 x 62 ft) took nearly five years to complete. These tapestries were not easy things to make. It depicts [the harlot seated on the beast](#) from Revelation 17. She is arrayed in scarlet and purple thread finery, and holds a golden cup of abominations, while seated on the scarlet seven-headed beast emerging from waters symbolizing the nations and peoples.¹



The Harlot Seated on the Beast (1375-79). Apocalypse Tapestry
Nicolas Bataille, Musée des Tapisseries, Angers. Web Gallery of Art.

¹ Emil Krén and Daniel Marx. "[The Harlot Seated on the Beast](#)," Web Gallery of Art (since 1996).

This scene in Revelation, in return, owes perhaps some of its origin to Ezekiel 16 and especially 23—the two chapters that pair up in this part of Ezekiel. Specifically, Rev 17:16 describes the portrayal of the harlot’s desolation as sketched according to the outlines of the prophesized judgment of apostate Jerusalem by God in Ezek 16:37-41.² In this way, it seems that our passage plays some role in helping us identify the harlot of Revelation. That’s something we will probably wait to think more about once we get to Ch. 23.

Here, I want to focus in on the tapestry idea. What is a tapestry? A tapestry is a woven fabric in which colored weft threads are interlaced with warp threads to create intricate pictures or patterns. The warp are the strong, lengthwise vertical foundation threads held taut on the loom, while the weft runs horizontally and are carried back and forth across the warp and beaten down to form the visible design. Using the same principles, long ago, writers began utilizing the idea of weaving literary texts together into deliberate alternates of two or more thematic threads vertically and horizontally, producing a fabric of meaning that only fully visible when the warp or weft are read together like a tapestry.

² G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 1139.

I first came across this fascinating idea in our study of [Leviticus](#) many years ago. Since then, I've been studying on a weekly basis with the scholar who rediscovered how this works itself out in the Torah.³ But I've also explored how other biblical writers may also utilize it and it has born some fascinating fruit in other books such as Acts and, on occasion, Ezekiel. Ezekiel is not a fully woven book like, say, Genesis is. But it does have its moments. Ezekiel 16 is one of those moments.

This chapter creates a stunning woven picture that depicts both unspeakable and glorious things that you can see by going verse by verse, but which absolutely pop out like a tapestry when viewed as a weave. Looking at it this way will take us through a deliberate escalation of themes across the [seven rows](#) (1-7; I've presented the text as woven below the Title of the sermon).⁴ But we can also look at its [three columns](#) (A, B, C) which, if understood properly, bring out further themes that ground (at least) three fixed ideas that otherwise seem randomly scattered and meaningless in the rows.

³ For more go to [Moshe Kline's](#) websites: <https://woven-torah.com/>; <https://chaver.com/>. You can also go to this page on my website [here](#) which will link you to Moshe's book as well as that of Dr. Paul Hocking who received his Ph.D. in the Weave of Leviticus: (<https://www.douglasvandorn.com/woventorah>).

⁴ I will have an overview of the weave as an appendix at the end of the sermon.

This is **an extremely long chapter**—63 verses, the longest in the book! In fact, it is longer than six of the Minor Prophets!⁵ Compare this to the mere eight verses of ch. 15. The way I like to preach is by units of thought. Ezekiel 16 is very clearly a single unit of thought. But that makes trying to preach it a rather daunting task!

This is all the more true when you understand the content. Daniel Block says that, “**The chapter is held together by its unique vocabulary and style,**”⁶ something that caused Dr. Heiser to laugh out loud when he taught this adding, “**That’s a nice academic way of putting it, Dan.**”⁷ **What so funny about that?** When you read the chapter, you will quickly see that this may not be something you want to read to your children. Jerusalem is a “prostitute” and a “whore” (two different Hebrew words). Block will later, rightly, call it “**semipornographic.**” In fact, **it could be rated R** for its description of the woman’s body and for her later actions. This is a style that is a “**deliberate rhetorical device designed to produce a strong emotional response.**”⁸ We must deal with the text, but also do so tactfully.

⁵ **Daniel Isaac Block**, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 459.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 464–65.

⁷ **Michael S. Heiser**, “[Ezekiel 16](#),” *Naked Bible Podcast* 123 (Oct 23, 2016).

⁸ Block, 467.

The **genre** of our chapter is often identified as **an allegory**. But as the weave will prove, there's something more than mere allegory going on here. It's quite literally not that Israel is merely *like* Yahweh's bride, but rather than she *is* Yahweh's bride through some kind of supernatural covenantal bonding. This bride isn't merely doing something *akin* to adultery, she is literally committing adultery through her idolatrous worship via her infatuations with the nations. The weave will make this idea truly stand out.

The other way this chapter is discussed is often as **a *riḅ* oracle**, that is **a covenant lawsuit**. But it isn't a courtroom lawsuit in the strictest sense (which would require a neutral party). It is a bilateral, personal dispute between two parties in covenant. It can be viewed through the classic five part structure of these ancient oracles:

1. Introduction (commissioning formula)
2. Summons
3. Accusation
4. Sentence
5. Conclusion (signatory formula)

The bottom line is that the seven rows are the dramatic, escalating stages through which the five-part *riḅ* is delivered.

The three columns are the permanent evidence table in the covenantal dispute. Together they form a 3-D picture of an already unimaginable scene. This weave is how Ezekiel makes the ancient covenant-lawsuit become rhetorically unbearable — with three unescapable exhibits (the columns) hammered home across seven escalating counts, culminating in only one conceivable verdict ... Guilty! But as the gavel is about to fall, it ends with the most surprising decision imaginable!

The Weft Columns: The Interwoven Story

Weft 1 (1-13):

From Discarded Disdained Infant to Queen of Earth

We will **begin with the weft** rows, that is the horizontal threads which in this weave run sequentially from **vs. 1-63** across **seven distinct rows**. First, we look at **vv. 1-13**. **This first thread** will take us from an abandoned, bloody Canaanite infant kicking in an open field to a royal bride covenanted to Yahweh. The story begins with the greatest act of **unmerited grace** imaginable—the story of adoption and marriage.

The Word of the LORD comes to the prophet (Ezek 16:1). Christ tells the son of Man—a title we’ve seen many times, but which will have startling almost prophetic implications by the time we get to the end of the chapter—“Make known to Jerusalem her abominations” (2). We are in the middle of a litany of chapters spelling these out in many ways—through oracles, symbolic acts, allegories, and parables. God really wants the people to get the point.

In this case, we get a kind of *allegory*. The prophet is to tell them that the Lord GOD (Adonai YHWH, the name of the Word) speaks to Jerusalem. Stop here. He calls them “Jerusalem” twice. He says Jerusalem owes its origin and birth in the land of the *Canaanite* to an *Amorite* father and a *Hittite* mother (3). It pretty much can’t get any more offensive than this, especially since the Israelites are the stock of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. That’s why it is so vital that they are *not called Israelites*, but “Jerusalem.” This city-name allows for the allegory, because Jerusalem was originally a Jebusite city, a people apparently belonging to the Hittite-Canaanites and their satellites. In Joshua’s day, Jerusalem was ruled by king Adoni-zedek who made an alliance with the Amorite kingdoms.⁹ Interestingly, the Amorites especially are associated

⁹ *Jerusalem Through the Ages* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1968), p. 4. Cited in Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 22, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 274. **Going Deeper:** In Joshua’s day, Adonai-zedek is king of Jerusalem. In Abram’s day, it was Melchi-zedek. In my

with the Rephaim giants like Og and Sihon (**Deut 31:4**; cf. **Amos 2:9**), making this crude identity what much worse.

At any rate, **vv. 4-5** talk about **Jerusalem's birth** saying that when it was born, **no one cut the cord or washed it with water or wrapped it in swaddling cloths. This baby was not pitied or loved** by any of the people around it. Instead, they cast it out on the open field to die. That's a picture of just how despised Israel has always been by the nations and that any positive act towards her would be totally unmerited.

Vv. 6-13 now describe how the Lord GOD, the Word himself, passed by and **saw the infant** still wallowing in its blood. So he said, "**Live!**" (**6**). Much later he will tell dry bones to live (**37:3ff**); same thing. Her very life is a miracle. He made the baby **flourish like a plant**, the **vine** he has just described in **Ch. 15**. It grew up and became tall and turned into the most **amazingly beautiful woman** imaginable (**7-8**). He uses incredibly emotive, **sensual language** of nudity and

view, Melchizedek is actually the Angel of the LORD. So, as all the ancient culture says, it seems sometime in the intervening years, the rule of the Watcher of Jerusalem gave way to that of the human king. But this human king bears the name Adonai. Curiously, while the world certainly means just "lord" in many places, in Psalm 110:1, it specifically refers to Jesus (Matt 22:44; etc.) However, vs. 4 calls this Adonai ... *Melchizedek*! That fits with my idea that Melchizedek is actually the Angel of the LORD which I discuss in other places. Fast forwarding back to Adonai-zedek, it would appear in this line of thinking that this man actually bears not just a generic title for king, but the very title of Christ upon his breast. His family were chosen to be the kings of Jerusalem. IF this is true, then the story of Joshua 10:1ff. becomes that much more interesting. For when he hears that Joshua has destroyed Ai, he makes an alliance with four other Canaanite kings, thus becoming the embodiment of the very thing Ezekiel is now allegorizing. No wonder God stripped the Jebusites of rule and gave the city to David!

puberty (breasts and pubic hair) along with **adornment and extravagance** to explain a couple of things. First, this filthy bloody undeveloped despised baby has become utterly beautiful only thanks to God's command and miraculous intervention to "live." Second, simultaneously, she has grown up. She is at the age for love, **the age for marriage**.

And that's what God does. Switching metaphors, he **spreads the corner of his garment**, the classic ANE legal act of betrothal/marriage, as seen when Boaz does the same for Ruth (**Ruth 3:9**). He **covers her nakedness**,¹⁰ Edenic language when God covered our parents in the skins of the animal. It shows both **his protection and his possession** as he ends the woman's shame. She is now his and his alone. Thus, he enters into "**a covenant with you**" and "**you become mine**" (8).¹¹ *This*, is the Angel of the LORD, the Angel of the covenant (**Jdg 2:1; Gen 15:18; 17:7-8; 22:16-18, 28:13-16; 48:15-16; Ex 2:3-8; 23:20-23**; etc.). Figuratively, he bathes her, washes off her blood, and anoints her with oil (9).¹² He clothes her with fine embroidery, leather, and silk

¹⁰ The opposite of Ham who uncovered the nakedness of his father by sleeping with his mother, the product of which seems to have been Canaan—the origin of the Canaanites!

¹¹ This is implicit proof that God in fact entered into a covenant arrangement with Adam in the Garden. It's the exact same idea.

¹² The blood here seems to be a play both on her infancy blood which hasn't been washed until now and her virginity blood which even this is now cleaned, creating the perfect relationship, since it is God who has taken her.

(10). She is adorned with ornaments and bracelets and chains for her neck (11). She gets the ring on her nose and earrings in her ears and a beautiful crown on her head (12). She is covered in gold and silver, fine linen and silk. Her plate is the table of royalty (13). **She is the Queen of Nations**, beautiful beyond compare. By the way, these are all things Christ does for the church in the NT.¹³

*Weft 2 (14-19):
From Queen of Earth to Adulteress*

We come immediately to our **second weft**. The first thread set us on the highest possible height of grace in order to contrast it with the lowest possible depth of **a great fall** into deeply perverted sin. But it begins slowly. This thread will show us that the moment she becomes the most renowned beauty among the nations, her heart immediately trusts in that beauty and **uses God's own gifts to make idols** where her pride escalates from zero to full-blown spiritual adultery in a single heartbeat.

¹³ **Bathes/washes** (Eph 5:25-27); anoints with **oil** [of the Holy Spirit] (2Cor 1:21-22; 1Jn 2:20, 27), **clothes** her with embroidered garments of fine linen and silk (Rev 19:7-8), sandals of fine **leather** (Luke 15:22), **jewelry**, bracelets, chains, etc. (Isa 61:10; Rev 21:1), **gold and silver** (1Cor 3:12; Rev 3:18), the **table** of royalty (John 6:51-58; Rev 19:9).

Her renown went forth among the nations because she was so beautiful. Her beauty was in fact perfect, because God himself bestowed it upon her (14). But she trusted in that beauty. This is the vanity of Hollywood, the hubris of celebrity, the narcissism of attractiveness. So many beautiful women turn their God-given good-looks into their idol, sadly thinking that’s all they are good for—their looks.

In Jerusalem’s case, it caused her to “play the whore” because of her renown. I need to make a point right here. The word “whore” is *tizni*. It is distinct from the word “prostitute” (*zonah*) found later in the chapter (31, 33, 34). Typically, you might think of a whore as a prostitute, thus synonyms. But this is absolutely *not* the picture being presented.¹⁴ It says she played the whore “because of [her] renown and lavished [her] whorings on any passerby; [her] beauty became his” (15). This is not the picture of a destitute victim forced into sex-work to make ends meet. This is *not Fantine in Les Misérables* or some kind of human trafficking situation where the child is forced into prostitution. This is *Pretty Woman*—high end street walking living the lifestyle of the rich and famous. This is a gorgeous entitled girl-empowered

¹⁴ For a word-study that matches what I’m presenting see Peggy L. Day, “[The Bitch Had It Coming To Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16](#),” *Biblical Interpretation* 8.3 (2000): 231-54. Day is a feminist whose overall theological reading is not great, but her word study is solid.

well-to-do 18 year old approached on the streets of L.A. to start making high-end adult movies. After the initial shock of a conscience severed, she doesn't hate what she's doing. She loves it! She wants to do it more and more. **She's a porn star!** I can't think of anything more offensively parallel from our own culture. Imagine if she was your daughter.

And **she's using the very gifts her husband lavished upon her to do it!** She takes some of her garments and makes herself **colorful shrines** upon which she plays the whore. God is astonished and says, "**The like has never been, nor ever shall be**" (16). She takes her beautiful jewels of his gold of and his silver and makes "**images of men**" (17). She takes her embroidered garments to dress her idols and sets his oil and his incense before them (18). She even takes his bread and flour and oil and honey and sets it before them as a pleasing aroma (19). Her street-walking has become a religious ceremony, her lovers become her god, all on her husband's dime.

Weft 3 (20-25):

From Adulteress to Child-Sacrificing Madam

Our **third weft thread** now comes into view. The sin goes public and starts murdering the next generation. What

started as personal pride turned whore now explodes into mass child sacrifice and the building of temple shrines on every street corner filled with cultic prostitution. She takes her own sons and daughters, whom she had borne to God, his very own children, “and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured” (20). God asks were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered his children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them (21)? Historically, this refers to the unimaginable practice of human sacrifice of children to the pagan gods like Molech in the traditions of the pagan nations all around them (e.g. 2Kg 16:3; 21:6; cf. 17:31).

Jerusalem did not remember the days of her youth, when she was naked and wallowing in her blood (Ezek 16:22). So, after all this wickedness (the Lord GOD pronounces a double woe upon her (23), as she built herself a vaulted chamber and a lofty place in every square (24). Up goes a lofty place and she makes her beauty and abomination, as she offers herself to anyone who passes by (25). She’s now owns her own porn studio, running the whole seedy operation in secret and out of sight—recruiting the girls, taking the money, and offering the sacrifices to keep the gods (her customers) happy. She’s become the Madam over her brothel. But is she really the one in charge?

Weft 4 (26-36):

From Local Madam to International Empire

Our **fourth thread** suddenly shows itself. The local Madam now develops into an all-out **international empire!** She plays the whore with the **Egyptians**, provoking God to anger (26). An interesting verse presents itself that I think the warp threads will help us understand better. “**Therefore, I stretched out my hand against you and diminished your allotted portion.**” Deuteronomy 32 vibes? Yes, and scholars have noted that this entire chapter is built on the foundation of Moses’s great song.¹⁵

God delivers them into the greed of her enemies, the “**daughters of the Philistines who were themselves ashamed of her lewd behavior**” (27)! She plays the whore with the **Assyrians**—the very people who took them into captivity a century earlier! Even this did not satisfy her (28). She multiplies her whorings with the **Chaldeans**. That’s *the Babylonians*—the very people who have been breaking upon her shores like tsunami waves and whom God says is going to

¹⁵ A wonderful paper showing the richness of many connections in Ezek 16 to Deut 32 was written for JBL a few years back. Amazingly, it completely misses this most obvious of all connections. See **Jason Gile**, “[Ezekiel 16 and the Song of Moses: A Prophetic Transformation?](#)” *JBL* 130:1 (2011): 87-108.

destroy Jerusalem! Her lust for fame, her narcissism, her personal conquest through her beauty has made her **utterly mad**. These are not the acts of a desperate woman, but an insane one.

The **very center of square** of our weave may also be one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. “**How sick is your heart, declares the Lord GOD, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute**” (30). The verse itself contains two words that appear nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶ **How sick is your heart!** It could be rendered “weak” or “fever-hot” or “degenerate.” The Targum says, “**How strong was the wickedness of your heart.**” These words striking the heart become Exhibit A of the doctrine of **total depravity** and how it works. This entire chapter is a living testimony to how sick we all became apart from Christ.

This is also the only direct divine exclamation of shock in the chapter. The third person speech is interrupted for a moment as the Lord himself interrupts the prophecy with a **cry of horror** at how terminally sick his bride’s heart is. This is the psychological climax of the entire speech. It will also

¹⁶ *’ānullāh libbātek* (“how inflamed/sick/deranged is your heart”) and *’ishsbāh-zônāh shallātet* (“a domineering/brazen/shameless whore-woman”).

turn the whole weave like a hinge. Prior to this her heart is **proud, forgetful, insatiable**. After this, her heart is **crushed, shamed, and ...** we'll just have to wait and see about the rest.

The vaulted chambers and lofty places rise again in every square, and now the text drops a new word: she has become a *zonah*—a literal prostitute (31). But watch the horror unfold: even the lowliest street prostitute takes money to survive; Jerusalem scorns payment. She is the adulterous wife who pays her lovers and bribes them to come from every side (33–34). Men give gifts to all prostitutes, but she gave God's own gifts to her lovers and hired them to defile her. She really thinks she's the one in control, the madam running a global empire of brothels, paying Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon to sleep with her because she can have anyone she wants. But something far darker is lurking here that the picture hasn't fully shown us yet: the lovers she's bribing are not her clients. They're her pimps. And behind them stand the real owners who have been using her all along. She's not buying protection. She's paying the very traffickers who will one day strip her, stone her, and burn everything she built to the ground. That's what a terminally sick heart looks like when it trusts its own beauty instead of its Husband.

In these ways **she was different from other women**. No one solicited her or paid her (34). Therefore, “**hear the word of the LORD**” (35). Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered (we return to that theme) because of her whorings and lovers and idols, because of the blood of her own children (36).

Weft 5 (37-43):

From International Empire to Devoured by Her Lovers

The **fourth thread** abruptly ends and the fifth begins. **Every gift is going to be stripped**, every crime is going to be repaid in blood by the very lovers she chased, as God declares, “**I return your deeds upon your head.**” The focus here is on God repaying her, even as he gives her over to the dark forces she gave her body to. **The covenant curses** are about to fall with perfect, terrifying justice. God will therefore gather her lovers—loved and hated against her on every side and he will uncover her nakedness to them that all may see (37). I think of **Ham going into Noah’s tent** and uncovering the nakedness of his father—sleeping with his mother, trying to take the birthright, destroying his father’s dignity. God is giving her over to her sin. Her dignity is gone.

I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy (38). Those laws, for example of stoning the adulterers, are there to avenge the offended party. God is the offended party! He was jealous for her. She brazenly abandoned him. Now justice will roll down like a river. He will give her into the hands of the nations and throw down her vaulted chambers and lofty places (39). They will strip her of her cloths and jewels and she will be naked and unadorned and pitiful and despised once more.

They will bring a crowd against her to stone her (according to law), and cut her to pieces with a sword (a prediction of the coming disaster upon Jerusalem; 40). They will burn her houses and execute judgments before all the women of the nations. God will make her stop playing the whore (41) and will satisfy his wrath on her, and his jealousy will depart. Then he will be calm and will no more be angry (42). The jealous husband is avenged. What an incredible picture we are getting of how God views faithlessness from those in covenant with him.

Because she didn't remember her youth, but did these things, he will “return your deeds upon your head.” This

isn't vengeance. It is justice. She gets exactly what she deserves. Nothing more. For she has in fact done all these things to herself (43).

Weft 6 (44-52):

From Devoured by Her Lovers to A Worse Fate than Sodom

The sixth thread now weaves its picture. Jerusalem will now be declared worse than Sodom, Samaria, and all pagan nations combined, as the indictment reaches its most shocking depth: even the worst Gentiles look righteous beside her. She will become a proverb: “Like mother, like daughter” (44). What does this mean? We have to keep looking at the picture. “You are the daughter of your mother, who loathed her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children” (45). What does this mean? Remember the beginning? “Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite.” Jerusalem is a pagan, the very people it mocks—a Hittite, not someone in covenant with God. “And your elder sister is Samaria, who lived with her daughters to the north of you” (46). Samaritans. Curse words. She is them. But it gets worse. “And your younger sister, who lived to the south of

you, is Sodom with her daughters.” Sodom? As in Sodom and Gomorrah? As in the worst possible place to emulate in world history? As in the city that gave us the very word ‘sodomy’ — a place every Jew saw as the ultimate symbol of sexual perversion. That’s her sister?

The Lord GOD explains that she not only walked in their ways and abominations, but within a very short time became more corrupt than them in everything she did (47). So God swears by himself that Sodom itself has not done as you have done (48). What had Sodom done? We usually think of the great sin of homosexuality, a sin that was actually even worse than that when you consider in a reversal of Genesis 6:1-4 it was male *angels* they wanted! God instead highlights these sins: pride, excess of food, and prosperity. Sounds like the kind of society that always forgets the poor and needy when it’s drunk on pride and prosperity. What do those things always seem to leave a world with a diseased heart to do? Forget the poor and needy (49). A fascinating thing to point out. God cares deeply about the outcasts. God commanded her to. Jerusalem utterly neglected his law.

Then it adds, “They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it” (50). Liberals want to insist that the homosexual activity of Genesis 19

wasn't actually a sin because Ezekiel doesn't mention it. Nonsense. That's exactly what he is referring to here. It's like God is saying, "You know what else they did." "Abomination" (*to'evah*) is a word that takes us back to the sins of Leviticus 18, 20, where homosexuality (cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13), not to mention rape and Molech worship other things are right there in the lists and deserve the death penalty. It is never used for "inhospitality" or pride; but it is for these activities.

He calls out the sins of Samaria, which hadn't done the half that God's bride did, making Samaria looking positively righteous (51). So God tells her to bear her disgrace. For her sins are worse than theirs and they were more right than her. "So be ashamed" because you made your sisters look righteous (52).

Weft 7 (53-63):

From A Worse Fate than Sodom to Atoned

We finally arrive at our final weft thread or row. It is totally shocking. But is that because the judgment will now reach an absolute pinnacle? Stunningly, *no*. What happens is completely unexpected. And it's the very definition of why

God is who God is. Remember our first thread and grace? Just when total annihilation is the only possible just next step, **God suddenly remembers His covenant, atones for everything** she has done, and **establishes an everlasting covenant** in perhaps the greatest reversal in the Bible as it turns the most obvious deserved death into undeserved, unmerited, purely gracious eternal life. What kind of a Being must God be like to do this? The exact opposite of Jerusalem's lovers.

But this also starts off slowly. Ezekiel isn't done turning the knife just yet. Immediately after saying that she is worse than Sodom, on the very heels and the very next breath, the Word of God says that he will **restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and Samaria** and her daughters. What? That's hardly good news to a Jew about to face such dire consequences. Is this because Jerusalem is so bad that God is now having pity on them purely out of revenge against his bride? She must have been covering her eyes at the words, unable to bear them.

Yet, no, for he continues, “... **and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst**” (53). Now, that is **a stunning idea**. But before moving too fast, we must consider that it says next that God does this so that she might bear her disgrace and be ashamed of all she has done, becoming a consolation to them

(54). The knife just pulled out now plunges deeper. The Lord reiterates that he will restore Sodom and Samaria to their former states as well as Jerusalem (55). Why?

It asks Jerusalem, “Was not your sister Sodom a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, before your wickedness as uncovered?” (56). Jerusalem mocked Sodom as the worst of the worst, and rightly so. But now, in restoring Syria/Edom and the Philistines and all their daughters (God picks two more present evil empires whom he will also restore), you, Jerusalem, have become the very same byword in their mouths (57). The meaning is that because Jerusalem made herself worse than Sodom and Samaria, God will restore *all of you* so that when his grace reaches the very worst of the worst, Jerusalem’s mouth will finally be shut in shame and you will know that “I alone am the LORD.” “You are worse than the worst” becomes the very reason God will show mercy, because if he can restore Sodom, Samaria, and Jerusalem together, no one can ever again accuse him of being unjust or unfaithful to his covenant name. That is true grace. Completely unthinkable.

Vs. 58 then adds a remarkable statement, “You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations, declares the LORD.” Next, The Lord GOD says he will deal with

her as she has done, importantly—*because she has despised the oath* in breaking the covenant (59). The meaning is that in going into captivity, she will pay for her sins and justice will be spent. This sets the stage for truly remarkable and most unexpected conclusion.

“Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth...” (60). *You forgot* the days of your youth. *I will not*. I won’t forget what I found lying on the street covered in blood, the cord still attached to the body. I won’t forget what I took you out of. Moreover, *I will establish for you an everlasting covenant* (60b). Ezekiel will talk much more about this in later chapters, but here we have *new covenant grace* breaking in, covering a firestorm of wrathful arrows like a giant shield.

This covenant will have a most dramatic effect upon Jerusalem. “*Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed*” (61a). *No more pride, no self-justification*; only shame remains. They will be utterly embarrassed at what they have done. And yet there’s more. “*... when you take your sisters, both you elder and younger, and I give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you*” (61b). What does that mean? It means that *God is going to save the worst pagans imaginable* and Israel will have

to watch it and will have nothing to say about it, because she has broken the covenant. And yet, Israel, too, is among those pagans.

Now listen very carefully. “*I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame*” (62-63a). And the last part adds, “... *when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD*” (63b). Atonement? The new covenant? “I”?

Do you understand what you are looking at. It isn't a sheep or goat that will atone and establish a new covenant. Not their repentance that will do it. Not some priest that will do it. It is God himself. But this God says “I” will do it. Of course, we know that Jesus becomes the lamb sacrificed and our great high priest. Those types were needed. But what was needed even more is that God himself would make atonement. And the only way that can happen is through death. Therefore, this is a prediction, somehow, that **God will die** to make atonement.

Yet, God can't truly die. So we can be more precise, for this is **the Word of God** who is delivering this entire oracle! The Angel was the God of the covenant. This is therefore

the same divine Word who is speaking this oracle — the pre-incarnate Christ — declaring that He Himself will one day make this atonement in human flesh. And so the son of man language identifying Ezekiel (**vs. 2**) now foreshadows **Jesus coming as the God-man!** Who has ever heard of such a thing as this, especially in light of how evil this woman was? **How bad is too bad for God not to save someone?** Apparently, there is no such thing, because this chapter literally tells you the absolute worst possible thing that could be done has been done, by Israel. Yet atonement will be made. Hallelujah!

So **that's the incredible story told in the weft threads.** A dramatic, increasingly escalating judgment that begins in a gracious covenant, moves to mass covenant breaking of ever escalating and unspeakable evil, which ends, not in ultimate final everlasting death, but in unexpected, unmerited, undeserved new covenant grace.

The Warp Columns: Three Fixed Exhibits

But I want to **move on to the warp threads**, those vertical strands that fix the entire weave so that the warp can even be threaded on the literary loom to give us such a picture. In what we are about to see, I'm only going to highlight what

I think is the single most interesting feature of each column (warp thread). Then I'll explain why I think this helps us ground our weave of the harlot to make this entire story pop out even more.

The first warp thread is what I've labeled Column A. We have seven squares of text in each column (because of the seven rows/weft). Listen to these words found the first square: Jerusalem (x2), Canaanites, Amorite, Hittite (Ezek 16:1-3). Our second square contains the phrase "the nations" (14). The third has "your sons and your daughters" (20) who are the offspring of the very nations previous mentioned, for in our first square, Jerusalem's father was an Amorite and her mother was a Hittite (3). Our fourth square of the column contains Egyptians, Philistines, Assyrians, and the land of Chaldea, along with the phrase "I diminished your allotted portion" (26-29). The fifth square has "your lovers" (37), making Israel now a wife which parallels her sons and daughters of the third square. The sixth square repeats the mother as a Hittite and father as an Amorite. It adds her sister are Samaria and Sodom (45-48). Finally, the seventh square of the column contains an absolute avalanche of names: Sodom and her daughters (x2), Samaria and her daughters (x2), Syria (x2; Aram or Edom in LXX), and the

Philistines (53-58). So every single square contains a reference to specific nations, and there are many of them mentioned. Amazingly, we find no references to any of this in any square in cols 2 or 3. That makes 40+ mentions in Col 1 with none in the others. That can't possibly be a coincidence.

Let's move to Col C. Looking down on its squares, the first square contains a reference to “a covenant with you” (8). The second has “image of men” which are statues or carved pillars (17). The third square has Israel building a “vaulted chamber” and a “lofty place in every square” (23). The lofty chamber reappears in the fourth square, along with a lofty place in every square and “abominable idols.” Here, I will also point out that Israel is called a prostitute, an “adulterous wife, who “receives strangers instead of her husband,” lovers, and whorings with lovers (31-36). The fifth square contains “abominations” along with the phrase, “I have returned your deeds upon your head” (43). The sixth square repeats that she has “acted more abominably” (52). The seventh square returns to God establishing his “covenant” through “atonement” (61-63). Thinking about these

ideas, they are all focus on cultic relationships of Israel to either God or the gods of the nations. Amazingly, we have little to none of this language in either cols 1 or 2!

This gives us a fascinating contrast of warp threads. The first thread is **entirely the nations** and their peoples mixing with Israel. The third thread is **entirely the spiritual realm**—the gods behind the nations, the idols, pagan worship all contrasted with God who entered into a covenant with Israel. The left is **the physical realm**. The right is **the spiritual realm**. The two are feeding off of one another. Remember when she thought she was the madam paying her lovers? The **nations were only the pimps she thought she was hiring; the gods were the real handlers** who owned her all along. These threads show that the thing which people think is *purely a metaphor* is in fact a figure of something very real that takes place in the spiritual realm through Israel corruption with the nations around her.

That makes sense given **a divine council worldview!** And what's that? It's the idea that God gave to the nations an inheritance and each nation was given a portion of land and a supernatural being to rule over it (**Deut 32:7-9**). For it is the gods of the nations (the “sons of God”) who are given to the nations, who were quite literally covenanted to those

nations (read for example the into to the *Code of Hammurabi*), even as Yahweh is covenanted with Israel. If the metaphor is a wife in covenant marriage, then **to commit idolatry by running to the nations and their gods is to commit real spiritual adultery** with real supernatural beings, breaking covenant with God in a most serious way imaginable according to God's holy word. There is a reason for the First Commandment, and it is playing out before our eyes in this weave. This happens as Israel finds itself drawn to the nations, of which she now becomes exactly like: pagan. No wonder God "diminished her allowed portion" to deliver her to the greed of her enemies. She broke the covenant through adultery.

Where does that leave us? We have **column 2, a conceptual middle** in every sense between the physical nations and the spiritual adultery. This is a column of choice, or heart, and of memory. It is the only column where Israel decides to forget Yahweh or to be remembered by him. Look down its seven squares and listen. The First square: God Himself "**passed by**" the bloody infant and saw her kicking in her blood (4–5). Second square: she "**trusted in her own beauty**" and her heart turned proud (15–16). Third square: she "**forgot the days of her youth**" when she was naked and bare

(22). Fourth square: **the absolute center of the whole weave**, the single verse that sits dead in the middle of the chapter: “**How sick is your heart!**” (30). These are all decisions of her heart! Fifth square: the mob rises, the fury is spent, and the whoring finally stops—because the heart has been crushed (40–42). Sixth square: the hearts of Sodom and Samaria are laid bare so Jerusalem can see her own heart is worse (49–51). Seventh square: the only time in the whole chapter God speaks in the first person about His own heart: “**Yet I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth**” (60).

In this way, what Jerusalem did was a choice. She became like the nations and forgot her covenant with the LORD. She became a veritable pagan as she moved into the column of the nations. She abandoned her covenant with the LORD and became one flesh with the gods of the nations as she moved into their column.

But, **she’s not the only one** making choices. The very God who saw her and made a choice to adopt and marry her, the very God who chose to carry out the covenant curses upon her for her actions, he is also the God who chose—completely apart from her willing and running, to make a new covenant, a covenant between the Father and Son of

God in eternity past that guarantees salvation for the elect, a covenant that would be unbreakable because it is grounded in God's eternal purpose, a covenant that in space and time atones for Jerusalem's sin and the sin of the whole world through the Son as mediator for His people. [This is the covenant in which we now stand](#), as Christ has atoned for our sins and satisfied the wrath of God towards you. It is a covenant you stand in by grace alone because of Christ alone. It is a covenant you receive by faith alone. Not because of your works, for you deserve what Jerusalem got. Stand firm in the Lord and see his grace in Ezek 16.

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Appendix

Ezekiel 16 – The Seven-Row, Three-Column Weave

Row	Verses	Column A – NATIONS & THEIR OFFSPRING	Column B – HEART & MEMORY	Column C – SPIRITUAL REALM & COVENANT
1	1–13	Amorite father, Hittite mother, land of Canaanites	God passes by, sees the bloody infant	“Live!” → covenant oath → bridal washing & coronation
2	14–19	Renown among the nations	Trusted in your beauty → played the whore	Made male idols, high places, offered My food & incense
3	20–25	Your sons & daughters (whom you bore to Me) sacrificed	Forgot the days of your youth	Built vaulted chamber & lofty place on every square
4	26–36	Egypt → Assyria → Babylon → paid lovers	How sick is your heart! (v. 30 only)	Vaulted chambers, lofty places, abominable idols, reverse prostitute
5	37–43	Lovers gather, strip clothes/jewels, demolish vaulted chambers	Mob stones & burns → wrath spent	“I return your deeds upon your head” because of abominations
6	44–54	Samaria, Sodom & their daughters	Their sins described	You acted more abominably than they
7	55–63	Sodom, Samaria, Syria/Edom, Philistines & all their daughters restored	Yet I remember My covenant with you	I myself establish an everlasting covenant & atone for you

One-sentence summary of each column

Column A– Nations & Offspring: Every ethnic group, lover, son, daughter, and restored nation appears here and nowhere else — the human-political side of the adultery.

Column B – Heart & Memory: The decisive middle — every decision to forget God or be remembered by Him happens here, climaxing with the lone verse “How sick is your heart!” -**Column C** – Spiritual Realm & Covenant: Every idol, high place, abomination, and covenant reference appears here and nowhere else — the real gods behind the nations and the true marriage that was broken and restored.

One-sentence summary of each row (the escalating story)

1. From discarded, bloody Canaanite infant to royal bride — the height of unmerited grace.
2. From queen of nations to proud adulteress who turns God’s gifts into idols — the fall begins instantly.
3. From private adultery to public child-sacrifice and temple-brothels on every corner — the sin murders the next generation.
4. From local madam to international empire who pays superpowers to sleep with her — the absolute moral nadir.
5. From empire madam to devoured and burned by her own lovers — covenant curses executed to the letter.
6. From devoured harlot to declared worse than Sodom and Samaria — the indictment cannot get lower.
7. From deserved annihilation to everlasting covenant and divine atonement — the greatest reversal in Scripture.