

EZEKIEL

Chapter 23

Oholah and Oholibah

The word of the LORD came to me: 2 “Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. 3 They played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosoms handled. 4 Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem. 5 “Oholah played the whore while she was mine, and she lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors 6 clothed in purple, governors and commanders, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. 7 She bestowed her whoring upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them, and she defiled herself with all the idols of everyone after whom she lusted. 8 She did not give up her whoring that she had begun in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her and handled her virgin bosom and poured out their whoring lust upon her. 9 Therefore I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hands of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted. 10 These uncovered her nakedness; they seized her sons and her daughters; and as for her, they killed her with the sword; and she became a byword among women, when judgment had been executed on her. 11 “Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her lust and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. 12 She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and commanders, warriors clothed in full armor, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men. 13 And I saw that she was defiled; they both took the same way. 14 But she carried her whoring further. She saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion, 15 wearing belts on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them having the appearance of officers, a likeness of Babylonians whose native land was Chaldea. 16 When she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. 17 And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoring lust. And after she was defiled by them, she turned from them in disgust. 18 When she carried on her whoring so openly and flaunted her nakedness, I turned in disgust from her, as I had turned in disgust from her sister. 19 Yet she increased her whoring, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt 20 and lusted after her lovers there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose issue was like that of horses. 21 Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts.” 22 Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will stir up against you your lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them against you from every side: 23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, governors and commanders all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses. 24 And they shall come against you from the north with chariots and wagons and a host of peoples. They shall set themselves against you on every side with buckler, shield, and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. 25 And I will direct my jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in fury. They shall cut off your nose and your ears, and your survivors shall fall by the sword. They shall seize your sons and your daughters, and your survivors shall be devoured by fire. 26 They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels. 27 Thus I will put an end to your lewdness and your whoring begun in the land of Egypt, so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore. 28 “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust, 29 and they shall deal with you in hatred and take away all the fruit of your labor and leave you naked and bare, and the

nakedness of your whoring shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your whoring 30 have brought this upon you, because you played the whore with the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. 31 You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. 32 Thus says the Lord GOD: “You shall drink your sister’s cup that is deep and large; you shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much; 33 you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow. A cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria; 34 you shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its shards, and tear your breasts; for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. 35 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have forgotten me and cast me behind your back, you yourself must bear the consequences of your lewdness and whoring.” 36 The LORD said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Declare to them their abominations. 37 For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. With their idols they have committed adultery, and they have even offered up to them for food the children whom they had borne to me. 38 Moreover, this they have done to me: they have defiled my sanctuary on the same day and profaned my Sabbaths. 39 For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it. And behold, this is what they did in my house. 40 They even sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and behold, they came. For them you bathed yourself, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments. 41 You sat on a stately couch, with a table spread before it on which you had placed my incense and my oil. 42 The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and with men of the common sort, drunkards were brought from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on the hands of the women, and beautiful crowns on their heads. 43 “Then I said of her who was worn out by adultery, ‘Now they will continue to use her for a whore, even her!’ 44 For they have gone in to her, as men go in to a prostitute. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, lewd women! 45 But righteous men shall pass judgment on them with the sentence of adulteresses, and with the sentence of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.” 46 For thus says the Lord GOD: “Bring up a vast host against them, and make them an object of terror and a plunder. 47 And the host shall stone them and cut them down with their swords. They shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses. 48 Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done. 49 And they shall return your lewdness upon you, and you shall bear the penalty for your sinful idolatry, and you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.”

Ch 23 Ezekiel tried to break through the hard resistance to his preaching of repentance by confronting the rebellious house with an allegorical satire as shocking to their self-righteous sensibilities as the one recorded in ch 16. (TLSB)

That chapter 23 is a sort of sequel to chapter 16 is obvious. In both, sexual imagery is pressed almost to the limit—in about the same hyperbolic way Ezekiel treats other topics. It is probably coincidental that chapter 16 is the longest chapter in the book and chapter 23 is the second longest. But, it must be stressed, in both chapters the aim is not to titillate the audience with pornography, but to shock it, to dramatize how such behavior departed from Yahweh’s will as sharply as the people’s attitude toward him did in other respects. (CC)

23:2 After Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divided into two independent states. The capital of the seceding northern tribes came to be Samaria, while Jerusalem remained the seat of government in the south. The blood relationship of the two separate kingdoms is expressed in the satire by calling them daughters of one mother. (TLSB)

23:4 *Oholah ... Oholibah.* Common element in the names is Hbr *'ohel*, “tent.” Its figurative significance derives from its use to designate Israel’s place of worship before the temple was built, called “the tent of meeting” (Ex 29:42; 33:7; Nu 11:24). (CSB)

Oholah. Means “her tent.” (CSB)

Lit, “her tent,” because the northern tribes established sanctuaries of their own in opposition to the only legitimate worship center. (TLSB)

elder. Samaria is called the elder of the sisters because it was destroyed more than 100 years before Ezekiel spoke this satire. (TLSB)

Oholibah. Means “My tent is in her.” Cf. the two sisters of Jer 3:6–12. “Tent” could stand for Canaanite high places, for the Lord’s tabernacle (except that Ezekiel never uses the word elsewhere for the legitimate shrine) or for Israel’s tent-dwelling origin. (CSB)

Lit, “My tent is in her,” because God’s approved place of meeting with His people remained in Jerusalem. (TLSB)

became Mine. Figurative way of saying that the covenant made by God with the entire nation was like the marriage vow of a bride and groom, which is to be kept inviolate. (TLSB)

23:5 *the whore*. Here represents political alliances with pagan powers—not idolatry as in ch. 16. The graphic language of the chapter underscores God’s and Ezekiel’s disgust with Israel for playing the worldly game of international politics rather than relying on the Lord for her security—as clear a case of religious prostitution as idolatry. (CSB)

Assyrians. See 2Ki 15:19. (CSB)

The Northern Kingdom made overtures of alliance to the Assyrians. These diplomatic maneuvers deserve to be called harlotries. They violated the relationship of total trust and unreserved dependence that the people pledged to maintain exclusively with God. The felony was compounded by the fact that treaties with heathen nations required adopting the worship of their idols. (See note, 16:26–29; cf Hos 5:13; 7:11; 12:1.) (TLSB)

23:6 *clothed in purple*. Afforded by the wealthy. (TLSB)

23:8 *in Egypt*. Cf. 20:5–8. Israel’s entire history was marked by unfaithfulness. For her attachment to Egypt see Ex 17:3; Nu 11:5, 18, 20; 14:2–4; 21:5. (CSB)

In his very brief summary (23:5–10), Ezekiel has completely passed over most of Israel’s history from the sojourn in Egypt (nineteenth–fifteenth centuries B.C.) to the Assyrian period (ninth–seventh centuries B.C.) shortly before his own day. But here he reminds his audience that his historical omission does not imply any hiatus in Oholah’s unrestrained adulteries. (CC)

23:10 *judgment*. Oholah came to a tragic end when the very lovers with whom she defiled herself turned against her and slew her. (TLSB)

23:11–21 Instead of learning from the fate of her elder sister, Oholibah was even more corrupt. (TLSB)

23:14 *men portrayed on a wall*. Arousal through pictures was even more perverted. (CSB)

Engraved in low-relief carvings. See note, 8:10. *Chaldeans*. Ruling house of the Babylonians. (TLSB)

23:15 *belts*. Cf. Isa 5:27 for similar Assyrian military equipment. (CSB)

23:17 *the bed of love*. Euphemism for intercourse. (TLSB)

she turned from them in disgust. Desire turned to revulsion. (TLSB)

23:19–21 Driven by vulgar, uninhibited lust, Oholibah increased her whoring with the Egyptians to exceed what she did in the days of her youth. (TLSB)

23:20 *paramours*. Hbr term is likely borrowed from another language and is usually translated “concubines,” but cannot refer to women here, as the rest of the verse makes clear. Some deviant Egyptian behavior is involved. (TLSB)

23:21 *you*. Oholibah is directly addressed, as follows in vv 22–35. (TLSB)

23:22–35 Fourfold legal sentencing introduced by “thus says the Lord GOD.” (1) Her lovers will become her executioners (vv 22–27). (2) They will leave her denuded of resources, the fruit of her labor (vv 28–31). (3) The rapacious men will act at God’s judgment (vv 32–34). (4) Convicted of lewdness and whoring, she will bear the consequences of her deeds (v 35). (TLSB)

23:22 *I will stir up against you*. Introduces a great reversal of Oholibah’s fortunes. As prostitutes commonly experience, she will become an object of abuse and violence rather than affection. (TLSB)

23:23 *Babylonians ... Chaldeans*. Often identified with one another, here distinguished (as in v. 15), probably because the Chaldeans were relative newcomers. (CSB)

Babylonian army will be composed in part of Aramean tribes located east of the Tigris River. Their names appear on Assyrian records. (TLSB)

Pekod. Aramaic people located east of Babylon. (CSB)

Shoa and Koa. Babylonian allies of uncertain origin and location. (CSB)

23:24 *from the north*. Hbr word occurring only here is so translated. (TLSB)

their judgments. Which were cruel and gruesome. (CSB)

They act on God’s behalf. (TLSB)

23:25 *cut off your nose and your ears*. Abuses the Assyrians used to humiliate some prisoners. (TLSB)

23:31 *cup*. Filled with the anger of the Lord. To drink it was to die. For a development of the imagery cf. Ps 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15–29; 49:12; La 4:21; Ob 16; Hab 2:16; Mt 20:22; 26:39; Rev 14:10. (CSB)

23:34 Act of insane delirium produced by the content of the cup. (TLSB)

23:36–49 The abominable deeds and punishment of destroyed Samaria and the adultery and still-impending judgment of Jerusalem merge into a single picture of guilt followed by punishment. In the perspective of God’s unchanging justice, what will happen has already happened, and what has happened must happen again. The wages of sin never go unpaid.

23:38–39 *on the same day*. Adding insult to injury, the idolaters who sacrificed their children have the defiant effrontery to enter the temple on a Sabbath with the blood of the ghastly crime still on their hands. (TLSB)

23:40 *They even sent for men*. Possibly a reference to the Jerusalem summit meeting in Zedekiah's time (Jer 27). *you*. Jerusalem. (CSB)

painted your eyes. By daubing them with kohl, a soot-like compound, to draw attention to the eyes. (CSB)

In order to enhance their beauty. (TLSB)

23:41 *couch, with a table spread before it*. Ready for a banquet (see Isa 21:5; also Pr 9:2). (CSB)

Designed for reclining at meals. (TLSB)

23:42 *common drunkards*. Some features of the revelry and debauchery cannot be translated with certainty. The sisters embrace the dregs of society. (TLSB)

bracelets ... beautiful crowns. Cheap gifts to entice them. (TLSB)

23:43 *adultery*. She was a woman of habitual, unrestrained lewdness. She did not yield to temptation in a weak moment, but permitted men to commit adultery with her as readily as a professional harlot plies her trade. (TLSB)

23:45 *righteous men*. Though the Babylonians and Assyrians were no better than their victims, they executed righteous judgment because they carried out the sentence that God's Holy Law demands. (TLSB)

23:47 *stone them and cut them down*. Cf Lv 20:10; Dt 21:21. (TLSB)

23:48 *all women may take warning*. A warning to other nations. (TLSB)

Ch 23 Both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping foreign gods and forming alliances with foreign governments. God's use of sexually explicit language calls attention to His wrath against spiritual adultery. Modern lewdness in films, songs, and on the Internet similarly mislead people today by alienating them from God, who forbids such things. It also alienates people from their families, who cannot endure such unfaithfulness. Today, repent of lusts and from spiritual adulteries that mix true devotion with falsehood. No matter how deep the stain of your sins, trust that the Lord Jesus can cleanse you with His precious blood and renew positive relationships with heaven and at home. • Father, forgive us for foolishly bowing to our own lusts and sinful imaginations. Renew us in the purity of Holy Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)