

Ezekiel 16:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband!

Analysis

But as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! This verse exposes the perversion of Jerusalem's idolatry using the marriage metaphor central to Ezekiel 16. The Hebrew *na'aph* (נָאָפָה, "committeth adultery") denotes covenant betrayal—not mere sexual sin but the breaking of sacred vows. "**Strangers instead of her husband**" (זרים מִשְׁׁמָרָת אֱלֹהִים) intensifies the offense: Jerusalem preferred foreign alliances and pagan gods over Yahweh, her covenant husband.

The exclamation mark conveys divine outrage. Hosea's prophecy uses identical imagery (Hosea 2:2-13), where Israel's pursuit of Baal constitutes spiritual adultery. The theological principle is profound: **idolatry is not religious preference but covenant infidelity**. God's jealousy stems from His exclusive marriage covenant with Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6, Jeremiah 2:2). When Israel sought Egypt's protection (Isaiah 30:1-3) or Assyria's favor (2 Kings 16:7-9), they committed adultery against their divine husband.

Paul applies this metaphor to the church as Christ's bride (2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-32). Any allegiance that competes with Christ—whether materialism, nationalism, or ideological commitment—constitutes spiritual adultery. James declares, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4). The covenant relationship demands exclusive loyalty.

Historical Context

Ezekiel prophesied this allegory (593-571 BC) to exiles who had witnessed Jerusalem's fall but still didn't grasp the theological reason for judgment. Chapter 16 traces Jerusalem's history from abandoned infant (Canaanite origins) to God's chosen bride (Davidic covenant) to unfaithful adulteress (idolatrous alliances).

Archaeological evidence confirms Jerusalem's syncretism. Excavations reveal Asherah poles, foreign altars, and Egyptian amulets alongside temple artifacts. Kings like Ahaz and Manasseh actively promoted foreign cults within Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:10-16, 21:3-7). Even Josiah's reforms (622 BC) couldn't fully eradicate entrenched idolatry. The marriage metaphor would have shocked the exiles—they viewed themselves as victims of harsh treatment, but God exposed them as unfaithful spouses who betrayed their loving husband.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What 'strangers' compete with Christ for your ultimate allegiance—career, political ideology, material security?
2. How does viewing sin as covenant betrayal rather than rule-breaking change your understanding of repentance?

Interlinear Text

בְּאִשָּׁה הַמִּתְנָא פָּתָח תְּנִתְנָא הַיְשָׁרָה
But as a wife that committeth adultery H8478 instead of her husband H376

אֶת תְּקַנֵּה יְרִים: H853 strangers
which taketh H3947

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 2:28 (Parallel theme): But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah.

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