

# EZEKIEL

## *Cry Me a River*

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,  
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion  
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 23:1-49

Topic

To expose the sin of Samaria & Jerusalem, the LORD tells a story of two unfaithful sisters, Oholah & Oholibah.

Title

***“Oho, Oho, A Harlot’s Life For Me”***

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**John Bunyan left nothing to guess work in his classic book, whose full title is, *The Pilgrim’s Progress From This World to That Which Is to Come.***

- Character’s names include Christian & Christiana, Obstinate, Evangelist, Hypocrisy & Charity.
- The pilgrimage follows the main character, Christian, traveling from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, which is home to the Tree of Life and has streets paved with gold.

The Lord makes it just as obvious that our text is an allegory. He introduces two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, and immediately reveals, “Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah” (v4).

He describes them as unfaithful wives:

- The LORD says of Oholah, “She has never given up her harlotry *brought* from Egypt...” (v8).

- The LORD says of Oholibah, "Thus I will make you cease your lewdness and your harlotry *Brought* from the land of Egypt, So that you will not lift your eyes to them, Nor remember Egypt anymore."

**Several NT passages assume that idolatry will be a peril in our relationship with Jesus.**

- First John 5:21 "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
- First Corinthians 10:14 "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry."
- Colossians 3:5 "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

**Idolatry isn't just breaking God's law. It breaks His heart in ways we cannot fathom.**

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 God's Love For You Is Intimate,** and **#2 God's Love For You Is Incessant.**

**#1 God's Love For You Is Intimate (v1-10)**

You've seen those parental warnings on-screen? For this chapter, it would be NC-17 for Vulgar Language. Profanity is common - even in church - but it's unnecessary. Rather than dismissing all of those under 18yrs, I've paraphrased the NKJV eliminating explicit wording.

There's almost nothing here that is hard to understand. It won't require a great deal of commentary. The story is for impact.

The word of the Lord came again to me, saying, "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They acted unfaithfully in their youth; there, their hearts were led astray, and they gave their devotion to others. Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names: Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

The root word from which their names derive is *ohel*, meaning "tent" or "tabernacle."

- Oholah means *her own Tabernacle*.
- Oholibah means *My Tabernacle is in her*.

After King Solomon's death, Israel split into two kingdoms. The 10 northern tribes were called Israel, and the 2 southern tribes were called Judah. God had designated Jerusalem's Temple as the only proper place of worship. His Tabernacle was in Jerusalem. The northern tribes established a man-made false system of worship in Samaria - her own Tabernacle.

Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she gave her heart to her lovers, the Assyrians, clothed in blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. Thus she pursued the Assyrians, all of them attractive men, and she defiled herself with all their idols. She did not give up her past unfaithfulness, for when she was in Egypt, they had influenced her, and she had followed after them. Therefore, I delivered her into the hands of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians for whom she had longed. They uncovered her sins, took her children and daughters away, and killed her with the sword. She became an example to other women, for they executed judgment on her."

I've been captivated by how Ezekiel, and the Bible, portray God's emotions. Many scholars argue that God cannot have feelings in a meaningful sense because that would imply a dependence on us and compromise His sovereignty.

In verse twenty-five the LORD will say, "I will set My jealousy against you." Jealousy is an *extremely* strong emotion. Nevertheless the Bible often attributes it to the Lord. Of course it is to be distinguished from human jealousy, which is rooted in insecurity or selfishness. God's jealousy is holy - and I would argue that it is, therefore, far more intense than ours.

In the OT God describes Himself being affected by intense sorrow. Hosea 11:8, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? ... My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender."

Jesus famously wept. In Hebrews 4:15 Jesus, as fully God and fully man, sympathizes with human weakness.

Bottom line: God has genuine emotions... But without it affecting His sovereignty.

The whole point of treating Samaria and Jerusalem as unfaithful wives is to elicit strong emotion from the Jews in Jerusalem.

Marital unfaithfulness hurts **so** bad. Proverbs says, "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be

seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent" (6:27-29).

Spiritual infidelity is hurtful & painful for the LORD. Regardless of how we understand God's emotions, He chose this illustration to show us the deep pain He experiences when we turn away from Him for *something* or *someone* else.

When I am tempted to physical or spiritual infidelity, I ought to think about how much it hurts My Father in Heaven, my Savior seated at His right hand, and God the Holy Spirit who indwells me.

## **#2 God's Love For You Is Incessant<sup>1</sup> (v11-49)**

God turns our attention to Jerusalem (Oholibah).

"Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became even more corrupt in her unfaithfulness, behaving worse than her sister. She pursued the Assyrians - leaders, rulers, and well-dressed warriors - all of them desirable young men riding on horses. I saw that she too was defiled, and both sisters followed the same path. But she increased her unfaithfulness even more. She saw men portrayed on the wall, images of Babylonians drawn in bright colors, Wearing belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads, all looking like officers, images of the Babylonians from Chaldea. As soon as she saw them, she longed for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her and led her into unfaithfulness, and she became defiled by them. Yet after this, she became disgusted with them. When she openly displayed her unfaithfulness and exposed her heart, I turned away from her, just as I had turned away from her sister. Yet she increased her wrongdoing, longing for the days of her youth when she followed after those in Egypt. She was drawn to them, just as she had been before, and pursued them again. So you repeated the ways of your youth, when you acted unfaithfully with the Egyptians."

Egypt is mentioned four times in this chapter: "They committed harlotry in Egypt... She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt... Thus I will make you cease your lewdness and your harlotry *Brought* from the land of Egypt, So that you will not lift your eyes to them, Nor remember Egypt anymore."

The Exodus was in 1446BC. Ezekiel is 586BC. *Nine hundred years after being delivered, the Jews continued to worship the gods of Egypt.*

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<sup>1</sup> unremitting, unrelenting, eternal, constant, unceasing

**“You can take the Hebrew out of Egypt, but it proved so hard to take Egypt out of the Hebrew;” Now replace “Hebrew” with “Christian.”**

Christians bring their idols with them, too. A ‘for instance’ in the Bible would be the episode in the city of Ephesus where we read, “Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver” (Acts 19:19).

Letting go of the “idols” we carried into our relationship with the Lord can be a lifelong process.

“Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord God: ‘I will stir up your lovers against you - those whom you have turned away from - and I will bring them against you from every side: The Babylonians, all the Chaldeans, Pekod, Shoa, and Koa; all the Assyrians with them, desirable young men, leaders and rulers, officers and warriors, all riding on horses.

They shall come against you with weapons, chariots, and an army of people. They will surround you with shields, helmets, and armor, and I will put judgment before them, and they shall judge you according to their ways.

“Why, God?” questions need to be put into the context of people rejecting God & being given what they want.

I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury. They shall remove what you value, and take away what is precious to you. They shall strip you of your garments and take away your fine jewelry. Thus I will remove from you the sins of your youth, and you will no longer look to Egypt for help. For thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will deliver you into the hands of those you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned away. They will deal harshly with you, taking away what you labored for and leaving you exposed and empty. The shame of your unfaithfulness and wrongdoing will be revealed.

During the reigns of David & Solomon, the Israelites were a military world power. David had his “Mighty Men.” But Israel only existed and continues to exist because the LORD fought for them. Take God out of the equation and they were easily conquered & dispersed. Take no credit; point to Jesus, genuinely.

You have brought this upon yourself because you pursued the nations and defiled yourself with their idols. You have followed in your sister's ways, therefore I will put her punishment upon you.

The next time you are struggling with an OT text that seems to point to unfairness or capriciousness in God, remember the phrase, "You have brought this upon yourself." How much worse would suffering be if there were no God?

'Thus says the Lord God: "You shall drink your sister's cup, Deep and wide, You shall be filled with sorrow and scorn. You will be filled with ruin and devastation, The cup of your sister Samaria. You shall drink from it and drain it, Break its pieces, And tear at yourself in sorrow, For I have spoken,' says the Lord God.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, you shall bear the consequences of your unfaithfulness and wrongdoing.' "

The Lord also said to me: "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For they have been unfaithful, committing offenses against Me. They have even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to Me, to false gods. Moreover, they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths. On the very day they sacrificed their children to idols, they came into My sanctuary and defiled it. This is what they have done inside My house!

Furthermore, you sent messengers to distant lands, and when they arrived, you welcomed them. You bathed, adorned yourself with fine jewelry, and put on makeup. You sat on a splendid couch, with a prepared table before you, on which you placed My incense and oil. The noise of a carefree crowd was with her, including men from distant lands who adorned her hands and placed crowns on her head. Then I said concerning her, who had grown accustomed to such ways: 'Will they still follow after her?' But they went in to her, just as men go to a woman who has been unfaithful; so they pursued Oholah and Oholibah in their wickedness.

But righteous men will judge them for their unfaithfulness and for shedding blood, because they are guilty. For thus says the Lord God: 'Bring an army against them! Let them be terrorized and plundered. The assembly shall stone them and strike them down with swords; they shall slay their children and burn their houses. Thus I will remove wickedness from the land, so that all women may take warning and not commit such acts. You shall bear the consequences of your unfaithfulness, and you shall know that I am the Lord God.' "

The Babylonian captivity would last a total of 70yrs. Afterwards the Jews were free to return home. However, they were not autonomous for another 2500yrs when on May 14<sup>th</sup> 1948 they became a nation again, in one day.

It followed on the heels of the Holocaust. On October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2023, they suffered the worst death toll since the Holocaust.

A bleak future looms: the Antichrist, or "man of sin," will appear as a savior, negotiating a seven-year treaty. It marks Day One of the 7yr Great Tribulation. Midway through this period, he will desecrate the rebuilt Temple by entering the Holy of Holies, proclaiming himself as God and demanding worship.

Jesus warned those in Judea to flee from the antichrist's persecution, possibly seeking refuge in the fortified city of Petra. In their distress, they will call upon the Lord for salvation. At His second coming, they will look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn, leading the surviving remnant to repentance and salvation.

Take an aerial view of history, mix in some Dead Sea Scrolls, then the writings of a few early church fathers, and you'll have the Millennial Day Theory, aka, the Six-Ages-of-the-World. It links the six days of creation followed by a day of rest to six millennia of human history culminating in a millennium of rest. This interpretation suggests that each real, 24hr day of Creation symbolizes a thousand-year period of human history. The seventh day represents the Millennial Kingdom on Earth. I'm not all-in on that, but it is interesting because we are right now close to the end of the first 6000 years.

Even though nothing is impossible for God, and that there is nothing too hard for Him, the salvation of Israel and Gentile nations is no small task. It takes thousands of years to accomplish.

Be encouraged! Just as Israel is the apple of God's eye, the Church is the Lord's bride, His body, and His Temple on Earth. He began the work of saving us; He carries it forward; **He must complete it.**