

# Triennial Torah Study – 3<sup>rd</sup> Year 17/03/2012

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By Joseph F. Dumond

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<https://sightedmoon.com/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf>

<b>Lev 20</b>	<b>Ezek 14-16</b>		<b>Jacob 1 – 2:13</b>
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## Leviticus 20

Come Out From Among Them and Be Separate! (Leviticus 20)

God's purpose was to bring Israel into the Land of Promise—and He would do just that. But the land was filled with people who practiced abominable wickedness. Because Israel was a carnal people, not having the Holy Spirit, and because they had been raised in an oppressive pagan culture, they would be tempted to syncretize and “borrow” pagan elements in their worship of God. This, of course, was completely unacceptable to God.

One of the practices of the people of Canaan was child sacrifice. Children, most often the firstborn, were burned alive to the false god Molech in the belief that their innocence and sinlessness would appease him and make the prayers the children supposedly brought before him more acceptable (hence the mention of mediums and familiar spirits, which were other forms of communication with a god). While it may seem incredible to us that anyone could be seduced into such horrific practice, Israel would not have found it unthinkable—it was simply one of many religious practices of the day. God, however, found it utterly loathsome! So, He unambiguously condemns child sacrifice in the first seven verses of the chapter. The penalty for such conduct was death, and the executioners were to be the people, not the state. This crime was so appalling that God wanted the entire community involved in its eradication. And notice, God directly connects holiness and sanctification not with such abhorrent practices, but with conscientious obedience to His laws.

This chapter also contains a repetition of the laws of sexual morality, albeit in a condensed form. The laws regarding sexual relations are repeated, but the emphasis is on the punishment and the enormity of the crime. Once again, notice the connection between sin and the defilement of the land.

Notice also that the dietary laws of clean and unclean meats are mentioned and specifically connected to holiness—that is, separation from the people of the surrounding lands. The dietary laws, too, were given primarily for holiness purposes rather than physical health. Indeed, the dietary laws do have many health benefits, and no doubt God so intended them; but their primary purpose is stated as being for holiness. By creating such dietary laws, God added a dimension to daily living that constantly reminded the Israelites that they were to continue to be separate from the people of the world, and the laws created a significant frustration to fellowship with non-Israelites. Does God want such a distinct separation between Christians and the world? Yes! Notice what the apostle Paul wrote: “And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ Therefore, ‘Come out from among

them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

## **Ezekiel 14-16**

Idols in the Heart; Judgment on Persistent Unfaithfulness (Ezekiel 14-15)

As chapter 14 opens, “some of the elders of Israel”—leaders among the Jewish exile—come to see Ezekiel. The Interpreter’s Bible gives this description: “We may begin by imagining the scene. The prophet is sitting in his house when the leading men of the community enter... Quietly and reverently the visitors take their seats on the ground before him at his request. Their whole attitude is one of deference to the man of God. Then their spokesman steps forward and reveals the errand on which they have come. There is some event—we are not told what it is—on which they would have the prophet throw light, some difficulty in which they need his advice. So they wait for an oracle... When it comes the insincerity of the men before him is mercilessly exposed. It pierces through their deferential exterior to what is in their hearts... These men profess one allegiance with their lips while their hearts cling tenaciously to quite another. They have not the slightest intention of accepting an oracle from Ezekiel unless it chimes in with what they have already made up their minds to do” (note on chapter 14). Thus, they were hypocrites.

God reveals to Ezekiel what these men are really about, explaining that they have “set up idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity” (verse 3). This does not mean they were literally worshiping idols. Rather, they set up idols in their hearts. This could certainly include devotion to pagan gods. But, as the New Testament explains, mere “covetousness...is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5; compare Ephesians 5:5). Essentially, anything that people set up in their affections and devotions as taking priority above the true God is an idol in the heart—be it a pagan deity, false ideology, money, personal prestige, selfish pursuits, allegiance to other people or some cause, an addiction, etc. Indeed, these leaders, who are shown to represent all Israel, each had a “multitude of...idols” that “estranged” them from God (Ezekiel 14:4-5).

“Should I be inquired of at all by them?” the Lord asks (verse 3). He tells Ezekiel to state that those who have idols in their heart will receive an answer according to their idols (verse 4)— that is, appropriate to their idolatrous spiritual condition. As Psalm 66:18 says, “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (NIV). James adds in the same vein, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3). God isn’t about to give counsel to people regarding every this or that they might seek Him about if their whole life is oriented against Him and His way. His response to any such inquirer is going to be the same: Repent!—and then we can talk (compare Ezekiel 14:6). This sharp response is intended to “seize” people “by their heart”—a wayward heart in need of dire warning (verse 5).

The same applies to “anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel” (verse 7). Note here that while Ezekiel was proclaiming this warning to Jewish leaders in Babylonia, the wording of verse 7 speaks not of the exiles, but of strangers dwelling with Israel in Israel’s land. It should be clear, then, that this prophecy was meant to apply to more than Ezekiel’s immediate audience. “House of Israel” in this passage can easily refer to all 12 tribes of Israel in our own day. Indeed, the principles of the prophecy are universal.

Those guilty of idolatrous rebellion in the heart who seek God’s counsel for the wrong reasons —demanding a certain answer, refusing to repent—will receive His answer in the form of severe judgment to serve as a wakeup call to them and others (verses 7-8). A wise father does not respond to a child’s brusque demand for some benefit—even if the father would dearly like to him to have it. Likewise, God knows that showering benefits on those in a surly and ungrateful frame of mind will only hurt them. And it would certainly set a terrible example for everyone else.

Verse 9 states, “And if the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the LORD have induced that prophet, and I will...destroy him.” In place of “induced,” other translations have “deceived,” “seduced,” “enticed” or “persuaded.” What this verse seems to be saying is that if one of the above-mentioned people with idolatrous hearts manages to entice or persuade a religious teacher representing God to give a false message—to tell the inquirer what he wants to hear— that circumstance is ultimately from God, as He allows it as a test for that teacher and as a means to give the people over to false teachers as they desire. Furthermore, it also provides an opportunity for God to bring judgment on both prophet and inquirer as a lesson to everyone —the goal of which is actually to lead the people to repentance and deliverance (verses 10-11).

Starting in verse 12, Ezekiel receives another message from God. It is unclear if it was given in the same context as the early part of the chapter or at a later time. The subject is a land that sins against God by “persistent unfaithfulness” (verse 13). His judgment will bring it to ruin. The end of the chapter makes it clear that this message concerns the ancient fall of Jerusalem and that it was intended for the Jews already in captivity. Yet it likely has a broader, dual application, as so many of Ezekiel’s prophecies do—applying also to all Israel in the last days.

In this section God separately lists four punishments: famine (verse 13); wild beasts (verse 15); the sword of warfare (verse 17); and pestilence (verse 19). In each case, He states that even if three men, “Noah, Daniel, and Job,” were in the land, “they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness” (verse 14). “The allusion is to Abraham’s intercession for Sodom (Gen. 18). God promised to spare the wicked cities of the plain if only 10 righteous men could be found within them (v. 32). The story generated the belief that God would not judge if a few righteous men could be found to pray for the rest. But the presence of three of history’s most righteous men could not save Judah” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on Ezekiel 14:12-20).

The righteousness of Noah delivered him and seven of his family, but could not preserve the rest of humanity from the Flood (Genesis 6:9). Job was spared from death, but was unable to save the lives of his children even though he was a man of outstanding integrity. Daniel was spared when he refused to defile himself with Nebuchadnezzar’s food, and he rose to prominence and saw to the promotion of his friends after he interpreted the king’s dream—but though by this time he had become a high official in Babylonia, he was unable to end the Jewish exile or to prevent more Jews from joining it. “Though his prophecies mostly were later than those of Ezekiel, his fame for piety and wisdom was already established, and the events recorded in Daniel 1 [and] 2 had transpired. The Jews would naturally, in their fallen condition, pride themselves on one who reflected such glory on his nation at the heathen capital, and would build vain hopes (here set aside) on his influence in averting ruin from them” (Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary, note on Ezekiel 14:14).

Note that “Daniel was already a legend in his own time...! This supports the traditional view that the Book of Daniel was written in the time of the Exile, not the second century B.C. as critics claim” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on verses 12-20). It should be pointed out that some commentators think the name in this chapter should be rendered not Daniel but Dan-El, referring supposedly to a now-unknown person. But that conclusion, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains, is not justified (see footnote on verse 14).

God then makes a cumulative argument in verse 21. “If Noah, Daniel, Job, could not deliver the land, when deserving only one judgment [of four], ‘how much more’ when all four judgments combined are justly to visit the land for sin, shall these three righteous men not deliver it” (JFB Commentary, note on verses 15-21).

“But to vindicate his justice before the exiles, the Lord would spare a small remnant of unrepentant Hebrews and send them into exile in Babylonia (v. 22). Some commentators view this remnant as a righteous remnant, but the context and the consistent use of the term ‘actions’ (alilah) in an evil sense throughout the O[ld] T[estament] when referring to mankind argues for an unrighteous remnant. This was strictly a manifestation of God’s grace. When

these unrighteous people would go into exile in Babylonia, the exiles already in Babylonia would observe their deeds and see how wicked the Judeans had become. Through this the exiles would be consoled that God was perfectly just in his judgment on Jerusalem (vv. 22-23). As the exiles saw that the Judge of all the earth did right (Gen 18:25), they would be comforted in their sorrow over what had happened to Jerusalem” (Expositor’s, note on Ezekiel 14:21-23).

And again, Jerusalem here is probably also typical of the nations of modern Israel, which has likewise proved persistently unfaithful.

### **The Wood of the Vine (Ezekiel 14-15)**

On the night before His death, at His final Passover with His disciples, Jesus told this gathered group that would form the core of His Church, spiritual Israel: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire” (John 15:1-6).

When Jesus said these words He may very well have been thinking of the 15th chapter of Ezekiel. Many times in the Prophets and Writings sections of the Bible, God had referred to Israel as His vine or vineyard. The “Song of the Vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-7 describes how God cultivated Israel in order to produce fruit. Jesus used the same imagery in the parable of Mark 12:1-12. An examination of these and other references shows that Israel was a cultivated vine, not a wild one. God had lavished His care on it. He had planted, fertilized, watered and protected it. But it failed to respond and produce fruit. Instead, God’s message through Ezekiel is that Israel went back to being a wild vine “among the trees of the forest”—that is, figuratively, the nations. So Israel was not content to be close to God. They wanted to fit in

with all the other nations around them. That’s why they adopted the religions and customs of other nations. God states that apart from her spiritual mission, Israel has no significance and no hope for survival. Without God, as Jesus told the disciples, no person or nation can produce fruit that is pleasing to Him.

The Jews had evidently come to think that because Israel was God’s chosen people, Jerusalem would not be allowed to fall into gentile hands. After all, God had compared Israel to the choicest vine (Isaiah 5:2; Jeremiah 2:21). However, as this parable goes on to show, the only value of a vine is in bearing fruit. The vine now referred to is, again, the kind that grows wild in the forest—the fruit of which is typically small, bitter and useless. Israel had become such a vine. Its fruitless condition actually made it less valuable than other nations.

So what purpose could it serve? The wood of a grapevine is worthless. It is too thin and flexible for making any useful items—it can neither support weight nor supply strength. Old vines were dried and burned as fuel. John the Baptist carried this message as a foundational part of his call to repentance: “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:9).

Since Israel was not producing fruit, it could no longer be viewed as a choice vine. Both ends of the vine that made up the 12 tribes of Israel had already been consumed in the destruction of the northern kingdom, the Assyrian ravaging of Judah soon afterward, and the recent deportations of Jews to Babylon in 605 and 597 B.C. All that remained at the time of this message was Jerusalem and the rest of the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem and the remainder of the Jews were now surrounded by gentile nations, since the other tribes were all gone.

God says that they are now sentenced to be burned. Jerusalem had escaped twice from the fire of Nebuchadnezzar, but it wouldn't survive the third time. They had "persisted in unfaithfulness," a phrase tying this prophecy to the previous one (see 14:13). Their lack of repentance was the reason God would not spare the city.

The lesson for all of us today is sobering. We must stay close to God the Father and Jesus Christ so that we can produce fruit. The modern nations of Israel should certainly take warning—but all Christians should also consider the lesson and take heed. The Church of God today, as stated earlier, is spiritual Israel. Galatians 6:16 refers to it as "the Israel of God." In Romans 2:29 the apostle Paul tells us that "he is a Jew who is one inwardly." Those of spiritual Israel are now being judged as to how much fruit God is able to produce through us. Judgment is now upon the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). We are to spiritually come out of the world (the wild) and not return to it—being instead a people cultivated by God to produce much good fruit, setting the example of persistent faithfulness.

### **Rescued Child Turned Murderous Harlot (Ezekiel 16)**

Ezekiel 16 shows God as a devoted, loving, generous, ideal husband married to an adulterous wife, reminiscent of other passages such as Jeremiah 3 and Hosea 1-3. Here the wife is Jerusalem, representative of the Jewish nation, the remnant of Israel. At Mount Sinai, God was married to the entire nation of Israel. The city of Jerusalem was then no part of this union. Later, however, the city was incorporated into the nation and its divine covenant relationship as the capital of all 12 tribes and center of true worship. Later still, the kingdom of Israel split into north and south—Israel in the north (symbolized in this chapter by its capital Samaria) and Judah in the south (symbolized by its capital Jerusalem). God eventually put away the apostate northern kingdom of Israel—sending its people into captivity. This left Judah as the remnant of Israel still in covenant with God. Yet Judah now stood even guiltier than the northern kingdom.

God tells Ezekiel to "make Jerusalem see her abominable conduct" (verse 2, NIV) and later in the chapter warns of coming invasion. This is perhaps an indication that Ezekiel's message reached the citizens of Jerusalem before its destruction. The prophet could have sent them a letter, as Jeremiah, who was in Jerusalem at the time, sent a letter to the captives in Babylon (see Jeremiah 29). Yet, as with other prophecies in this section, it also seems likely that the message of Ezekiel 16 was intended for Judah and Israel in the end time—to reach them through Ezekiel's book being part of Scripture and through God's true servants in the last days announcing the warnings contained within it.

In verse 3, God's message to Jerusalem begins, "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite." Jerusalem was originally a city of Canaan, populated during the Israelite conquest of the land by one of the Canaanite tribes, the Jebusites (Joshua 15:8, 63). The Amorites and Hittites were two leading Canaanite tribes (see Genesis 10:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:1). Their names were sometimes used generically of all Canaanites (see Genesis 15:16; Amos 2:10; Joshua 1:4). However, we should note that "the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites" were specifically grouped together as inhabiting the mountain region (Numbers 13:29), where Jerusalem was built.

Yet we should also consider Jerusalem as representative of the nation of Israel—of which, as mentioned, Judah was now the remnant. The mention of heritage then becomes a snub and rebuke. While the nation's forebears—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—sojourned in the same highlands of Canaan, they were not physically of Canaanite descent. Neither did they adopt Canaan's spiritual traditions. But their descendants, who later settled in Canaan, did. The Israelites thus became cultural descendants of the Canaanites. Jerusalem, corrupted with paganism and all manner of immorality, effectively reverted to its Canaanite parentage.

God recounts the life of Israel and Israelite Jerusalem as a tragic allegory. Three stages of life are presented: 1) a foundering, helpless, outcast baby who is rescued (verses 1-7); 2) the grown maiden who is betrothed and married to the one who saved her (verses 8-14); and 3) the wife who has turned into a harlot and baby murderer (verses 15-34).

She starts as a totally neglected newborn infant, deprived of all the care needed for survival. This baby was not “rubbed with salt” (verse 4), an ancient custom done to harden and strengthen an infant’s body. The Soncino Commentary explains: “As soon as the navel is cut, the midwife rubs the child all over with salt, water and oil, and tightly swathes it in clothes for seven days; at the end of that time she removes the dirty clothes, washes the child and anoints it, and then wraps it up again for seven days—and so on till the 40th day” (note on verse 4).

This vulnerable child is abandoned in the open field and despised. This was the condition of Israel as the people grew into a nation in Egypt—despised slaves (see Exodus 1). The Pharaoh had commanded the death of all boy babies, which eventually would have led to the extinction of the nation. God rescued them as they were “struggling.” The Revised English Bible has “kicking helplessly,” and the Jewish Tanakh translates this as “wallowing.” The Israelites were doomed to die in their own blood, but God provided them a savior in Moses, who led them out of Egypt. However, the imagery in Ezekiel 16 could also apply to the early years of the city of Jerusalem: “She was a foundering city, uncared for by...Israel in the conquest of the land, for the Hebrews failed to conquer the city of Jebus (Josh 15:63). In fact, they allowed this city to lie as an unwanted child throughout the period of the Judges (vv. 4-5).

It was a widespread custom in the ancient Near East to eliminate unwanted children (esp[ecially] girls) by exposing them” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, note on Ezekiel 16:4-5).

Under God’s direction this child “grew, matured and became very beautiful” but was “naked and bare” (verse 7). Israel was physically developed in numbers while in Egypt, but was lacking in true religion and morality. When the end of the period prophesied to Abraham about his descendants becoming slaves and then being delivered (Genesis 15:13-16) came to an end, God says that Israel was “old enough for love” (verse 8, NIV) or ready to enter into a relationship with Him. He says that he then spread his “wing” (NKJV) or the corner of his garment (NIV) over her. To spread a garment over a woman was an idiom for betrothal (Ruth 3:9). As noted earlier, Israel was married to God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20).

God then recalls that he clothed and decorated her like royalty. Most of the symbols mentioned —embroidered cloth, leather sandals, silk and costly garments—were also used in the tabernacle. The fine linen referred to the righteousness symbolized by the law God gave to Israel, which He had not given to any other nation. This was the same material used to clothe the priests (Exodus 39:1-2). God spared nothing in making His bride the showcase of nations. She is described as being decorated with costly jewels, gold and silver. These items are also used later in the Bible to describe the character of true followers of God (Malachi 3:17; 1 Corinthians 3:12; Revelation 3:18). God says that she rose to be a queen among the nations.

Again, the imagery can also apply to the city of Jerusalem itself: “The Lord visited Jerusalem and claimed her in marriage by spreading his garment over her (v. 8; cf. Ruth 3:9). He entered into a marriage covenant with Jerusalem [by incorporating it into His relationship with His people] (cf. Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14) as described in Psalm 132:13-17. She became the Lord’s city where he dwelt when David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and purchased the threshing floor of Arunah, the Jebusite (2 Sam 6; 24), in preparation for the temple’s construction. As a groom to his bride, God lavished marriage gifts on Jerusalem (vv. 10-13; cf. Gen 24:53; Ps 45:13-15; Isa 61:10): ornaments, cleansing, anointing, costly garments, jewelry, a crown, and fine foods. She was made exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty under the reigns of David and Solomon. Her fame and beauty became renowned

throughout the ancient Near East as the capital of the leading nation of that day (v. 14; 1 Kings 10; Lam 2:15)” (Expositor’s, note on verses 8-14).

How could God be married to Israel on the one hand and to Jerusalem in another sense? The New Testament affords us a parallel. Spiritual Israel, the Church of God, is the New Covenant Bride of Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7-9). Yet in Revelation 21:2 and verses 9-10, it appears that the coming New Jerusalem is the Bride. This makes sense when we realize that the New Jerusalem will be the eternal home of the glorified Church and that, even now, it is the place where Christians’ citizenship resides. For this reason, the Church is sometimes referred to as Jerusalem or Zion in prophecy.

Continuing in Ezekiel 16, how soon the Israelites forgot God! They became worshipers of idols. God says they played the harlot with all passers-by (verses 15, 25), entering into relationships with foreign nations and foreign gods. They built pagan shrines on every street, as Jeremiah also attested (Jeremiah 11:13). Translated literally, God says to the nation: “Thou...hast opened thy feet to every one that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms” (Ezekiel 16:25, KJV). God laments the fact the people took the gold, silver and jewelry He gave them and used it to make “male images” (verse 17). The Tanakh version has, “You took your beautiful things, made of the gold and silver that I had given you, and you made yourself phallic images and fornicated with them.” This is rather graphic imagery, showing God’s utter disgust with the nation. Representations of the male member were rather common in ancient Middle Eastern paganism, including not just explicit statuary but also large-scale symbolic representations such as upright stones, pillars, obelisks and slender temple towers.

It might be surprising to learn that, even today, the nations of Israel are still polluted with pagan shrines and even phallic imagery. The world religion known as Christianity is essentially a modern form of Baalism—with its churches topped with steeples, spires or bell towers. One source explains: “There is evidence that the spires of our churches owe their existence to the uprights or obelisks outside the temples of former ages... There are still in existence today remarkable specimens of original phallic symbols...steeples on our churches...and obelisks” (S. Brown, *Sex Worship and Symbolism in Primitive Races*, 1916). McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* confirms that “even the spires of churches are symbols retained from the old phallic worship” (1895, “Phallus”). In his book *Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism*, Thomas Inman writes that ancient fertility rites and phallic worship resulted in the setting up of various architectural structures such “as we now see towers or spires before our churches, and minarets before mosques” (1915, p. XXII).

As mentioned, ancient Israel and Judah gave the precious things of God to pagan idols. The most precious thing they offered was their children, whom God called His children: “And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them to the idols” (verses 20-21, NIV). Just as God condemned idolatry, He also condemned human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21). Ahaz was probably the king who introduced child sacrifice in Judah with the offering of his own son (2 Kings 16:3). Manasseh also sacrificed one of his sons (2 Kings 21:6). The total number of children destroyed by this practice before Josiah put a stop to it (2 Kings 23:10) is unknown. In all this, the nation failed to remember that it and its capital began as an outcast, dying infant rescued by God (Ezekiel 16:22). The people expressed no heart of feeling about their own children—God’s children.

Today millions of innocent babies are killed every year before they have a chance to live outside their mother’s womb. In almost every case, the reason for this heinous practice is “convenience”—the children sacrificed to the false gods of sexual hedonism and selfishness. Of course, the majority of children are not so murdered. But most

who live are “offered” over to this world’s false religious system and perverted values, thereby setting them on a path leading ultimately to death.

When God punished Israel and Judah in relatively minor ways it apparently did little good. They had forgotten that their very existence was due to God’s care for them. They refused to learn from the curse that came from their sin. Instead they sinned more—thinking the cure for the curse was to increase their distance from God by drawing closer to other nations. God viewed Israel’s idolatry as encompassing more than just their adoption of other nations’ religious practices. “By making alliances with foreign powers, they came also under the influence of their ideas and customs” (Soncino, note on verse 26). God’s true followers must never “copy the behavior and customs of this world” (Romans 12:2, Living Bible). We are to come out and be separate (Revelation 18:4).

God continues to describe the nation as an adulterous wife who even bribed strangers to consort with her. He foretells the destruction of the nation in the sight of all the nations with whom she had played the harlot—at the hands of these same nations (Ezekiel 16:37, 39). Jerusalem will be judged as a woman who has broken wedlock or shed blood, the penalty for which was violent death (verse 38). Interestingly, the former allies mentioned included not just the Chaldeans (verse 29) but also the Assyrians (verse 28). The fact that all such former allies would come against the nation perhaps suggests an end-time parallel since the Assyrians, their empire gone when Ezekiel wrote, will rise to prominence again in the last days in conjunction with the Chaldeans.

Again, the root cause of all the calamities goes back to the nation’s forgetfulness and ingratitude (verse 43). In Deuteronomy 8:10-11 God warned: “When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD... Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments.” Prosperity is often a greater temptation for evil than adversity is. In adverse times people often engage in soul-searching and turn to God. Prosperous times result in arrogance and self-reliance.

### **Worse Than Samaria and Sodom (Ezekiel 16)**

In the next section of Ezekiel 16, verses 44-59, Jerusalem is declared to be worse than Samaria and even than Sodom—which are declared to be her “sisters.” For some, this is strong evidence that “Jerusalem” in this chapter refers exclusively to the city of Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah—not in any sense to the nation of Israel as a whole. For why would Jerusalem represent all Israel when it is said to be sister to Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel? But consider again that in Ezekiel’s time Judah was the remnant of Israel (Israel being the name of the nation in covenant with God). The northern tribes, symbolized by Samaria, had once been part of that relationship but were no longer. Thus, when the chapter describes the allegorical history of Jerusalem, it is giving the history of the whole covenant nation (and the city’s part in that history).

God again refers to Jerusalem as a Canaanite daughter (verse 45). The analogy of Samaria and Sodom being Jerusalem’s “sisters” is fairly easy to follow when considering the cities themselves. Sodom was a Canaanite city (Genesis 10:19). And archaeology has revealed that Samaria was originally a Canaanite settlement. The Hebrew phrases translated “your elder sister” and “your younger sister” (Ezekiel 16:46) “mean literally ‘your great sister’ and ‘your small sister,’ respectively. Though these two constructions are idiomatic for ‘older’ (greater) and ‘younger’ (smaller), Ezekiel used the idioms properly within the figure, but with an emphasis on the literal meaning of the words. The play on the idioms stresses that Samaria was greater than Jerusalem and Sodom smaller than Jerusalem” (Expositor’s, footnote on verse 46). The term “daughters” refers either to the other towns included in the territories of the major cities mentioned or simply the individual citizens.

But again, the cities are also representative of the national populations over which they ruled. Jerusalem was, again, symbolic of Israel—in Ezekiel’s day of Israel’s remnant, Judah. Samaria stood for the former northern kingdom, cut



off from Judah and now gone. It is easy to see the peoples of the northern and southern kingdoms as “sisters,” as they shared the same Israelite ethnic heritage. But Sodom did not share in that heritage. Some have suggested that the reference perhaps concerns the fact that the Ammonites and Moabites descended from Abraham’s nephew Lot and his daughters, who dwelt in Sodom for some time. These people, however, had no physical kinship with the people of Sodom. But there was a cultural relationship, as Lot and his daughters were influenced by Sodom’s ways.

The Ammonites and

Moabites later embraced Canaanite religion and had an influence on the people of Israel and Judah. In any case, there was certainly a spiritual kinship between the people of Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem.

The wealth and prosperity of Sodom had plunged it into such spiritual laxity that the people fell headlong into an utter rejection of morality and restraint (verses 49-50). Crowds tried to gangrape men visiting the town or young women who lived there (Genesis 19). Yet according to God’s judgment, Sodom wasn’t as evil as Judah. Judah had become so depraved that it allowed homosexual prostitution at the temple as a form of worship. Moreover, the real measuring stick here was accountability. As Jesus Christ stated, “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48). The people of Jerusalem and Judah— the center of true worship—because they should have known better, were much more accountable for their wicked conduct than the pagans of Sodom who were totally cut off from God. Likewise, the northern tribes were more accountable than Sodom, but not as accountable as the Jews, who had more access to God’s truth.

Despite the terrible record of idolatry and evil, God—in His incredible mercy—promises a time of forgiveness and restoration in the future. Verses 53-55: “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, that you may bear your own shame and be disgraced by all that you did when you comforted them. 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.” This may refer in part to the return of Israel and Judah to the Holy Land at the time of Christ’s return. However, Sodom was utterly destroyed and seemingly has no descendants to return—unless the Ammonites and Moabites are meant, as some have suggested. The prophecy seems to point mainly to the time when all those who died in ancient times are resurrected to life again

1,000 years after Christ returns (see Revelation 20:5). Paralleling the above verses in Ezekiel, Jesus told Jews of His day, “It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:24).

Yet God would provide atonement upon repentance. He had decreed in His covenant with Israel that He would be faithful to all He had promised, which included restoration (Leviticus 26:40-45). In the relationship at the restoration of the future, all must become Jews spiritually (see Romans 2:28-29), and all peoples will come under the rule of Jerusalem—symbolically making them her daughters. This relationship was not promised in the covenant at Sinai (Ezekiel 16:61). But it will be part of the New Covenant (verse 62).

Ezekiel 16 contains some important lessons for all Christians. In the allegorical account of how God rescued the outcast child Israel from certain death, and made her His nation and His wife, there is a personal message for each one of us. God has by intention called the weak of the world (1 Corinthians 1:26) and every one of us was lost in our sins and on the path to eternal death (Romans 3:23, 6:23). We have all gone through the rescuing process just like ancient Israel. They were a nation in bondage, as we all are in bondage to Satan’s society before God calls us (Galatians 4:3). They were given life when they were almost dead—the same process that Paul describes for all Christians in Ephesians 2:1. We now have a choice of whether to remain faithful to God or commit spiritual adultery

with the world around us and its evil ways. Let us remain vigilant and stay the course. And on the occasions when we fail in this and sin, we should remember that God is always there to forgive if we will repent.

### **James 1 – 2:13**

Starting a new book this week friends – the letter written by James. James, in Hebrew is Ya'aqob and there is evidence that this Ya'aqob (James) is the brother of Yeshua. James the son of Zebdee was killed by Herod in 62 AD and this letter in our Messianic Scriptures today was written later than this. James was the head of the assembly in Jerusalem and had seen and talked with the risen Messiah. And yet, with all this, in v. 1:1 what does he say concerning himself?

"Ya'aqob, a servant of Elohim and of the Master Yeshua Messiah..." He is addressing his letter to "the twelve tribes who are in the dispersion" this means more than "Jews" as most commentators express in their exposition of this epistle. The Tribe of Judah was "one" of the twelve tribes, there were eleven others and James is writing to ALL twelve.

James begins with a theme of joy and keeping that joy even during times of trial. When trials come, a temptation of the flesh arises and these trials produce perfecting of the spirit. Knowing this then, remain in joy even through the trials and prove the Faith received by reacting and handling these trials in perfection. When we feel as though we need wisdom for handling certain matters, pray to receive wisdom from Elohim and it shall be given. He goes on to warn us not to pray for wisdom having doubts but believe wholeheartedly for answer to whatever we ask.

The rich shall fade away in all their ways like the flower and grass under the hot sun. Blessed are those who endure trials, for they are proved and will receive the crown of life that is promised to them who love our Master.

Do not say "I am enticed by Elohim." Elohim entices no man for He Himself is not enticed by any evil matter. The enticement comes from each of our own desires and we are drawn away and trapped by them. The desire, if entertained, implants and is conceived within. It gives birth and is sin, and when sin has been accomplished brings forth death.

What comes from heaven is every good gift, every perfect gift, all light from the Father of lights. In Him there is no shadow of turning and with Whom, there is no change. He purposed to bring us forth by the Word of Truth to be a kind of first fruits. So James advises us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of Elohim. Receive with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save. Become doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Hearers are as one who has looked into a mirror and when they walked away, they forgot the vision. But one who looks into the perfect Torah, that of freedom, and continues in it (doing what it commands) does not forget. This one shall be blessed in the doing of the commands which are righteousness.

A religious person who does not bridle the tongue is worthless.

Clean and undefiled religion before the Elohim and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Do not hold the belief of Yeshua with partiality, giving attention and favor to those dressed in robes and gold while displacing the poor and unkempt. In doing this you have discriminated among the brethren and become judges, and not judges only but judges with wicked thoughts.

Has not Elohim chosen the poor of this world, rich in belief and heirs of the reign, which He promised to those who love Him? Showing respect for the rich and disrespect for the poor is sin and transgression of the Torah. We are

commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves. Showing partiality is transgression of the Torah and when one transgresses in one point, they are guilty of all.

Compassion boasts over judgment.