



Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 23

Theme: Parable of Two Sisters

Michael Fronczak
Bible Study Resource Center
Beit-Lechem Ministries
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036
www.biblestudyresourcecenter.com

Copyright © 2010

Theme: Parable of two sisters

Missler Introduction: The Two Sisters In this chapter we are going to learn about two sisters. One is *Aholah*, and the other is *Aholibah*. Their names are almost the same, both are goddesses. While on the one hand they were real people, they were also types of allegories referring to the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The *Northern Kingdom* was sometimes labeled Samaria, sometimes Ephraim, sometimes Israel. Of the group of tribes in the north, one tribe would become an idiom for the bunch. In the *Southern Kingdom*, Judah tended to be the label, the House of Judah, the Southern Kingdom.

We are going to think of these two as the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom as we get into all of this. The Kingdom has been divided since tribal days as “Judah and Ephraim,” south and north (Judges 8:1; 12:1; 2 Samuel 19:43).

Aholah means “her tent.” Aholibah means “my tent is in her.” In that difference lies the insight. God never recognized the worship that Jeroboam set up in the north.

Samaria was regarded as the elder sister of Judah in that Samaria preceded Judah into apostasy and defection, and also preceded Judah into captivity. The Babylonian captivity started in 606 B.C. Jerusalem finally fell in the final sense in 586 B.C. The fall of Samaria to the Assyrians was in 722 B.C., more than a hundred years prior. Samaria was more corrupt, so it fell earlier. Judah becomes ultimately more corrupt, but at least among the kings of Judah there were a couple of good guys.¹

Constable The parable of the two sisters:

This chapter is the final climactic one in Ezekiel's collection of messages that condemn Israel's defective leadership (chs. 20—23).

Both chapters 16 and 23 personify Israel as a prostitute, but there are significant differences in these chapters. In chapter 16 *Canaan* is the mother of Israel who corrupted her daughter by teaching her *spiritual* adultery, namely, idolatry or trust in other *gods*. In chapter 23 *Israel* herself is responsible for pursuing mainly *political* adultery, trust in other *nations*, through alliances with foreign powers. In chapter 16 the *beginnings* of Israel's unfaithful career receive most attention whereas in chapter 23 the *whole* of Israel's unfaithful career is in view. Chapter 16 deals with *Judah* alone, but chapter 23 focuses on both *Israel and Judah* with emphasis on Judah. Many students of this chapter have noted its similarities to Jeremiah 3:6-11, and some consider it an exposition of that text.

There the emphasis was on idolatries as breaking the marriage relation and the sacred covenant with God, here it is on the nation's worldly spirit and worldly alliances for safety and national security.

Despite the distasteful theme and the indelicate language, the reader of these verses must appreciate that this is the language of unspeakable disgust and must try to recognize Ezekiel's passion for God's honour and his fury at the adulterous conduct of His covenant people. The feeling of nausea which a chapter like this arouses must be blamed not on the writer of the chapter nor even on its contents, but on the conduct which had to be described in such revolting terms.

This chapter contains the most graphic language in the Bible in reference to sexual imagery. For that reason it requires extreme care in teaching and preaching.²

¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on the Book of Ezekiel, khouse.org

² Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel, 2010 Edition

Wycliffe: Chapter 23 contains an allegorical portrayal of the history of Samaria and Jerusalem as two sisters unfaithful to their divine spouse. In the allegory of chapter 16, Israel's religious unfaithfulness because of the seductions of Canaanite worship is likened to adultery. The present chapter treats of Israel's political alliances with heathen nations, involving distrust in the power of the Lord, under the figure of harlotry. In a poem exhibiting much repulsive detail (vv. 1-35), the prophet describes (1) the infidelities of Oholah (Samaria) and her punishment (vv. 1-10); (2) the infidelities of Oholibah (Jerusalem; vv. 11-21) and her punishment (vv. 22-35). An appended address (vv. 36-49) pictures the two sisters sinning and receiving judgment contemporaneously. The kingdom of the Lord must be faithful to him rather than rely on pagan alliances. "Already the conception was taking possession of the prophetic mind that the kingdom of God was not a state but what we now call a church" (A. B. Davidson, *Cambridge Bible*, p. 165).³

Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC) The parable of the two adulterous sisters

Ezekiel presented another parable to illustrate Judah's unfaithfulness and the certainty of her punishment. Chapter 23 seems to be a restatement of the parable in chapter 16 since both chapters deal with Judah's unfaithfulness to God. However, in chapter 16 Ezekiel focused on Judah's idolatry, whereas in chapter 23 he stressed Judah's illicit foreign alliances in addition to her idolatry. In chapter 16 her trust was in other gods; in chapter 23 it was in other nations.⁴

McGee: Once again, in chapter 23, Ezekiel goes way out on a limb, he goes way out into left field, and he tells the people another strange parable. It is the parable of two sisters: one was named Aholah, and the other was Aholibah. I think that when he began to give this parable, the people actually smiled and said, "Where in the world is this fellow going with a story like that?"⁵

Revelation, Word—Using the analogy of prostitution as lack of fidelity to God, the prophet declared the story of two nations—Judah and Israel. Both nations left God for other gods and thus defaced their own identity. They had to face the consequences of their actions. International alliances cannot replace faithfulness to God's covenant.

History, Judgment—See 16:1-63, note; 20:1-44, note; 1 Ki 20:13, note; Jer 1:14-19, note. God described Israel's history as that of two prostitutes making alliances with the most available suitors. God sent their illicit lovers to punish them. A history of calling oneself God's people does not make a community God's people assured of His blessings. Rather a people's historical actions of faith or faithlessness show their true identity and bring God's actions on them.

Two Sisters. The allegory of the unfaithful sisters parallels ch. 16 (esp. 16:44–63) in employing this extended metaphor to portray the nature of God's relationship to Judah (and here, Israel) and its inevitable outcome in judgment (for common features, see the

³ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:1). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 22:30–31). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 22:31). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

notes on ch. 16). Whereas ch. 16 focused primarily on religious fidelity and worship, with politics in the background, here those elements are reversed as political issues come to the fore. Also, ch. 16 is overtly framed on the basis of a marriage covenant, which here is implied rather than stated. Once again, Jeremiah's preaching provides background (cf. Jer. 3:6–10). The two sisters are again cities: Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem (Ezek. 23:4). Jerusalem's destruction is depicted as yet more just and certain in light of the judgment that befell her sister. The oracle falls into two main parts: vv. 1–35 tell the story and its outcome, with a condensed version found in vv. 36–49, which brings elements of social justice into the scenario.

Ezekiel 23:1

The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying,

Ezekiel didn't make this story up—God gave him this message.

Constable 1-3: The Lord gave Ezekiel a story about two sisters who had one mother (cf. Jer. 3:7). These young girls became prostitutes in Egypt and allowed men to fondle their breasts. That is, they allowed the Egyptians to become intimate with them even though they were to be faithful to the Lord alone (cf. 16:26; 20:7-8; Num. 25:3-9; Josh. 24:14; 2 Kings 21:15; Hos. 1:2). One evidence of the idolatry that the Israelites had adopted from the Egyptians came to the surface in the Golden Calf incident in the wilderness (Exod. 32). Joshua later warned the Israelites about the dangers of idolatry, which had persisted since they had departed from Egypt (Josh. 24:14).

Israel and Judah became separate entities after the division of the kingdom following Solomon's reign, though relations between the northern and southern tribes had become increasingly unfriendly long before that (cf. Judg. 8:1; 12:1; 2 Sam. 19:43). However, God projected their identities back to the time when they were still within their mother, ancient Israel, in Egypt. The common origin of these sisters accounts in part for their similar behavior. Their father, unstated, was Yahweh.

LAN: Ezekiel continued his discussion of the reasons for God's judgment by telling a further allegory. He compared the northern and southern kingdoms to two sisters who became prostitutes. The proud citizens of Jerusalem had long scorned their sister city of Samaria, thinking that they of Jerusalem were superior. But God called both of these cities prostitutes—a shock to the people of Jerusalem who thought that they were righteous. Just as the imagery of this message was shocking and distasteful to the people, so our sins are repugnant to God.

BKC 1-3. Two sisters shared the same moral degradation for they became prostitutes in Egypt, engaging in prostitution from their youth. Ezekiel's reference to Egypt would call to mind the origins of the nation Israel in Egypt (cf. 20:4-12). The two sisters were sexually promiscuous women.⁶

Old Testament Survey (OTS) 1-4: In a lengthy allegory reminiscent of chapter 16 Ezekiel underscored the debasement of Israel. The prophet spoke of two sisters who played the harlot in their youth in the land of Egypt. "Their breasts were pressed," i.e., fondled, which points to sexual license. The sisters lost their virgin chastity even before leaving Egypt. The names of the sisters were Oholah and Oholibah. They both belonged to God, i.e., were married to him, and both bore him children. Lest there be any mistake about the meaning of this allegory, Ezekiel revealed the identity of the two sisters. Oholah was Samaria; Oholibah was Jerusalem.⁷

ESV 1–21: The sisters in this allegory are introduced (vv. 1–4), then the older sister's story, including her downfall, is told (vv. 5–10), which is another feature of this oracle that sets it apart from ch. 16. The younger sister's story follows, with greater development (23:11–21). The "partners" (Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt) represent various political alliances sought by the respective capital cities.

ESV 1–35: The Sisters and Politics. In the first part of the oracle (vv. 1–21), the behavior of the sisters is individually described, with the younger sister (Jerusalem) not only exceeding her older sister's unfaithfulness quantitatively by involving more partners, but qualitatively, in that she "saw" (v. 11) what happened to Samaria yet it only deepened her own depravity. Judgment inevitably follows (vv. 22–31).

Chuck Smith 1-3: Ezekiel goes on to speak of these two daughters. The one's name is Aholah; she is the older one. And her younger sister is Aholibah. Now Aholah means *her tent*. Aholibah means her tent is in her. And in the interpreting of this little parable of these two sisters who were prostitutes, the one sister, the older sister is Samaria, the Northern Kingdom which first went into idolatry. Turned against God when Jeroboam became king over the Northern Kingdom. He set up the calf in Bethel and in Dan and he said, "Now these are the gods that brought you out of Egypt. These are the gods that you worship." And he installed calf worship; later on Baal worship and Molech. And they introduced all of these gods of the Assyrians and the gods of the nations round about and they turned from the true and the living God and they began to worship idols. And thus, prostituted themselves, giving themselves unto idolatry in love and all for these false religions instead of giving themselves in their love for the Lord.

Now, as the result of Aholah and her lewd acts that is against God, God's judgment, He used the Syrians, the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom. And thus, Samaria was destroyed by Assyria. Now, when Samaria was destroyed, you would think that that would have been a lesson to Judah, the younger sister. "Her tent is in her," referring to the fact that the tabernacle, the place of worship was established in Jerusalem, in the

⁶ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:1–3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 23:1–49). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Southern Kingdom, Aholibah. But rather than learning from the idolatry of the north that perpetrated its fall, they started doing the very same things. In fact, king Ahaz went up to Assyria, and he makes mention of this here, how they went to Assyria. And her sister Aholibah saw this and she was more corrupt in her inordinate love that she in her whoredoms more than her sister. She doted upon the Assyrians.

So king Ahaz in Second Kings about chapter 16 or so tells about this. He went up to Assyria and there he saw the altar of the gods of the Assyrians. And he sent a design and all back to the priest in Jerusalem and ordered that an altar be built in Jerusalem like this altar of the false gods in Assyria so that when he returned to Jerusalem the priest had made this altar that was fashioned after the altar of the Assyrian gods. And Ahaz, of course, began to worship at this altar fashioned like unto the altar of the Assyrian gods. And he speaks about that here. But not only did they embrace the gods of the Assyrians, but they saw pictures of the Babylonians and this vermilion color and all that was endemic to the Babylonians and they desired.

Also, they sent for some of the Babylonians, "Come and share with us." And then they began to pollute themselves with the Babylonian religion. And so even became worse than her wicked sister Samaria in that she multiplied her whoredoms. And God said, "My mind was alienated from her like as My mind was alienated from her sister." They had turned away from their love for God from their serving God, and they began to worship at these false idols, false altars, and God said, naturally, "My mind was alienated from them." And so God then speaks of His jealousy that is against them and how the Babylonians will come and they will deal furiously with you and you'll fall by the sword and the residue that remains will be devoured by the fire.⁸

Ezekiel 23:2

Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother:

“One mother” was the whole nation of Israel.

Dake: [two women, the daughters of one mother] The two sisters are symbolic of Samaria and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 23:4). Both kingdoms of Israel were branches of the same stock (Ezekiel 23:2), and both committed whoredom with Egypt, indicating the idolatry of Israel while in that land (Ezekiel 23:3). They also committed whoredoms in their youth, indicating their idolatry before God made the Mosaic covenant with them and caused them to become His wife by covenant relationship (Ezekiel 23:3; Isaiah 54:5). While they belonged to God they were fruitful and bore children, sons and daughters (Ezekiel 23:4), but when they left Him they became unfruitful (Ezekiel 23:5-21).⁹

Clarke: Son of man, there were two women—All the Hebrews were derived from one source, Abraham and Sarah; and, till the schism under Rehoboam, formed but one people: but as these ten tribes and a half separated from Judah and Benjamin, they became two distinct people under different kings; called the kingdom of Judah, and the kingdom of Israel. They are called here, because of their consanguinity, two sisters. The

⁸ Chuck Smith, Notes on Ezekiel, Pastor and Founder of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

⁹ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

elder, Samaria, (for there was the seat of government for the kingdom of Israel), was called *aholah*, “a tent.” The younger, Judah, was called *aholibah*, “my tent is in her,” because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the seat of the government of the kingdom of Judah.¹⁰

Wycliffe: The two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, are introduced as sisters (cf. Jer 3:7; Ezk 16:46). 4. **Oholah**, *she who has a tent*, and **Oholibah**, *a tent is in her*, were “sisters alike in name and in guilt.” For similarly formed names, see Gen 35:18; Isa 62:4. Ewald points out that in the East brothers and sisters often have names very similar, as Hasan and Husein (little Hasan), sons of Ali, son-in-law of Mohammed. **They were mine.** The law forbade taking two sisters in marriage (Lev 18:18). The figure of marriage (cf. Jer 2:2; Hos 2:21, 22) is developed at length by Ezekiel.¹¹

Here two sister harlots, the daughters of one mother, are presented. They represent Samaria and Jerusalem (vv. 1-49). The parable suggests that they had a separate existence even during the Egyptian captivity and that idolatry was with them from the beginning (vv. 2-4). Samaria, after her whoredom with Assyria and Egypt, was given over to Assyria (vv. 5-10), and Jerusalem, refusing to learn from her sister’s fate, continued in her fornication (vv. 11-35). Both kingdoms were reminded of their harlotry and idolatry (vv. 36-44), and their coming punishment was announced (vv. 45-49).

Ezekiel 23:3

And they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity.

Tracing depravity back to Egypt corresponds to the historical recital of 20:5–8.

Ezekiel 23:4

And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah.

Note that the interpretation is right there in the text. Another thought that is thrown in here is that their appetites for idolatry started back in Egypt. The role of Egypt in that sense can be found in Genesis 45:10; 46:2-5; 47:1-6; Exodus 1:8 (the golden calf) and 24:14.

¹⁰ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on The Old Testament

¹¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:2–5). Chicago: Moody Press.

Constable: Oholah was the name of the older sister (lit. "her tent," probably a reference to her pagan tent shrines), and she represents Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of Israel. Oholibah was the younger sister (lit. "my tent is in her," probably a reference to the temple), and she represents Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah. One of Esau's wives was Oholibamah, meaning "tent of the high place" (Gen. 36:2). Oholah and Oholibah became the wife of the Lord and bore Him sons and daughters (i.e., inhabitants and surrounding villages). Evidently the Lord regarded Samaria as the older sister because the Northern Kingdom was the first to apostatize and to establish political alliances with foreign nations, particularly the Assyrians (Hos. 8:9).

While this allegory suggests that Yahweh committed bigamy and incest, He obviously did nothing in relation to Israel that was in any way improper. This is an excellent example of why we should not apply what the parable excludes; there is no reference to the sisters' father in the parable. The story makes certain comparisons, but if we try to apply all the implications of the story we end up with some incongruities.

Though the law prohibited a man from marrying sisters (Lev. 18:18), such marriages are not unknown in the Bible (cf. Jacob). The Lord here uses a contextually conditioned metaphor for illustrative purposes. The use of such an illustration does not mean that the Lord condoned bigamy.

[their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah] Their names:

1. Aholah, or Samaria, was the elder sister. The Hebrew means her own tent or tabernacle. So-named because the ten tribes under Jeroboam set up their own worship to rival that in Jerusalem and to be distinct from Jehovah's worship (1 Kings 12:25-33).
2. Aholibah, or Jerusalem, was the younger sister. The Hebrew means "My tent is in her." So-named because God's temple and true worship were in Judah and Jerusalem, not in the ten-tribe kingdom and Samaria.

LAN 4-6: Oholah (meaning, "her tent"), the northern kingdom of Israel, was lured away from God by the dashing Assyrians—their fashionable clothes and powerful positions. The people coveted youth, strength, power, wealth, and pleasure—the same qualities people think will bring happiness today. But the charming Assyrians drew Israel away from God.

BKC: After describing their character Ezekiel gave their names and identities. The older was named Oholah, and her sister was Oholibah. These names are based on the Hebrew word for "tent" (*'ōhel*). The first name means "her tent" and the second means "my tent is in her." Though one must be careful not to press a parable's details, probably these names have significance. The word "tent" implied a dwelling place or sanctuary. It was often used of God's sanctuary among Israel (cf. Ex. 29:4, 10-11, 30). The name Oholah ("her tent") could imply that the sanctuary associated with this sister was of her own making. By contrast, the name Oholibah ("my tent is in her") implies that God's sanctuary was in her midst.

Oholah represented Samaria, and Oholibah represented Jerusalem. These two "sisters," the capital cities of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, represented the people of those two kingdoms.

Though God’s covenant with these women was not explicitly stated, it was implied. They were Mine and gave birth to sons and daughters. The God of grace lavished His love on these undeserving sisters.¹²

McGee: “Samaria is Aholah”—that is, the northern kingdom of Israel is Aholah. “And Jerusalem Aholibah”—Jerusalem and Judah in the south is Aholibah.

The meaning of *Aholibah* (Jerusalem and Judah) is, “My tent is in her.” Who is saying this? God is saying, “My tent is in her.” In other words, in the southern kingdom, in Jerusalem, was the wonderful temple of Solomon. It was patterned after the tabernacle in the wilderness, and it was the place where the people approached God. That was wonderful.

Aholah means “her own tent.” The northern kingdom rebelled and separated from the southern part of Israel. Old King Jeroboam put up two golden calves, one in Beth-el and one in Samaria, and tried to keep his people from going south to worship in Jerusalem.

It was very easy for the prophets and the people of the southern kingdom to say that God will judge those golden calves in the north—and He surely did. However, He is going to judge the southern kingdom also, because they were going through the ritual of a dead religion; they thought they were right with God, but they actually were living in sin.

One of the things that is cutting the nerve of the spiritual life even of fundamental Christians and fundamental churches today is the lives of some church members. Of course you are saved by grace—that is the only way you and I can ever be saved. If God is not going to save by grace, then I couldn’t possibly be saved, but that does not mean that I am not to live for Him. That doesn’t mean that He will not judge you and me. That does not mean that our lives cannot kill the spiritual life in a church.

Ezekiel attracted a little attention with his story about these two girls, Aholah and Aholibah. This incident reminds me of the whimsical story which comes out of my southland about a poor tenant farmer who had a little donkey. He hitched the donkey up to a wagon in which one line was leather and the other was a cotton rope. One day he was going to give a friend a ride into town. The friend got into the wagon, but the farmer went and got a two-by-four out of the wagon, took it up to the front and hit his donkey on the head! The friend was thunderstruck; he couldn’t believe what he saw. “Why in the world did you do that?” he asked. “Well,” the farmer said, “I always have to get his attention before I start.” Ezekiel was dealing with a lot of hard-headed people, and he tells this parable to get their attention. Sometimes preachers are criticized for using sensational subjects for their messages, but I have great sympathy for them. How else are you going to get people to listen today? Ezekiel used some unusual methods.¹³

“Oholah” means “her tent” or “she who has a tent.” “Oholibah” means “my tent is in her.” Both names have a cultic or pagan background referring to pagan worship in Jerusalem. The distinctive element was the allusion to “her” tent in Samaria, but in Jerusalem it is “My” tent, i.e., YAHWEH’s tent. The privilege of Jerusalem was thereby magnified, as was also her responsibility.

¹² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 23:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In Hebrew, the names **Oholah**, meaning “Her Own Tabernacle,” and **Oholibah**, meaning “My Tabernacle Is in Her,” seem to refer to God’s sanctuaries in each land or, in a distinct usage, to the tent shrines for Canaanite idols as opposed to God’s true temple (see 2 Sam. 6:17). Samaria is the elder (literally the “greater”) because she first made political and idolatrous alliances with foreign nations and was the first to be punished by foreign captivity. They were Mine: The Lord identified both cities as a part of His chosen nation. sons and daughters: This phrase refers to the growth of the nation of Israel. They would become a powerful nation, but with pagan allies and a proliferation of idolaters.

ESV: The names **Oholah** (“her tent”) and **Oholibah** (“my tent is in her”) are given and quickly identified as Samaria and Jerusalem. The significance of the symbolism of these names has been largely lost, and the translations suggested here are approximate.

Ezekiel 23:5

And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians *her* neighbours,

Constable 5-8: Oholah proved unfaithful to the Lord by lusting after her attractive neighbors, the Assyrians.

The appeal, then as now, was to youth, strength, position, wealth and self-gratification; that is, the world in all its dazzle and attractiveness.

Oholah committed political adultery by making alliances with the Assyrians, which involved worshipping their idols (cf. 2 Kings 15:19-20; 17:3-4; Hos. 5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1-2; Amos 5:26). The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, an important archaeological find dating to about 840 B.C., shows King Jehu of Israel bowing in submission before King Shalmaneser III of Assyria and giving him tribute money.¹⁴ This was a continuation of Oholah's behavior from her youth in Egypt where she had done the same things.

Dake: [And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians *her* neighbours] Aholah, or Samaria, is first dealt with as playing the harlot when she belonged to God. She doted on her lovers, the Assyrians. They are described and her whoredom with them in Ezekiel 23:6-7. Her whoredom with Egypt is next stated (Ezekiel 23:8). God delivered her from Egypt and she began to commit whoredom with the Assyrians (Ezekiel 23:9). They discovered her nakedness and took her sons and daughters into captivity, slaying many with the sword (Ezekiel 23:10; 2 Kings 17).

Clarke: And Aholah played the harlot—Without entering into detail here, or following the figures, they both became idolatrous, and received the impure rites of the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, of which connection the prophet speaks here as he did in chap. 16, which see.

In this chapter there are many of what we would call indelicate expressions, because a parallel is run between idolatry and prostitution, and the circumstances of the latter

¹⁴ See D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, pp. 48-49, plate 3, and pp. 50-52.

illustrate the peculiarities of the former. In such cases, perhaps, the matter alone was given to the prophet, and he was left to use his own language, and amplify as he saw good. Ezekiel was among the Jews what Juvenal was among the Romans,—a rough reprover of the most abominable vices. They both spoke of things as they found them; stripped vice naked, and scourged it publicly. The original is still more rough than the translation; and surely there is no need of a comment to explain imagery that is but too generally understood. I have said enough on Ezekiel 16, and to that I must refer the reader. It is true that there are a few things here in the shade that might be illustrated by anatomy; and it would not be difficult to do it: but they are not necessary to salvation, and I shall not take off the covering. They were sufficiently understood by those for whose use they were originally designed.

Wycliffe 5- 6: Her lovers the Assyrians, warriors (RSV). The AV *neighbours, qfrôbîm*, is probably connected with the word *qfrâb*, “battle” (Job 38:23; Zech 14:3); or it may be a cognate of the Akkadian *kurâdû*, “warriors,” to be read *qfrôdîm*. 7. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (859–824) shows Jehu king of Israel paying tribute, 842 B.C. (cf. Pritchard, ANET, pp. 281-284). Israel entered into a costly alliance with Tiglath-pileser III (745–727), king of Assyria (II Kgs 15:19-29). Verses 8, 9 tell of Samaria’s intrigues with Assyria and Egypt (see also, Hos 5:13; 7:11; 8:9, 10; 12:1). Hoshea’s intrigues with Egypt against Assyria led to the overthrow of Samaria (II Kgs 17:3-6). 10. She became famous; i.e., she became a byword (lit., *name*; cf. v. 48; 16:41; 36:3).¹⁵

BKC 5-10. The sin of Oholah, the older sister, was her (Samaria’s) association with the Assyrians. Samaria’s alliance with Assyria ultimately led to her doom.

Israel’s relationships with Assyria are well documented. The Black Obelisk of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (dated ca. 841 B.C.) mentions “Jehu son of Omri” and pictures him bowing down to the Assyrian monarch. This is not mentioned in the Bible, but it probably resulted from the Syrian threat to Israel. Syria was expanding into Israel’s land in the Transjordan during Jehu’s reign (2 Kings 10:32-34). To counter that threat Jehu allied Israel with Assyria and submitted himself as a vassal. The obelisk pictures Jehu and his servants bringing tribute to the Assyrian king. Menahem and Hoshea, two later kings of Israel, also paid tribute to Assyria (2 Kings 15:19-20; 17:3-4). The Prophet Hosea (ca. 760-720 B.C.) rebuked Israel for her dependence on Assyria instead of on the Lord (cf. Hosea 5:13-14; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1).

After Israel became Assyria’s vassal she could not disentangle herself. When she finally tried to break away by forming a coalition with both Syria and Egypt (cf. 2 Kings 17:4; Isa. 7:1), she felt Assyria’s wrath. The very nation to which Samaria had turned for assistance would destroy her. God gave all Israel, including Samaria, over to her lovers, the Assyrians, for whom she lusted and who killed her with the sword. In 722 B.C. Samaria fell to Assyria (cf. 2 Kings 17:5-6, 18-20).¹⁶

¹⁵ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:5). Chicago: Moody Press.

¹⁶ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:5–10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

OTS Their Lewdness (23:5–21).

Ezekiel used sexual terms like lewdness, adultery, and harlotry to depict Israel's intimate association with idolatry. He first focused on the harlotry of Oholah, the northern sister, and then on Oholibah, the land of Judah.

1. *Samaria's harlotry (23:5–10)*. Oholah committed harlotry from under the authority of God. She threw herself on her "lovers," i.e., political allies. She was especially attracted to the Assyrians who came to her with handsome and dashing young warriors. Yet Oholah did not forsake her Egyptian lovers with whom she had committed harlotry in her youth. Her political entanglements always involved defilement by the idols of her allies. Therefore, God gave Samaria into the hand of her Assyrian lovers. They "uncovered her nakedness," i.e., ravished the land. They took captive the sons and daughters of Oholah. They slew Oholah with the sword, i.e., destroyed the Northern Kingdom. Thus did Oholah become a "byword among women," i.e., an object of reproach among other nations.

2. *Jerusalem's harlotry (23:11–21)*. Oholibah became even more corrupt than her northern sister. She too became attracted to the handsome and dashing warriors from Assyria. Yet even during her liaison with the Assyrians, her lust was kindled by wall pictures of the Chaldeans in their native dress. She sent messengers to Chaldea (Babylon). The "Babylonians came to her to the bed of love," i.e., they entered into an alliance with Judah. Oholibah was then defiled by the harlotry (idolatry) of the new lover. The affair with the Chaldeans, however, was temporary. Oholibah soon "became disgusted with them" (23:11–17).

Oholibah became yet more degenerate. "She uncovered her harlotries," i.e., she began to openly seek alliances with other nations. In an attempt to attract lovers who could free her from Babylon, she "uncovered her nakedness." In spite of warnings that she was alienating her God, she continued to multiply her harlotries. She recalled her early harlotry in Egypt and so she made overtures in that direction. She lusted after the Egyptians who had a reputation for sexual potency, i.e., military power. She relived the "lewdness" of her youth in Egypt, i.e., she revived Egyptian cults and customs long forgotten (23:18–21).¹⁷

played the harlot: This word may be used for any immoral sexual acts. Here it refers to the nation placing its faith in and seeking strength and security from alliances with political powers instead of God (2 Kin. 15:17–20; 17:1–4; Hos. 12:1–2).

Ezekiel 23:6

Which were clothed with blue, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding upon horses.

Clothed with blue—The purple dye was highly valued among the ancients, and at first was only used by kings, at last it was used among the military, particularly by officers of high rank in the country.

¹⁷ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 23:5–21). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Ezekiel 23:7

Thus she committed her whoredoms with them, with all them *that were* the chosen men of Assyria, and with all on whom she doted: with all their idols she defiled herself.

Ezekiel 23:8

Neither left she her whoredoms *brought* from Egypt: for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised the breasts of her virginity, and poured their whoredom upon her.

Samaria's whoring behavior began in her youth (i.e., in Egypt).

Ezekiel 23:9

Wherefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted.

Constable 9-10: The Lord had turned her over to the Assyrians whom she had proved unfaithful with in 722 B.C. They abused her and even murdered her so that she had become infamous for her sins (cf. Prov. 1:31; Rom. 1:24-32). The name "Jezebel" evokes similar disgust even today.

Infidelity in marriage was taken very seriously in ancient Israel. Adultery and prostitution were both odious to God and punishable by death, as several passages in Leviticus (19:29; 20:10; 21:9) and Deuteronomy (22:21-22; 23:17) indicate.

Ezekiel reminds his audience of how God already had judged Samaria through Assyrian conquest and captivity in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 17:5-41). Uncovered her nakedness means to be stripped bare and so put to great shame. Became a byword means people began using the name "Samaria" as a synonym for "immoral nation."

Ezekiel 23:10

These discovered her nakedness: they took her sons and her daughters, and slew her with the sword: and she became famous among women; for they had executed judgment upon her.

Missler: It was the Northern Kingdom in Numbers 5, while still under the Lord's authority, where we find chronicled that they went astray with the Assyrians. It was specifically climaxed with King Jehu's tribute to Shalmaneser in 841 B.C. You can find this marked on the black obelisk of his which is now in the British Museum. The main thing we might watch for is who destroyed Aholah? It was her lovers! The same thing is seen in Revelation 17 -18 in the harlot, Mystery Babylon. Who destroys her? The nation she rides on. Remember she is riding on the nations. Who turns on her and consumes her? Those nations.

Study the harlot, and you will discover that there is a model here that we see in the Old Testament; and we see it in the extreme, amplified sense in the New Testament.

What we are talking about here is Aholah (2 Kings 17). It occurred about 722 B.C. There is a spiritual model that we can follow in Revelation. [See our *Revelation* commentary set for a study of this passage.]

Dake: [sister Aholibah saw this, she was more corrupt in her inordinante love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in her whoredoms] Aholibah, or Judah, is next dealt with as seeing the whoredoms of Samaria, and becoming more corrupt than she ever was. Judah also doted on the Assyrians, her neighbors, who are again described (Ezekiel 23:12). God saw that she was defiled by the Assyrians (Ezekiel 23:13), and that she increased her whoredom by falling in love also with Babylonians, who are described in Ezekiel 23:14-15. She sent messengers to Chaldea to make a covenant with them (Ezekiel 23:16), and the Babylonians came to her in a bed of love, defiling her with their whoredom. Thus Judah was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated (Ezekiel 23:17); and she continued to multiply her whoredoms by calling to remembrance such sins of her youth with Egypt whom she began to long for again (Ezekiel 23:18-21).

Ezekiel 23:11

And when her sister Aholibah saw *this*, she was more corrupt in her inordinate love than she, and in her whoredoms more than her sister in *her* whoredoms.

Missler: This calls to mind an observation that the only thing man has learned from history is that man has learned nothing from history. Truly history repeats itself.

That is exactly what happened here. The Southern Kingdom had over a hundred year advantage over the Northern Kingdom. She saw them fall into idolatry and sin, and the foreign alliances with Assyria, ending up being taken captive by the Assyrians themselves! God judged them for spiritual corruption.

You would think that Judah would have learnt by their example. Wrong. The whole message here was that the same thing happened to the Southern Kingdom that happened to the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33). King Ahaz made his alliance with Tiglath-pileser and this political maneuver of Ahaz was denounced in Isaiah 7:3-17. This was where he asked for a sign, and Isaiah said, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." A woman having a child is not a big sign; but a virgin having one is. And that is what gave rise to that very famous verse in Isaiah's denunciation of Ahaz's league with Tiglath-pileser. Judah did send her ambassadors to Chaldea (Jeremiah 29 and elsewhere...).

Those political alliances led to religious defections. You cannot separate the religion from the politics in this whole issue.

Constable 11-13: Oholibah observed her sister's behavior and fate, but she did not learn from them. As many historians have observed, the one thing we learn from history is that most people do not learn from history. Oholibah became even more unfaithful than her sister. She too lusted after the Assyrians whom she viewed as attractive political allies (2 Kings 16:8; cf. Isa. 7:7-9), and she added the Babylonians to her list of lovers. Both sisters followed the same pattern of behavior.

LAN: Oholibah (meaning, “my tent is in her”) was shown to be worse because she did not learn from the judgment upon her sister, but continued in her lust for the Assyrians and Babylonians. Therefore, her judgment was equally certain. Just as Oholibah was privileged and should have known better, so we are privileged because we know about Christ. We need to be doubly sure that we follow him.

Wycliffe 11-13. *Intrigues with Assyria.* 11. **When her sister Oholibah saw this.** Samaria’s example did not prove a deterrent to Jerusalem, which was guilty of greater excesses (16:47, 51; Jer 3:8, 11). 12. **She doted upon the Assyrians.** Cf. verses 5, 6. Ahaz called in Assyrian aid (II Kgs 16:7; 23:11, 12; Isa 7:1-25).¹⁸

BKC 11-18. The judgment of the older sister Oholah (Samaria) should have been a warning to the younger sister Oholibah (Jerusalem). Unfortunately she failed to heed the warning. In fact she was more depraved than her sister.

Jerusalem followed the immoral course charted by her sister: she too lusted after the Assyrians. Judah carried the favor of Assyria rather than relying on her God. Possibly Ezekiel had in mind the disastrous political move of King Ahaz of Judah who willingly made Judah Assyria’s vassal. Israel and Syria had banded together to oppose Assyria, and they sought to bring Judah into the alliance. When Ahaz refused, they attacked Judah hoping to dethrone Ahaz and to replace him with a king who would support their uprising. Rather than trusting in God for deliverance (as Isaiah the prophet urged him to do), Ahaz sent to Assyria to enlist her aid and protection. With that act Judah became a vassal of Assyria for the next century (cf. 2 Kings 16:5-9; Isa. 7).

But Jerusalem’s political intrigues did not stop there; she carried her prostitution still further. After appealing to Assyria, Jerusalem turned to Babylon. Ezekiel described in some detail the garb of the Babylonian soldiers Jerusalem lusted after (Ezek. 23:15).

Jerusalem sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, to the bed of love, and in their lust they defiled her. Jerusalem’s respite from Assyria’s domination was short-lived. King Josiah established her independence, but he was killed in battle as he tried to thwart an Egyptian incursion through his country (cf. 2 Kings 23:29-30). Judah became a vassal of Egypt for four years. Probably during that time King Jehoiakim contacted Babylon to request her aid. When Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 B.C., Jehoiakim willingly switched allegiances and became Nebuchadnezzar’s vassal (2 Kings 24:1).

But when Babylon came, Jerusalem found that the lovers for whom she had lusted were brutal. After she had been defiled by them, she turned away from them in disgust.

¹⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:11). Chicago: Moody Press.

Babylon became a harsher taskmaster than either Assyria or Egypt, and Jerusalem sought to escape Babylon's dominance.

While Jerusalem turned from Babylon, God turned from Jerusalem. Jerusalem continued in the ways of her sister and even surpassed Samaria's unfaithfulness. God had finally rejected Samaria for her actions, and He now rejected Jerusalem.¹⁹

Though the language of this passage is graphic and offensive, like the descriptions given in ch. 16, it is a true reflection of the depths to which Israel had fallen in her abandonment of her true lover and God. Actually, the offense is not in the language of description but rather in the sins which have been committed.

The notice that **Oholibah saw this** is the only hint Ezekiel gives that she ought to have learned the lessons of her older sister.

Ezekiel 23:12

She doted upon the Assyrians *her* neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men.

Dake: [clothed most gorgeously] The Assyrians were famous for their rich and costly apparel. The expression "Assyrian garments" became a term for all kinds of fine clothing. Different from the Egyptian and Persian clothes, they consisted of tunics or robes varying in length, of mantles of different shapes, of long-fringed scarfs, and embroidered girdles. Ornaments in profusion were put on the dresses, some of which appear to have been emblematic of certain dignities and employments.

LAN: "She too lusted after the Assyrians" may mean excessively trying to please and probably refers to Ahaz paying protection money to Tiglath-Pileser III (2 Kings 16:7-8).

McGee: This refers to an historical event which took place when Old King Ahaz was on the throne in the southern kingdom. He went up to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and he saw there an altar he thought was the prettiest altar he'd ever seen. So he sent Urijah the priest to get the pattern of it in order to make one just like it (2 Kings 16:10-18). He wanted to "improve the worship," you know—he went in for that type of thing. Well, God took note of that, and He judged the northern kingdom for it.

Now the Babylonian invasion of the southern kingdom is about to take place—there's no alternative to it. God is judging both the northern and the southern kingdoms because they have turned away from the living and true God; one went brazenly into idolatry, and the other *pretended* to worship the Lord.

My friend, it might be well for all of God's people to heed Paul's warning: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ..." (2 Cor. 13:5). Someone may ask, "Don't you believe in the security of the believer?" Yes, I do, but I also believe in the insecurity of make-believers. We need to examine ourselves. When you go to church do you really

¹⁹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:11-18). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

worship God? Do you draw close to the person of Christ? Do you really love Him? He doesn't want your service unless you do. In John 21 He asked Peter, "Lovest thou me?" When Peter could say that he did, then the Lord said, "Feed my sheep." Only then could the Lord use him.²⁰

The **Assyrians** had dominated the period of Manasseh's rule (cf. 2 Chron. 33:11).

Ezekiel 23:13

Then I saw that she was defiled, that they took both one way,

Ezekiel 23:14

And that she increased her whoredoms: for when she saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion,

Constable 14-16: Oholibah saw pictures of the Babylonians that aroused her desire for alliance, and she lusted after them and wrote to them (2 Kings 23:32, 37; cf. Jer. 22:21). Much visual art in biblical times was painted and or carved on walls. The splendor that was Babylon deeply impressed the Israelites.

[portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion]
Pictures of gods were painted on the walls in bright colors.

Wycliffe 14-18. *Intrigues with Babylon.* **Men portrayed upon the wall.** The Babylonians decorated the walls of their rooms with carved and colored panels (cf. 8:10; Jer 22:14). 15. **Girdles.** Belts or *waistcloths* were part of the Babylonian's clothing (see Isa 5:27; 11:5; also, description of Babylonian noble, Herodotus *Histories* I, 195). **Flowing turbans on their heads** (RSV). *Things wound around*, and fillets hanging down behind. **Looking like officers** (RSV). An "officer" (*shālīsh*) was the third man who occupied the chariot with the king and the driver, a man of high rank. 16. **She ... sent messengers.** The occasion is unknown, though Hezekiah had welcomed an embassy from Babylon about the year 712 B.C. (cf. Isa 39). 17. **Her mind was alienated** (lit., *was dislocated*; cf. Gen 32:25). She felt the revulsion of sated passion.²¹

"Vermilion" is a brilliant, blood-red color.

Judah **increased her harlotry** by engaging in political and spiritual intercourse with first the Assyrians (vv. 12, 13; see 2 Kin. 16:7-9) and then the **Chaldeans** (a regional term used for the entire Babylonian Empire; see vv. 15, 17, 23). The last two lines tell how Judean envoys to Babylon became enamored of Babylonian rulers and their power

²⁰ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 23:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

²¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:14). Chicago: Moody Press.

through pictures (see Jer. 22:14) on their palace and temple walls. Vermilion is a red color.

ESV 14–17: The empire of the Babylonians succeeded that of the Assyrians (v. 12).

Ezekiel 23:15

Girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads, all of them princes to look to, after the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity:

Ezekiel 23:16

And as soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted upon them, and sent messengers unto them into Chaldea.

Missler: There are some people who believe that the ears are the access of God's Word - "Faith cometh by hearing..." Romans 10:17. On the other hand the eyes are Satan's entry. Genesis 3, the woman saw that the fruit was pleasant to the eyes. Our eyes lead us into booby traps. The ear is the avenue which God uses to reach us.

An invitation to Chaldea (Babylon) was given by Hezekiah to the envoys from Babylon (2 Kings 20:12ff; Isaiah 38-39).

Ezekiel 23:17

And the Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their whoredom, and she was polluted with them, and her mind was alienated from them.

Constable 17-21: The Babylonians responded to her invitations and came to Judea where they polluted her by entering into treaties with her. After she became a vassal of Babylon, she became disgusted with the Babylonians and turned away to seek help from Egypt (cf. Jer. 2:18; 6:8; 37:5-7; Lam. 4:17). The Lord also became disgusted with her, as He had with her sister. Nevertheless she persisted in her immoral conduct that she had learned in Egypt. She lusted after the Egyptians that pursued her like donkeys and horses in heat (cf. Jer. 2:24; 5:8; 13:27). Donkeys and horses were proverbial for their strong sexual drive (cf. Jer. 2:24; 5:8; 13:27), and the Lord used these animals as a figure for the Egyptians' potency that attracted the Israelites. Jerusalem returned to her old lover, namely, Egypt.

At first, Judah made an alliance with Babylonia (Chaldea), but then changed its mind. During the reigns of the last two Judean kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, Judah looked to Egypt for help. Judah's unfaithfulness (its alliances with godless nations) cost it the only real protection it ever had—God.

alienated herself: This is an allusion to Judah's turning in disappointment and disgust from relying on Babylon to relying on Egypt (see 2 Kin. 23:28–24:1). God's alienation from Jerusalem is an allusion to the city's coming defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

Ezekiel 23:18

So she discovered her whoredoms, and discovered her nakedness: then my mind was alienated from her, like as my mind was alienated from her sister.

Ezekiel 23:19

Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.

Wycliffe 19-21. *Intrigues with Egypt.* 19. **Played the harlot in the land of Egypt.** In the time of Isaiah, there was a strong pro-Egyptian party (Isa 30–31; cf Jer 2:18; 37:5ff.; Ezk 29–32). 20. **Paramours.** For parallels to the revolting figures of this verse, see Hos 8:9; Jer 2:24; 5:8; 13:27. As a harlot is attracted by sexual potency, so Judah was allured by the military prowess of Egypt.²²

BKC 19-21. Jerusalem's faithlessness cost her the only true protection she ever had. Yet instead of repenting of her sin, she sought additional human help, becoming more and more promiscuous. Her cycle of sin brought her back to the very nation with which she had originally been defiled and which had enslaved her—Egypt (vv. 3, 19, 21).

To show his absolute disgust in this course of action, Ezekiel used coarse language (v. 20), not to be vulgar, but to portray graphically the utter spiritual degradation to which Judah had fallen.

In the last 14 years of Judah's history (600-586 B.C.) she attempted to elicit Egypt's help in her revolt against Babylon. King Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon in 600 B.C. after Egypt defeated Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). Judah eagerly grasped Egypt's hollow promises of aid. Zedekiah's final revolt against Babylon in 588 B.C. came with Egypt's promise of assistance (2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 37:5-8; Ezek. 29:6-7).²³

Usually, "youthful memory" implies coming to one's senses (e.g., 16:22). Here, remembering the days of her youth inspires Oholibah to greater depths of depravity. **Egypt** again proves a temptation to Jerusalem; see notes on 16:23–29; 17:11–18.

²² Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:19). Chicago: Moody Press.

²³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:19–21). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 23:20

For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses.

Now that is a strange phrase. Horses on the Egyptian hieroglyphics were a symbol meaning a lustful person. You and I are not used to this idea derived from these Egyptian ideograms. Also, asses and horses were used proverbially to speak of the lustful. (Examples are in Jeremiah 2:24, 5:8, and 13:27.) It is a figure of speech which we have no occasion to use.

Judah renewed its alliance with Egypt (Jer. 37:5–7) which is strikingly symbolized in this verse as a lustful, illicit lover (see v. 3; 16:26).

Ezekiel 23:21

Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth.

“Lewdness” is promiscuity (see also Ezekiel 23:27, 49)—giving sexual favors instead of being faithful to a spouse or to God. We don’t think of ourselves as being spiritually promiscuous, but we often spend more time seeking advice from magazines, television commercials, and non-Christian experts than we do from God and his Word.

Ezekiel 23:22

Therefore, O Aholibah, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will raise up thy lovers against thee, from whom thy mind is alienated, and I will bring them against thee on every side;

Again, God used that which she was pursuing to undo her. God uses the object of our lusts to be the mechanism by which we are judged. Chuck Smith once said that sometimes the way God judges adultery is that He gives the couple each other.

Constable 22-24: Because of her behavior the Lord promised to turn Oholibah's soldierlovers against her, even the Babylonians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and the tribal groups of the empire. The Chaldeans were the original residents of southern Babylonia who became a ruling class within Babylonia. The Assyrians had suffered defeat by the Babylonians and now lived within Babylonia, mainly in the north. Pekod, Shoa, and Koa were tribes that lived in eastern Babylonia and were part of the empire (cf. Isa. 22:5; Jer. 50:21). They would all come against Oholibah from every direction, attack her from all sides, and try to destroy her using their own customary methods. Ezekiel painted a picture of the whole world coming against Israel. The Lord would allow this to happen to her.

[lovers] The lovers of these two symbolic women were the nations whom they trusted in instead of Jehovah—the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and others (Ezekiel 23:5,8,14-15,17,21,23).

LAN 22-26: This predicts the last attack on Jerusalem that would destroy the city and bring to Babylonia the third wave of captives in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25; Jeremiah 52). The first attack came in 605 B.C., the second in 597 B.C. Pekod, Shoa, and Koa were Babylonian allies.

Wycliffe 22-27. *First threat of punishment.* 23. Pekod, Shoa, and Koa (cf. Jer 50:20; Isa 22:5) are identified as the Pukudu, Sutu, and Kutu, tribes living east of the Tigris River, near its mouth, all part of the Chaldean empire. Captains and rulers. *Officers and warriors*, following the reading of verses 5, 6, and 12. Rulers. The MT translates *called ones*, which may suggest counselors “called in” to give counsel. 24. Buckler. A small shield carried on the arm. And shield. A large protective device. I will commit judgment; i.e., of Jerusalem, to the Chaldeans (cf. I Kgs 8:46). They were to “judge” her according to their own cruel judgements. 25. Set my jealousy. Cf. Num 25:11. On mutilation of an adulteress, and others, see the Middle Assyrian Law Code (Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*) pp. 427-438, especially sections 4, 8, 9, 11-14, 40, 41, 50-59. On the practice in Egypt, see Diodorus Siculus *The Historical Library* i. 78. Cf. Ezk 12:13; 16:40. 26. They shall ... strip thee. Cf. 16:38, 39.²⁴

BKC 22-27. Here Ezekiel gave four oracles, each beginning with the words, This is what the Sovereign LORD says (vv. 22, 28, 32, 35). The oracles all focused on Jerusalem’s judgment. Those Jerusalem despised would be the ones who would punish her. God would bring her lovers against her, including the Babylonians ... the men of Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians. Perhaps Pekod, Shoa, and Koa were three Aramean tribes (*Puqûdû*, *Sutû*, and *Qutû*), near the mouth of the Tigris River. These three tribes, along with the Assyrians, were part of the Babylonian Empire and were represented in Babylon’s army. Ezekiel was saying that the combined army of Babylon and her allies would descend on Jerusalem.

When the Babylonians would attack Jerusalem with military officers ... weapons, and well-protected soldiers the city would not escape. The punishment God would inflict on her in His anger through Babylon would be like a mutilation. They will cut off your noses and your ears, and those ... who are left will fall by the sword. In Mesopotamia facial mutilation was a frequent punishment for adultery. A guilty woman would be rendered so grotesque that she would be forever undesirable to anyone else; she would be forced to bear her shame and guilt publicly. Similarly Jerusalem would be rendered unattractive to any more potential lovers.

Also some of Jerusalem’s children would be carried away as slaves, others would be burned by fire, and her possessions (clothes and jewelry) would be stripped away. God’s punishment would cure Judah’s lust; she would no longer look to Egypt for help.²⁵

²⁴ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:22). Chicago: Moody Press.

²⁵ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:22–27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

OTS Their Punishment (23:22–35).

The punishment of Samaria's lewdness was past. Her sister Jerusalem was about to experience a similar fate. Ezekiel first described her punishment; then he underscored that description by means of a parable.

1. *Jerusalem's punishment described (23:22–31a)*. God was about to bring against Oholibah her alienated lovers, i.e., the Chaldeans. The attacking army would be multi-national. They would be dashing in appearance as they came to do their deadly work. These soldiers, however, would be armed for war and they would deploy themselves for siege about Jerusalem. To this army the Lord had committed the judgment of Jerusalem. They would judge the place "according to their customs." This force would execute the jealous wrath of God against Jerusalem. "Nose and ears," i.e., the leading citizens, would be removed from the city. Captivity, sword and fire awaited the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The attackers would strip the harlot of garments and jewels, i.e., take all her wealth, and leave her naked and bare. Under this attack the lewd Egyptian harlotries would be forgotten for it would be clear that no relief would come from Pharaoh (23:22–27).

For emphasis and with even greater clarity Ezekiel repeated the threat he had just made. Jerusalem was to be given into the hand of those whom she hated, i.e., the Chaldeans. They would deal with Jerusalem in hatred. They would confiscate all properties leaving Oholibah nothing. That day would uncover the full extent of Jerusalem's "lewdness and harlotries." This terrible fate awaited Jerusalem because she had "played the harlot with the nations" and because she had "defiled" herself with idols. Oholibah had followed the path of her notorious sister to the north (23:28–31a).

2. *Jerusalem's punishment illustrated (23:31b–35)*. God placed in the hand of Oholibah the same cup of judgment which her sister had consumed. That cup was deep and large and full to the brim. Drinking that cup would result in national "drunkenness," i.e., confusion, which in turn would lead to scorn and derision by other nations. That cup would produce sorrow, astonishment and desolation. Not only must Oholibah drain the cup, she must even gnaw the shards of the container. She would experience every last bit of punishment which God had decreed for her. Then she would tear her breasts, i.e., be plunged into anguish and despair. The cup depicted the terrible consequence of having forgotten God, of having deliberately cast the Lord behind their back. This was the punishment for Oholibah's harlotries and lewdness.²⁶

God's verdict was that He would judge Jerusalem through Babylon, formerly an ally but now an enemy. Pekod, Shoa, Koa, ... the Assyrians with them: These were tribal vassals of Babylon that would join the assault on Judah. A buckler was a large rectangular shield. Removing the nose and ears was an ancient punishment for adultery.

ESV 22–31: As in ch. 16, the paramours become the punishers. Twice here the formula thus says the Lord **God** (23:22, 28) introduces announcements of judgment (vv. 22–27; 28–31). The longer first section details the political agents of destruction, leaving the second to provide a summary.

²⁶ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 23:22–35). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Ezekiel 23:23

The Babylonians, and all the Chaldeans, Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them: all of them desirable young men, captains and rulers, great lords and renowned, all of them riding upon horses.

Clarke: Pekod, and Shoa, and Koa These names have been thought to designate certain people bordering on the Chaldeans; but no geographer has ever been able to find them out.

In our old translations these names were considered appellatives—rulers, mighty men, and tyrants. Others, following the literal import of the words, have translated, visiting, shouting and retreating. Others have applied them to the habits of the Chaldean soldiers. Pekod signifying the muster or review of armies; Shoa, the magnificence of their uniform and arms; and Koa, the marks or embroidery of the clothes of the captains and generals. Grotius thought that they might be names of contiguous nations: Pekod, the Bactrians; Shoa, a people of Armenia; and Boa, the Medes. I have nothing to add that would satisfy myself, or be edifying to my readers.

The judgment was carried out by Babylonians and Chaldeans. These three names, “Pekod,” “Shoa,” and “Koa,” identify some of the tribes on the eastern border of the empire. Perhaps these areas were famous for mercenaries to be used against Israel.

Ezekiel 23:24

And they shall come against thee with chariots, wagons, and wheels, and with an assembly of people, which shall set against thee buckler and shield and helmet round about: and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments.

Ezekiel 23:25

And I will set my jealousy against thee, and they shall deal furiously with thee: they shall take away thy nose and thine ears; and thy remnant shall fall by the sword: they shall take thy sons and thy daughters; and thy residue shall be devoured by the fire.

Cutting off the nose and ears was not something they did with captives. They treated captives brutally, but they did this particular punishment to adulteresses. It was a form of disfigurement that was a form of punishment in the ancient world for adultery.

Constable 25-27: The Lord would express His jealousy over Jerusalem and deal with her in His wrath. Her enemies would cut off her nose and her ears. This was an ancient Near Eastern punishment for adulteresses, which was understandable since these women typically adorned themselves with nose-rings and earrings. This appears to have been a method of mutilating enemies and prisoners of war as well. This punishment would make Jerusalem grotesque, unappealing, and repulsive to other nations.

These enemies would also kill many Israelites, deport others (2 Kings 24:10-16; 25:11; Dan. 1:1), and burn still others (2 Kings 25:18-21). They would strip the nation of her clothes and jewelry, perhaps a reference to her wealth, possessions, and temple treasures (cf. 2 Kings 25:13-17; 2 Chron. 36:18). The Lord would allow this to teach Oholibah to abhor the Egyptians as political partners.

Dake: [they shall take away thy nose and thine ears] These mutilations were common among the Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Persians. Among the Chaldeans, adulteresses were punished in this manner, which fact is perhaps the basis of this text.

Ezekiel 23:26

They shall also strip thee out of thy clothes, and take away thy fair jewels.

Ezekiel 23:27

Thus will I make thy lewdness to cease from thee, and thy whoredom brought from the land of Egypt: so that thou shalt not lift up thine eyes unto them, nor remember Egypt any more.

When passions are sated, there is a loathing that follows.

Ezekiel 23:28

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will deliver thee into the hand of them whom thou hatest, into the hand of them from whom thy mind is alienated:

Constable 28-29: The Lord also announced that He would turn Jerusalem over to those whom she had come to hate, namely, the Babylonians. They would hate her, rob her of her property, and leave her naked and ashamed (in 586 B.C.).

Wycliffe 28-31. *Second threat of punishment.* 29. (Fruit of) **thy labour**; i.e., wealth (Jer 20:5; Ps 128:2). 31. **Cup.** Jerusalem must drink of her sister's **cup** of punishment (cf. Isa 51:17, 22, 23; Jer 25:15, 16; Hab 2:16).²⁷

BKC 28-31. This second oracle repeats (for emphasis) several points stated in verses 22-27, and adds that when the Babylonians were done, Jerusalem would be left naked and bare. Though ashamed, this punishment would come because of her promiscuity in seeking aid from other nations and becoming perverted by their idols. Since she had sinned like her sister, she would be punished in a similar way (I will put her up into your hand; cf. comments on vv. 32-34)—by the sword and exile.²⁸

²⁷ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:28). Chicago: Moody Press.

²⁸ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:28-31). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

28-31: This “lover” was one whom the Judeans came to hate as an enemy. God explains that He would use the Babylonians as an instrument of His wrath: (1) to expose the extreme unfaithfulness of Judah and (2) to punish Judah for its idolatry that had resulted from forbidden political alliances (see Ex. 20:1–6; 34:10–17; Deut. 18:9–14). The **sister** is Samaria (see vv. 4, 33) with whom Jerusalem would share a similar destiny of destruction—her cup.

Ezekiel 23:29

And they shall deal with thee hatefully, and shall take away all thy labour, and shall leave thee naked and bare: and the nakedness of thy whoredoms shall be discovered, both thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

Ezekiel 23:30

I will do these *things* unto thee, because thou hast gone a whoring after the heathen, *and* because thou art polluted with their idols.

Constable 30-31: This punishment would come on her because she committed political adultery with the nations and had defiled herself with their idolatry (cf. Exod. 20:1-7; Deut. 17:14-20). She had behaved as her older sister, so the Lord would give the cup of His wrath to her to drink (cf. Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15-17, 28; Hab. 2:16; Zech. 12:2; Matt. 20:22; 26:39; Rev. 14:10), the same cup Oholah had to drink.

In using this imagery Ezekiel belongs to a long prophetic chain that was to culminate in Jesus, who absorbed in his own person the horror of God's judgment, accepting it from his hand not without a shudder (Mark 14:36).

Ezekiel 23:31

Thou hast walked in the way of thy sister; therefore will I give her cup into thine hand.

[**cup into thine hand**] Her cup, the cup of Samaria, was total destruction as a nation and captivity for the remnant left alive (2 Kings 17).

Ezekiel 23:32

Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup deep and large: thou shalt be laughed to scorn and had in derision; it containeth much.

Constable 32-34: The Lord also promised that Oholibah would indeed drink from the large cup of God's judgment from which Oholah had drunk. Some commentators referred to this pericope as the "cup song" (cf. the "sword song" in 21:8-17). Drinking this cup would make her an object of scorn as well as drunk and sad. The cup would contain

punishment in the form of horror and desolation, just like Samaria had experienced. Oholibah would drain the cup; she would endure all the punishment God had for her. She would even madly gnaw the fragments of the earthenware cup or shatter it to pieces. The same Hebrew verb means "to gnaw" (NASB, NRSV) and "to break" (AV, NIV, NKJV). She would also tear at her breasts, probably in remorse over how she had used them to seduce her lovers. Another interpretation understands the cup as breaking and lacerating Oholibah's breasts. In other words, she would despise herself for her former behavior.

Wycliffe 32-34. *Third threat of punishment.* These verses constitute a poem on the cup of punishment. 34. **Pluck out your hair** (RSV). A free rendering of the LXX for the MT *gnaw its sherds*. **Pluck off thine own breasts.** Cf. Jer 25:16; Job 39:24.²⁹

BKC 32-34. This third oracle of judgment against Jerusalem differs from the others because it is a poem. The point of the poem, which might be titled "The Cup of God's Judgment," is that Jerusalem was to take part in Samaria's judgment because she had taken part in Samaria's sin. God said, You will drink your sister's cup (cf. v. 31), a cup large and deep; it will bring scorn and derision, for it holds so much.

The concept of imbibing a cup of judgment occurs throughout the Bible (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17-23; Jer. 25:15-19; 51:7; Hab. 2:16; Rev. 17:3-4; 18:6). The "contents" of the cup were the ruinous effects of sin—sorrow ... ruin, and desolation—accumulated by the nation.³⁰

The cup is often symbolic of God's judgment (see Ps. 75:7, 8; Jer. 25:15–29; Matt. 20:22; Rev. 14:10). break its shards: The phrase vividly portrays how completely Judah would drink the cup of wrath, breaking what was already broken. Tear at your own breasts pictures the resultant agony and anguish.

ESV 32–35: Two further thus **says** introductions frame the final outcomes. The mention of the cup in v. 31 triggers a different development here. The cup is well known in Jeremiah as an image of punishment (see Jer. 25:15–29; cf. Isa. 51:17–23), although here the metaphor of the sisters is not abandoned (Ezek. 23:33). Verse 35 concludes the entire oracle.

Ezekiel 23:33

Thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of thy sister Samaria.

²⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:32). Chicago: Moody Press.

³⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:32–34). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 23:34

Thou shalt even drink it and suck *it* out, and thou shalt break the sherds thereof, and pluck off thine own breasts: for I have spoken *it*, saith the Lord GOD.

[**sherds**] This word is a variation of shard, a fragment of brittle substance, as of an earthen vessel.

[**pluck off thine own breasts**] This simply means to destroy the occasions of their idolatry; or, more literally, it refers to the tearing at the breasts.

Ezekiel 23:35

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.

“Thou hast forgotten me.” - the fundamental behind all sin. The “cup” is an idiom. (Ps 75:8; Isaiah 51; Jer 25; Hab2; but most of all Mt 20:22. Jesus sampling God’s wrath. “This cup” He sampled, in fact drank all of it for us. We do not have to face this cup because of Him; He has already drank it for us.)

Constable: Jerusalem would bear the Lord's punishment for her lewd and immoral behavior because she had abandoned Him. This short message identifies the root problem in Israel's apostasy: she had forsaken Yahweh.

When a nation (or an individual) discards God, there is no other road to follow but that which leads to perversion and utter degradation.

Wycliffe: *Fourth threat.* 35. **Bear** (the consequences of) **thy lewdness.** Cf. verses 8, 27, 44.³¹

BKC: This fourth oracle presents the main reason Jerusalem was to be judged. She had forgotten God (cf. 22:12) and thrust Him behind her back. Jerusalem’s illicit affairs with other nations came after she forgot her source of protection and openly rejected God. Because of this rejection, she must bear the consequences of her lewdness.

(3) Conclusion (23:36-49). In the final section of this chapter Ezekiel reviewed the sin and judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem. The history and judgment of both countries had been presented separately (vv. 1-35), but now they were combined for the sake of comparison. The sins of both nations were idolatry (vv. 36-39) and foreign alliances (vv. 40-44), and their judgments were the same (vv. 45-49).³²

³¹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:35–36). Chicago: Moody Press.

³² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:35). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Sin, Responsibility—Sin may bring fame, fortune, and fun for awhile. Crowds may gather around the sinner. When political advantage is at stake, the lure of sin becomes all the greater. When religious apostasy results, sin becomes all the graver. God soon enters the picture to destroy sin and its “profit.” The sinner must bear personal responsibility to God for sin, weighing its short-term gain against ultimate destruction.

This verse summarizes why God was going to punish Jerusalem with such vengeance: you have forgotten Me. The people had intentionally ignored God, pictured by the parallel phrase cast Me behind your back.

Ezekiel 23:36

The LORD said moreover unto me; Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah and Aholibah? ye, declare unto them their abominations;

Missler: The Indictment Now verses 36-42 are a detailed indictment. There is no comparable arraignment in the Scripture that is more incisive or scathing, and yet so complete.

Constable 36-37: The Lord called Ezekiel to pass judgment on Oholah and Aholibah (cf. 20:4; 22:2). He should then announce their fate because they had committed adultery (cf. Exod. 22:20; 23:13; Deut. 4:15-24; 12:24-32) and had shed innocent blood in their unfaithfulness (cf. Exod. 20:13; Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5). Their spiritual adultery consisted of idolatry, and their bloodshed was the practice of child sacrifice in connection with idolatry. They had killed the Lord's own children.

Dake: [their abominations] Eight sins of Samaria and Jerusalem:

1. Adultery (Ezekiel 23:37)
2. Murders
3. Idolatry
4. Sacrificed children in the fire (Ezekiel 23:37-39)
5. Defiled My sanctuary (Ezekiel 23:38-39)
6. Profaned My sabbaths
7. Made alliances with other nations (Ezekiel 23:40-42)
8. Committed idolatry and adultery in worship to idols with other nations (Ezekiel 23:40-44)

Wycliffe 36-39. *The sisters guilty of adultery, idolatry.* 37. The blood of child sacrifices was upon their hands, in their worship of idols, especially Moloch (cf. 16:20, 21). 38. They have defiled the sanctuary of the Temple and profaned the Lord's sabbaths. Cf. 20:12, 13; 22:8. 39. After performing heathen worship, they entered nonchalantly into the house of the Lord. Cf. Mic 3:11; Jer 7:9-11.³³

³³ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:36). Chicago: Moody Press.

BKC 36-39. Idolatry, though not the subject of verses 1-35, was common to Israel and Judah. The apex of their spiritual adultery was child sacrifice: they even sacrificed their children, whom they bore to Me. This, one of the most detestable practices of the Canaanite religions, had infiltrated both Israel and Judah (see comments on 16:20-22). The people were so hardened by sin that on the very day they sacrificed their children to their idols, they entered the temple with their children's blood on their hands and the smoky smell of burning flesh embedded in their clothes. Their very presence profaned and desecrated the house of God!³⁴

OTS Their Lewdness (23:36–44).

The second round of indictment against the two sisters is more specific. The language of allegory gives way to specific examples of what the prophet had in mind. The two sisters had committed adultery with their idols. Their hands were stained with the blood of their own children—Yahweh's children—whom they offered as food to their pagan gods in the sacrificial fires. On the very days when they committed these atrocities they entered into the God's sanctuary hypocritically to render homage to the Lord. They had thus profaned that sacred place and the sacred sabbaths as well (23:36–39).

Judah actively pursued idolatry. She sent messengers to distant places to invite idolaters to come and teach them pagan rites. Like a harlot, Judah attempted to attract new lovers. She prepared herself by bathing, putting on eye makeup, and bedecking herself with beautiful ornaments. She prepared her table with incense and oil. The irony was that she used the gifts which God had bestowed upon her to advance the cause of idolatry. She created a festive atmosphere, the sound of a multitude at ease. The harlot was not particular about who shared her table and her bed. Men of the common sort and even drunkards from the desert were all welcome (23:40–42).

The Lord hoped that the idolatrous pattern of behavior might stop when Judah became “worn out by adulteries.” Surely foreign nations would find her attractive no more! Yet foreigners continued to go into Oholah and Oholibah as they would go in to a harlot (23:43f.).³⁵

ESV 36–45: The actions listed in vv. 37–39 provide a more prosaic list of offenses than the consistently metaphorical language in the earlier part of the chapter. They echo other such lists seen previously, especially 22:6–12. The intensifying of interest in the worship life of the cities (for the most part, this list applies to both sisters) supplements the political infidelity identified in 23:5–21.

ESV 36–49: The Sisters and Religion. Having reached one stopping point, the oracle restarts, once again naming Oholah and Oholibah (v. 36; see note on v. 4). The familiar narrative pattern of accusation and analysis (vv. 36–45) leading to judgment (vv. 46–49) is again followed.

³⁴ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:36–39). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁵ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 23:36–44). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

They were destroying their own children in the fires to the god Molech and to the god Baal. Throwing them into the fire, their little baby boys.

Ezekiel 23:37

That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through *the fire*, to devour *them*.

Missler: That, again, is the Molech worship that he was speaking of. They had no problem of offering their children as offerings in the Valley of Hinnom which was just a few feet away from the Temple floor, and then worshiping in the Temple that same day? They saw no inconsistency in that!

[**Molech**] When people lost sight of God and began to worship the planets, demons, and hero gods, they practiced horrifying acts of cruelty, obscenity, and perversion (unnatural sexual acts). Even sons and daughters were burned in the fire (Leviticus 18:21; 2 Kings 3:26-27; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Kings 17:17,31; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Kings 23:10-11; 2 Chron. 28:3; 2 Chron. 33:6). Many of the ancient nations shed human blood before their deities. Molech means "king." This was the name of the main god of Ammon—called Chemosh by Moabites (see Biblical Facts about False Gods). Molech was worshiped in Egypt as Amun, or Amun-Ra, "the king of gods." What was supposed to be his likeness was a statue of brass resting on a pedestal or throne of brass—his head crowned and resembling that of a calf, and his arms extended as if to embrace all who came near. Children were his victims. The statue was heated red hot by fire inside and children were shaken over the flames or passed through the hot arms in dedication to it, to receive Molech's favor. It was believed that all children not so dedicated would die in infancy. Many were actually burned alive in the idol (see the scriptures above). It seems that King Ahaz was dedicated to Molech (2 Kings 16:3,19-20; 2 Chron. 28:3).³⁶

adultery ... defiled ... slain: These themes have been developed previously (see v. 8; 16:20, 21; Ex. 20:3–13, 22–26; 22:20; Lev. 18:21; 19:30; 20:1–5; Deut. 4:15–40).

Ezekiel 23:38

Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths.

Constable 38-39: They also made the temple unclean (cf. Exod. 20:24-26) and treated the Sabbath as any other day of the week (cf. Exod. 20:8-11; Lev. 19:3, 30). On the same days that they practiced child sacrifice they entered the temple to worship Yahweh. This amounted to treating Molech and Yahweh as though they were equal.

³⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Chuck Smith: They would go out and they would throw their children into these fires or place them into the arms of these little molten hot gods until they burned to death. And then they would go to the temple and worship God. And God said, "I can't stand it. I can't understand it. It's too much. I don't want it. I won't have it." And so God speaks of the judgment that must come upon Jerusalem for this.

Ezekiel 23:39

For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.

The Israelites went so far as to sacrifice their own children to idols and then to sacrifice to the Lord the same day. This made a mockery of worship. We cannot praise God and willfully sin at the same time. That would be like celebrating one's wedding anniversary and then going to bed with a neighbor.

Ezekiel 23:40

And furthermore, that ye have sent for men to come from far, unto whom a messenger was sent; and, lo, they came: for whom thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments,

Constable 40-42: These daughters had sent to other nations and invited ambassadors to come to them to make treaties (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). They had made themselves as attractive as possible, like a prostitute does for her lover. They even used the things that they should have used only for the worship of Yahweh to entice desert lovers (e.g. the Arabians, Moabites, and Edomites). The whole atmosphere of the reception was like that of a drunken orgy. The same Hebrew word, *saba'im*, can mean "Sabeans" and "drunkards" (v. 42), and both meanings could have been intended (double entendre). These foreign lovers gave the Israelites the wages of a prostitute including bracelets and crowns.

Wycliffe 40-44. *The harlotry of Israel in foreign alliances.* In these verses the harlot makes elaborate preparations to welcome her paramours. 40. Women painted their eyelids with powdered antimony or stibium to make them appear large and lustrous (cf. II Kgs 9:30; Jer 4:30; see also the name of Job's daughter, *Kerenhappuch*, "horn of eye paint," Job 42:14). 42, 43. These verses are unintelligible in the MT, and the versions do not yield satisfactory readings. Verse 44 is a summary of the preceding verses. Translate, to commit lewdness (RSV), following the LXX, in place of MT *women of lewdness*.³⁷

³⁷ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:40). Chicago: Moody Press.

BKC 40-44. The spiritual adultery of the two nations was matched only by their political adultery. Both countries enticed foreign nations into illicit alliances. Ezekiel painted a vivid picture of the sisters preparing themselves for lovers (i.e., enticing other nations to help them). The harlot sisters sent ... for men and when they arrived the girls bathed themselves for them, painted their eyes, and put on ... jewelry (cf. Prov. 7:6-21).

The enticements of the two sisters drew a carefree crowd of Sabeans ... from the desert and men from the rabble. The word “Sabeans” (*sābā’im*) may also be translated “drunkards” (from *sābā’*, “to imbibe, drink largely”; cf. NIV marg.). Perhaps Ezekiel deliberately chose the word because of its double meaning. The wild nomadic Sabeans may have behaved like drunkards. The reputation of the sisters was so well known that even the lower elements of society knew where to find them. Ezekiel also employed two similar-sounding words to draw attention to the baser elements being attracted to the women. They brought in (*mūbā’im*) “Sabeans/drunks” (*sābā’im*).

The sisters were using their charms to gain others’ favors, so God reduced them to the status of prostitutes (cf. Ezek. 23:3). This appropriately pictures Israel and Judah turning to pagan nations for help and being molested by them.³⁸

Ezekiel 23:41

And satest upon a stately bed, and a table prepared before it, whereupon thou hast set mine incense and mine oil.

Clarke: And satest upon a stately bed—Hast raised a stately altar to thy idols; probably alluding to that which Ahaz ordered to be made, after the similitude of that which he saw at Damascus. The bed here is in allusion to the sofas on which the ancients were accustomed to recline at their meals; or to the couches on which they place Asiatic brides, with incense pots and sweetmeats on a table before them.

Ezekiel 23:42

And a voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with the men of the common sort were brought Sabeans from the wilderness, which put bracelets upon their hands, and beautiful crowns upon their heads.

Clarke: And a voice of a multitude—This seems to be an account of an idolatrous festival, where a riotous multitude was assembled, and fellows of the baser sort, with bracelets on their arms and chapters on their heads, performed the religious rites.

Sabeans: This Hebrew word may also be read as “drunkards.” The nomadic peoples east and south of Israel were considered uncivilized and repugnant by the Hebrews.

³⁸ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:40–44). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 23:43

Then said I unto her that was old in adulteries, Will they now commit whoredoms with her, and she with them?

Constable 43-45: The Lord marveled that the nations would find Samaria and Jerusalem attractive partners since they had proved to be such unsatisfying lovers for so long. Yet they did. There is hardly anyone more pathetic and disgusting than an old whore. However, righteous people would pass judgment on the sisters as adulteresses who had blood on their hands. The enemies of Israel were righteous in judging her, not that they were right with God spiritually. They may have even been more righteous in their conduct than the Israelites. Other interpreters believe that the righteous in view may be the spiritual leaders of the remnant of faithful believers in Israel (cf. Deut. 22:13-21).

Ezekiel 23:44

Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women.

Ezekiel 23:45

And the righteous men, they shall judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of women that shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands.

Clarke: **And the righteous men** *anashim tsaddikim*. The Chaldeans, thus called because they are appointed by God to execute judgment on these criminals.

Wycliffe 45-49. *The adulteress put to death by righteous men.* **Righteous men.** Perhaps the meaning is that the moral sense of the community (not the Chaldeans) would pass judgment on the adulteresses (cf. vv. 24, 47; 16:40). 47. **Stone them.** Stoning was the punishment for adultery prescribed by the Law (cf. 16:38-40; Deut 21:21). 48. **Taught.** Warned by a public example (cf. verse 10; 16:41). 49. **Shall be requited** (RSV). So the Targum. **You shall bear the penalty** (RSV). Cf. verse 35; Lev 20:20.³⁹

BKC 45-49. God said that righteous men would sentence them to the punishment adulteresses deserved. Who were these “righteous men”? Certainly they were not the nations that ultimately destroyed the sisters, because those nations had previously committed adultery with them. Most likely the “righteous men” were the prophets of God raised up to denounce sin and pronounce judgment. They functioned like elders who decided the fate of someone accused of fornication (cf. Deut. 22:13-21).

The judgment for adultery was death (Lev. 20:10), generally by stoning (cf. Lev. 20:27; John 8:3-5); and the judgments for idolatry in a city were the sword and fire (Deut. 13:12-16). These judgments would be enacted against these “sisters.” The mob—a

³⁹ Pfeiffer, C. F. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible commentary : Old Testament* (Eze 23:45). Chicago: Moody Press.

derisive way of referring to the foreign nations—would stone them and cut them down with ... swords, and flames would engulf their houses. These are the same judgments Ezekiel pronounced earlier (Ezek. 16:40-41). They would provide a warning to other nations.⁴⁰

OTS Their Punishment (23:45–49).

In comparison to the sisters, those who brought judgment were “righteous men.” Both sisters deserved the judgment of adulteresses and the judgment of women who had shed blood. Therefore, the Lord called for a company to come against the sisters. They were to be given over to “terror and plunder.” The company would stone them, then cut them down with swords. Their sons and daughters would be slain, their houses burned. By this radical means God would force the lewdness to cease from the land. Through the experiences of Oholah and Oholibah other women, i.e., nations, would learn not to commit lewdness. The Lord would requite the lewdness of the sisters. They would bear the penalty of worshipping idols. In this experience they would come to have a better understanding of the nature of God (23:45–49).⁴¹

Alarming, those God would use to judge Samaria and Jerusalem (Assyria and Babylon respectively) are here called righteous. Obviously this does not describe their standing before God or their way of life. Instead, it underlines their role as instruments of God’s just judgment (see vv. 46, 47; Deut. 22:13–30).

Ezekiel 23:46

For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled.

Constable 46-49: The Lord commanded a group of soldiers to attack these cities and to terrorize and plunder them. These invaders would stone the guilty (the punishment for adulterers and murderers in the Mosaic Law), slay them and their children with their swords, and burn their houses. Thus the Lord would cause such shameful unfaithfulness to cease from His land (cf. 22:15), and He would teach other nations not to do as these two "women" had done. Samaria and Jerusalem would bear their punishment for practicing idolatry, and they would learn that Yahweh is God. "While most parables and messages concerning sin in the Old Testament seek to produce repentance, that is not so here. The message closed with a note of finality."

ESV 46–49: Again, punishment is visited on the cities and the countryside surrounding them (sons and ... daughters, v. 47; cf. vv. 4, 10, 25).

⁴⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 23:45–49). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴¹ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 23:45–49). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Ezekiel 23:47

And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire.

Shall stone them with stones—As they did adulteresses under the law. See Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22, compared with John 8:3.

Stoning was the prescribed punishment for adultery (Deut. 22:22-24).

Ezekiel 23:48

Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness.

Thus will I cause lewdness to cease—Idolatry; and from that time to the present day the Jews never relapsed into idolatry.

Ezekiel 23:49

And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sins of your idols: and ye shall know that I *am* the Lord GOD.

Missler: How interesting. There were two crimes in the Old Testament that were capital crimes punishable by stoning: murder and adultery.

In our culture we do not seem to get all upset when someone murders somebody else; we tend to wink and make situational comedies or popular entertainment on adultery. But in God's eyes, and in Israel, both of them were capital crimes and with the same punishment: stoning. (Deuteronomy 21 and 22.)

Obviously they stoned literally. The week Jesus was betrayed He said, "Not one stone will be left upon another, because you did not recognize the day of your visitation." The whole Temple Judgment and the fall of Jerusalem in 70A.D. had that flavor.

In the Book of Revelation, one of the key judgments is hailstones of 200 talents each! **Ye shall bear the sins of your idols**—The punishment due to your adultery; your apostasy from God, and setting up idolatry in the land.

