

Review

Back in chapter sixteen, God had painted a picture for the Jews. He said Jerusalem had been like a child abandoned who God had rescued and cared for. Later, when she became a woman, she was poor and unclothed. But once again, God had loved her and provided for her. Because of the great gifts God had given to her, she became proud instead of loving. She played the harlot with the other nations, and God finally had to judge her.

Now, as we pick up our study of Ezekiel in chapter 23, we see God once again illustrating the Jews' unfaithfulness by using an illustration...

23:1-4 Oholah And Oholibah

The illustration God used was that of two sisters, O-hol-AW and O-hol-ee-BAW, who played the harlot in Egypt. God explains that O-hol-AW is Samaria and that O-hol-ee-BAW is Jerusalem.

Remember that Samaria was the capitol of the northern kingdom of Israel, while Jerusalem was the capitol of the southern kingdom of Judah.

God's choice of names for the women in the story is interesting. You see, "O-hol-AW" in Hebrew means "her own tent." "O-hol-ee-BAW" means "my tent is in her." If you recall, God had established His temple in Jerusalem - His tent was in her. But when Jeroboam rebelled and the Jewish civil war took place, the nation was split. Jeroboam - knowing that the Jews would eventually return to following the house of David (1Kings 12:26) if they kept traveling to Jerusalem three times a year - established a new place of worship. He made golden calves and told the people,

1Kings 12:28 ...“It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

Thus, the name for "O-hol-ee-BAW," "her own tent."

And of course, they have the same mother, since they both came out of one nation's civil war.

They Played The Harlot

In the story, these women were described as being like two teenage girls with no respect for their virginity. They engaged in immorality, and their innocence was lost. Their harlotry is described as being committed in Egypt.

While chapter 16's description of Jerusalem as an adulterous woman was similar, God is actually emphasizing two different forms of harlotry. The earlier parable illustrated the Jews' spiritual harlotry - their worship of false gods. The harlotry God is describing now is political. It speaks of Jerusalem and Samaria's political alliances with Egypt.

Harlotry In Egypt In Their Youth

Notice that...

Ezek. 23:3 ...they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth...

Although the civil war happened during the days of Solomon's son, Israel's alliances with Egypt began with King Solomon himself. Remember...

1Kings 3:1 ...Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem.

About five hundred years after Israel had come out of slavery in Egypt (1Kings 6:1), here was Solomon aligning the Jewish people with the Egyptians. Of course, Egypt had no integrity in their dealings. The Egyptians frequently harbored Solomon's enemies like Hadad (1Kings 11:19) and Jeroboam (1Kings 11:40).

Like a teen girl with loose morals who is date-raped, Israel's alliance with Egypt only harmed her.

23:5-10 Oholah's Harlotry

God had warned the Jews not to form alliances with the nations around them, but they paid no attention. God points out the sins of the

northern kingdom through the story of O-hol-AW, as she lusted after the Assyrians.

It was during the reign of King Menahem of Israel that Israel played the harlot with the Assyrians. The Assyrian Empire was gaining strength in the land.

2Kings 15:19-20 Pul, king of Assyria, came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver so that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his rule. Then Menahem exacted the money from Israel, even from all the mighty men of wealth, from each man fifty shekels of silver to pay the king of Assyria...

God makes the point that He gave O-hol-AW into the hands of her lovers who slew her with the sword. And in fact, ultimately, the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom.

2Kings 17:5-6 Then the king of Assyria invaded the whole land and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria...

23:11 Oholibah Saw This

The story goes on to describe O-hol-ee-BAW, the sister, seeing this, but becoming even more corrupt. Certainly, the southern kingdom of Judah saw the northern kingdom evaporate into nothing. But still they did not repent of doing the same things that the northern kingdom had done to bring judgment upon themselves. They continued, not only in their idolatry, but in the political alliances that had proved so disastrous to the northern kingdom.

23:12-13 Oholibah's Harlotries With The Assyrians

Judah also tried to become allies of the Assyrian Empire. In 2Kings 16, we read the story of Judah's attempt to partner together with Assyria.

King Ahaz of Judah was facing attack from an alliance of Israel and

Aram. Fearing defeat, he contacted the Assyrian king, Tig-LATH Pil-EH-ser.

2Kings 16:7-8 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria.

And so not only did Ahaz enter into this ungodly alliance, but he paid for it with money that came from the house of the Lord!

Then, during a diplomatic visit to Damascus, he saw an Assyrian temple which impressed him. When he got back, he demanded that the house of the Lord be remodeled. The altar of sacrifice was moved out of the way (2Ki 16:14) and a copy of the Assyrian altar was built (2Ki 16:10). Many of the holy things in the temple were either cut up or removed (2Ki 16:17-18) to imitate the Assyrians' form of worship. Truly, they had both taken the same way (Ezek. 23:13).

23:14-21 Oholibah's Harlotries With The Babylonians

After the Assyrian Empire devastated the northern kingdom, you'd think that Judah would have cried out to God, rather than to another nation. But they didn't. She just "increased her harlotries."

Next on their list of preferred allies was Babylon, an empire which was rapidly growing in power and influence. The Babylonians would soon replace the Assyrians as the dominant one on the world scene.

Judah saw how powerful Babylon was, and how desirable an ally they would be, and was smitten. This process began when King Hezekiah of Judah was sick, and received a letter of concern from Babylon's king. He was so grateful, that he gave the letter's messengers a tour.

2Kings 20:13 Hezekiah listened to them, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and the house of his armor and

all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.

Needless to say, the messengers went back to the king of Babylon and said, "We need to invade this land and steal all that treasure."

23:22-35 Judgment Will Come

In God's story, O-hol-ee-BAW's lovers were going to be turned against her on every side. And that is what God was promising to do to Judah. The people groups from all over the Babylonian Empire, the Chaldeans, Pek-ODE, SHO-ah, and KO-ah would attack Judah. Their military force would be far superior, and God would stand against Judah. Their judgment would be certain and severe. They would face the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians as the northern kingdom did at the hands of the Assyrians.

God's word was,

Ezek. 23:35 "...Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries."

23:36-45 Abominations

The Lord is also quick to point out that this was not merely a military alliance issue. It also had to do with their adoption of the foreign gods. Their idolatry and profane behavior in defiance of His law were also reasons given for them being judged.

23:46-49 Bear The Penalty

Once again the Jews are reminded, "You brought this on yourselves." God is not being unjust. He has been more than kind and merciful. He has been long-suffering for many generations, but now it is time to bring judgment upon them.

As we pick up our study next time, we will see that this warning was the final warning. The siege of Jerusalem by Babylon was about to begin.