

EZEKIEL'S ALLEGORY X-RATED

If a book or movie is “banned in Boston,” you can bet the rent it’s too spicy to share with the children. Rightly or wrongly, Massachusetts’ capital has been saddled with a reputation for being prudish. Hand in hand with a liking for baked beans goes a penchant for Bible-based morals.

However, such puritanical attitudes overlook the fact that some of the raciest chapters ever penned can be found in the Bible.

Admittedly, there aren’t many lewd passages in the Jewish or Christian scriptures. But there are a few. And some of them come close to being X-rated.

A case in point is the 16th chapter of Ezekiel. The imagery in this powerful allegory is about as sexually explicit as an adults-only paperback. What keeps it from being pornographic is the fact that it is cleverly turned into a warning.

Here’s the story: Ezekiel was a priest-turned-prophet in the years which spanned the siege and sack of Jerusalem by the invading Babylonians.

In fact, he was taken prisoner at the onset of hostilities and shipped east with the first wave of expatriates.

Both before and after his enforced exile he tried to convince his fellow countrymen that their downfall was the Lord’s way of punishing them. But nobody was listening.

So Ezekiel reached for some of the most bizarre, less-than-modest language imaginable. He got their attention.

It must have been all but impossible to ignore a man who compares the history of his nation to the story of an abandoned baby girl.

The prophet doesn’t leave anything to the imagination. It’s all there in graphic detail: the castoff infant, unwashed and umbilical uncut, lying by the road; the pubescent young lady

with center-fold attractions loved and wedded by her adopter; the well-dressed wife stunningly beautiful and cover-girl famous.

And this same woman sleeping with anything in trousers!

That’s what Ezekiel was driving at. The Lord had chosen his people and made them what they were, he was trying to say, but they had abandoned him and turned a promiscuous eye elsewhere.

A prostitute normally makes her client pay for her favors. But his people went one worse, suggests the prophet. They’re like a wife who sells the jewelry her husband gave her in order to hire a stable of gigolos.

If you think the preceding paragraphs are too suggestive, try reading the real thing. The 16th chapter of Ezekiel doesn’t pull any punches. It’s about as detailed as you can get without being obscene.

Maybe that’s why it is rarely chosen as a sermon text and never gets included in children’s Bible story books.

Once you get past the titillating features, however, the chapter hits almost too close for comfort. For it has a nasty way of uncovering the ungrateful ways people have of treating their benefactors. It pulls the mask off all kinds of irreligious ingratitude even today.

But the point could never have been made so sharply if the prophet had played it safe. Instead, he resorted to nearly risqué language. And it worked; his point stuck.

All in all, this is another in the list of surprises in the Bible. Most people wouldn’t expect the biblical documents to come anywhere close to indecencies.

But there are exceptions to the expectations. In Ezekiel’s case, whatever worked was usable, even an R-rated picture featuring an ungrateful playgirl.