

God gives Ezekiel another parable. While this chapter is similar to chapter 16, here the emphasis is placed not as much on the spiritual breach of covenant as it is on the worldly spirit that they have become filled with. They have trusted in their own intuition and sought after peace and safety in earthly alliances rather than trusting in God.

THE PARABLE OF TWO SISTERS

23:1-4 *“The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, “Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled. “Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah.”*

As was pointed out in 16, these characteristics of the whole people of Israel had its roots in Egypt. There God’s people became deeply entrenched in the pagan idolatry of the Egyptians so that when we such activities as the making of and worshipping of the golden calf in the wilderness, they were not acting on something they were not familiar with (Gen 45:10; 46:2-5; 47:1-6; Ex 1:8; 24:14). The two sisters are defined in verse 4 as the northern and southern kingdom but as two sisters from the same mother they are in God’s eyes all Israel.

“**Oholah**” - means “her tent” or the tent that she devised. After the split of Israel Jeroboam had established worship at Beth-el which was not appointed by God. Rather He had appointed worship to be carried in His temple in its proper location in Jerusalem which is called “**Oholibah**” in this parable and means “My tent in her” Oholah is called the elder because the northern kingdom’s descent into idolatry and punishment preceded the southern kingdom.

23:5-6 *““Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, her neighbors, who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. She bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom were the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself. She did not forsake her harlotries from the time in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her. Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, but they slew her with the sword. Thus she became a byword among women, and they executed judgments on her.*

Just as when the people had demanded an earthly king, their security was based on earthly things. The Assyrian nation was very strong and intimidating and so they sought to create an alliance with them in order to establish protection. They sought after their gods and pagan lifestyle as a result. God has never desired for His people to become like the world, but maintain a separation for what fellowship has light with darkness (2Cor 6:14)? 2 Kings 10:32-34 records the expansion of the Assyrians into the region of the Israelites during

EZEKIEL

“Strengthened by God”

Session 17 - Ezekiel 23 & 24

Jehu's reign. There is the Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III on display in the British Museum that has on it the description “Jehu son of Omri” who is pictured bowing down to the Assyrian king. It is the earliest ancient depiction of an Israelite.

Rather than trusting in God alone, the northern kingdom submitted to Assyria as a vassal state and brought tribute to the Assyrian king. Menahem and Hoshea subsequently brought tribute to Assyria (2Ki 15:19-20; 17:3-4). Hosea rebuked the northern kingdom for her unholy alliance (Hos 5:13-14; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1) and God, in righteous retribution, turned their objects of trust into the instruments of their punishment: Pul, Tiglath-pileser, Esar-haddon, and Shalmaneser (2Ki 15:19, 29 17:3, 6, 24 Ezr 4:2, 10).

The Northern Kingdom sought to circumvent the “relationship” she had submitted to with the Assyrians when she realized that she wasn't going to benefit the way she had hoped. New secret alliances were made with Syria in order to throw off the yoke of the Assyrians. They sought to bring the Southern Kingdom aboard, but Ahaz refused so they attacked Judah with the desire to overthrow Ahaz and replace with a king who would support them.

King Ahaz, rather than trusting in God for protection as Isaiah had warned him to do, sought after protection from Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria and was denounced by Isaiah (7:3-17). It was during this warning by Isaiah that he gave all of Israel the promise of a future sign from God:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” (v14)

Ahaz then appeared before Tiglath-pileser and paid the price of submission and Judah was a vassal of Assyria for the next century (2Ki 16:5-9).

23:11-15 *“Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister. She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way. So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion, girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth.*”

The Southern Kingdom of Judah had the advantage of hindsight with her sister to the north. She was able to witness the sin and treachery of the unholy alliances that Samaria had made and was judged for by God. She had the advantage of the temple of God and thus His official presence with them and the solidarity of the Davidic line. Never the less when King Ahaz had gone before Tiglath-pileser he so admired the altar that was there he had Urijah the priest make a pattern of it so that he could have one made in Jerusalem just like it (2Ki 16:10-18). No matter what people think you cannot separate religion from politics and economics. They are all intertwined. It was under king Josiah that Judah regained her independence from Assyria but when he went to battle against the Egyptians he was killed by Pharaoh Necho and Judah became a vassal of

Egypt for 4 years (2Chron 35:3, 20-23; 2Ki 23:29-30). It was probably during this time that King Jehoiakim sent messengers into Chaldea to seek the aid of the Babylonians against Egypt and when Egypt was defeated by the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, Jehoiakim willingly became the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 24:1).

23:16-21 *“ When she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. The Babylonians came to her to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them. She uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister. Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt. She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses. Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth.”*

But the “romance” with Babylon was short lived. In the last 14 years of Judah’s history (600-586 BC), she attempted to elicit Egypt’s help in her revolt against Babylon. Judah returned to her “former lover” as it were. In 588 BC, Zedekiah’s final revolt against Babylon was built on the empty foundation of Egypt’s promise to help (2Ki 25:1; Jer 37:5-8; Ezek 29:6-7). There is the danger illustrated here of the “fondness” of past sin. It is interesting how the Lord often uses the objects of sinful affections to bring judgement upon his people and all mankind.

Israel will be under an illusion when the false Christ ratifies an alliance between her and the nations during Daniel’s 70th week. But the same man of sin will turn on her and send the remnant fleeing into the wilderness as the final “purge” of Israel takes place. Additionally it will be the very mark of the beast that humanity will seek after and desire that will lead to their bodies being corrupted with loathsome boils and sores (Rev 16:2) and lead to the ultimate destruction of their souls in hell (Rev 14:9-12; 20:4).

In Egyptian hieroglyphics, horses and donkeys were often used to depict lustful people. They were also used proverbially in scripture to speak to lust as well (Jer 2:24, 5:8; 13:27). God states that His mind has become disgusted with Judah as with Samaria.

23:22-24 *“ Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses. They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs.’”*

As is in the case with a harlot, there are no real lovers of true affections, rather there grows a true hatred and disdain within the minds of those who have been a part of the harlots activities. The very strength and culture

EZEKIEL

“Strengthened by God”

Session 17 - Ezekiel 23 & 24

of foreign people that enticed the two sisters (Israel) would be the instruments that God would use to destroy them.

23:25-27 *“I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath. They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire. They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. Thus I will make your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.”*

It was the common practice of the Egyptians and Chaldeans to mutilate the facial features of harlots so that no man would want to be with them again. Women would adorn their beauty with accents in the nose and ears. They wore beautiful clothing and jewelry, and these were also taken away from the harlot to expose her shame. This judgement of God on His people would destroy any and all former alliances that she sought after.

23:28-34 *“For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated. They will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries. These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols. You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand’. Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘You will drink your sister’s cup, which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; It contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You will drink it and drain it. Then you will gnaw its fragments and tear your breasts; for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord GOD.”*

The idiom of a cup filled with judgement occurs throughout the Bible (Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17-23; Jer 25:15-19; 51:7; Hab 2:16; Rev 17:3-4; 18:6). The ultimate cup that was ever given to drink was to Jesus Himself. As He prayed in Gethsemane with great drops of blood mingled with His sweat, He asked the Father three times for the cup to be passed from Him if possible, yet He did the Father’s will. He drank in for the redeemed the very wrath of God and from the time of His trial through His last breath on the cross, He became our sin and experienced the total alienation of His fellowship with the Father and the Spirit.

23:35 *“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.’”*

Notice again that their error is in that they have forgotten God. Having the knowledge of His Word and His character revealed in it, they none-the-less trusted in material things for their blessing. Rather than take God at His Word, they believed that their own prowess and wit could preserve them in the midst of this world. Jesus understood that His kingdom was not of this world and that His ultimate glory will be established in

the age to come; His kingdom.

23:36-42 *“Moreover, the LORD said to me, ‘Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food. Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths. For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house. Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came—for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments; and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it on which you had set My incense and My oil. The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads.’”*

Ezekiel again presents a summary of Israel’s sin. On the same day that they offered up children in sacrifice to Molech in the Valley of Gehenna, they would shamelessly and hypocritically enter into the temple of God as “worshippers”. They used every trick and scheme possible to entice unholy alliances and became obsessed with being like the nations around them.

23:43-49 *“Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, ‘Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus?’ But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women. But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands. For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror and plunder. The company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire. Thus I will make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done. Your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’”*

Stoning is the legal punishment for idolatry, both spiritual and physical. In the days of the tribulation great hailstones of 100lbs each will fall on the earthbound in judgement for worshipping the beast and his image.

THE PARABLE OF THE BOILING POT

24:1-2 *“And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, ‘Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.’”*

EZEKIEL

“Strengthened by God”

Session 17 - Ezekiel 23 & 24

Ezekiel is validated as one who is speaking directly for God by announcing the very day, ("this same day") of the beginning of the investment of the city by Nebuchadnezzar; "the ninth year," namely, of Jehoiachin's captivity, "the tenth day of the tenth month"; though he was three hundred miles away from Jerusalem among the captives at the Chebar (2Ki 25:1 Jer 39:1).

24:1-4 *“Speak a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Put on the pot, put it on and also pour water in it; Put in it the pieces, Every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with choice bones. Take the choicest of the flock, and also pile wood under the pot. Make it boil vigorously. Also seethe its bones in it.’”*

This was January 15, 588 BC; the very day that Babylon besieged Jerusalem which Ezekiel had been prophesying about all this time. This date is mentioned in 2Ki 25:1 and in Jer 39:1;52:4. Once again the Lord makes a reference to their self confident proverb (11:3) but like He did before uses it against them to show that Jerusalem will be the pot in which all of its inhabitants will be boiled without discrimination.

24:5-11 *“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the bloody city, to the pot in which there is rust and whose rust has not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece, without making a choice. For her blood is in her midst; she placed it on the bare rock; she did not pour it on the ground that it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance, I have put her blood on the bare rock, that it may not be covered.” ‘Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, “Woe to the bloody city! I also will make the pile great. Heap on the wood, kindle the fire, boil the flesh well mix in the spices, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty on its coals so that it may be hot and its bronze may glow and its filthiness may be melted in it, its rust consumed.”*

We are all too familiar with the imagery of the scum that rises to the surface of the boiling waters when making a stock for turkey gravy. The scum here is the sin of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. According to Leviticus 17:13 blood was to be covered by dust and any blood spilled that was not covered was to be avenged. She openly shed blood and hers shall be shed. Even the consumption of the contents is not enough; the caldron itself which is infected by the poisonous scum must be destroyed, that is, the city itself must be destroyed, not merely the inhabitants, just as the very house infected with leprosy was to be destroyed (Lev 14:34-45).

24:12-14 *“She has wearied Me with toil, yet her great rust has not gone from her; let her rust be in the fire! In your filthiness is lewdness. Because I would have cleansed you, yet you are not clean, you will not be cleansed from your filthiness again until I have spent My wrath on you. I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you,” declares the Lord GOD.”*

Despite the faithful, persistent warnings that the Lord has given to Judah, she has not relented in her sin and treachery. God’s wrath will eventually be spent and when it is after the tribulation, Israel will be cleansed as

the New Covenant becomes a reality for the surviving remnant of Israel.

THE DEATH OF EZEKIEL’S WIFE AND THE PROHIBITION OF PUBLIC MOURNING

24:15-18 *“And the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come. “Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache and do not eat the bread of men.” So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.”*

In the type, Ezekiel so affectionately calls his wife “the desire of his eyes” and she is to be the metaphor of the temple at the center of Jerusalem. He makes no other record of his personal history and displays his loyalty to the Lord and the carrying out of his calling as prophet. She would have represented the only real physical comfort and peace for him in the midst of all of the mockers and scoffers at his message. Yet even as she fell dead suddenly Ezekiel records that he did exactly as God had commanded and withheld all public expression of grief.

With the total destruction of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, there would be no one there to mourn. Additionally they would be in no position to mourn when the Lord had warned them for so long. They are without excuse. The suddenness of the death of Ezekiel’s wife depicts the suddenness of the destruction of Jerusalem.

24:19-24 *“The people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?” Then I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘speak to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword. You will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache and you will not eat the bread of men. Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another. Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’””*

The Lord will profane His sanctuary with the sword of the Chaldeans the way that His people have profaned it with their sin. Just as Ezekiel’s heart was surely crushed when he lost his wife, those in exile and any survivors would be crushed at the news of the fall of national Israel’s identity; Jerusalem and the temple. It would be laid in the dust as Ezekiel’s wife. The Jews in captivity would also not be able to publicly lament the way that they normally would, rather they would face silent mourning that would cause them to recognize the cause of the sorrow; their sin.

24:25-27 *‘As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes and their heart’s delight, their sons and their daughters, that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears? On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.’”*

"The day" referred to in these verses is the day of the overthrow of the temple, when the fugitive "escapes." But "that day," in Eze 24:27, is the day on which the fugitive brings the sad news to Ezekiel, at the Chebar. In the interval the prophet suspended his prophecies as to the Jews, as was foretold. Afterwards his mouth was "opened," and no more "dumb" (Eze 3:26, 27; compare Eze 24:27 33:21, 22).