

Ezekiel 23 – Two Sisters, One Broken Covenant, and the Jealous Love of God

1. Two Sisters and One Story of Unfaithfulness (Ezekiel 23:1–4)

“The word of the Lord came again to me, saying: ‘Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They committed harlotry in Egypt, they committed harlotry in their youth... Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters.’” (Ezekiel 23:1–4, NKJV)

God gives Ezekiel a vivid parable: two sisters, both of whom belong to Him, yet both become unfaithful.

- Oholah (“Her tent”) represents Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Oholibah (“My tent is in her”) represents Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, the southern kingdom, where God had placed His temple.

God uses the language of marriage and prostitution to describe spiritual unfaithfulness. The nation was meant to belong to Him alone—He had entered into covenant with them. But they took the affection, trust, and loyalty that belonged to the Lord and gave it to idols and foreign powers.

The point is not crude imagery for its own sake. God is showing how deeply it wounds His heart when His people turn away from Him. He is not a cold judge; He is a faithful Husband whose love has been despised.

2. Oholah (Samaria): Idolatry and Assyria (Ezekiel 23:5–10)

“Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians...” (Ezekiel 23:5, NKJV)

Samaria, the northern kingdom, was the first to plunge into open idolatry:

- They lusted after the Assyrians—their power, culture, and gods.
- They imported Assyrian worship, erecting idols and altars (see also the history in Kings).
- They trusted in political alliances and foreign armies instead of trusting in the Lord.

Their spiritual “harlotry” was not just false worship; it was **a transfer of trust**—they stopped relying on God and started relying on human power and idols.

So God allowed Assyria to turn on them. The very nation they chased after became the instrument of their judgment (Ezekiel 23:9–10). Samaria fell, and the northern kingdom was scattered.

You would think that would be a loud warning to Judah.

3. Oholibah (Jerusalem): Seeing and Still Not Learning (Ezekiel 23:11–21)

“Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her lust than she, and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister’s harlotry.” (Ezekiel 23:11, NKJV)

Jerusalem saw what happened to Samaria. They saw that idolatry and compromise led to destruction. But instead of being sobered, they went even further.

- They longed for Assyria too. King Ahaz patterned an altar in Jerusalem after an Assyrian altar and introduced foreign worship into the very place where God had chosen to put His name.
- They also set their eyes on Babylon, fascinated by its power, color, wealth, and culture (Ezekiel 23:14–16).
- They invited Babylonian influence in—politically, spiritually, and morally.

God describes Judah as chasing after these nations like an unfaithful wife chasing lovers. This is God's way of saying: "You were never content with Me. You kept thinking someone else could give you more."

Even worse, their idolatry led them to the darkest extremes:

"They have also caused their sons whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food." (Ezekiel 23:37, NKJV)

They sacrificed their own children to false gods—burning them alive to Molech and other idols. It is almost unbearable to read, and God speaks of it with holy horror.

Then, as if nothing was wrong:

"For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it; and indeed thus they have done in the midst of My house." (Ezekiel 23:39, NKJV)

They lived a double life—offering their children to idols and then walking into the temple as if everything was fine. God says, in effect, "I will not accept this kind of worship. I will not be added on to a life that belongs to idols."

4. The Cup of Judgment (Ezekiel 23:22–35)

Because Judah (Oholibah) refused to learn, God tells her:

"I will deliver you into the hand of those you hate... They will deal hatefully with you, take away all you have worked for, and leave you naked and bare." (Ezekiel 23:28–29, NKJV)

The very Babylonians she courted would come to strip her, humiliate her, burn her, and destroy her city and temple. God uses the image of a cup:

"You shall drink your sister's cup, the deep and wide one... You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria." (Ezekiel 23:32–33, NKJV)

Samaria drank that cup first when Assyria destroyed her. Now Judah would drink the same cup of judgment, and there would be no escaping it.

This is not because God delights in punishing. He had warned them over and over again. He had sent prophets. He had shown mercy. But they would not turn, and judgment was the last tool to get their attention and vindicate His holiness.

5. The Double Sin: Killing Children and Pretending to Worship (Ezekiel 23:36–39)

Then God puts His finger on the most shocking part:

“They have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. They have committed adultery with their idols, and even sacrificed their sons whom they bore to Me, passing them through the fire, to devour them.” (Ezekiel 23:37, NKJV)

And then:

“For after they had slain their children for their idols, on the same day they came into My sanctuary to profane it...” (Ezekiel 23:39, NKJV)

They killed their children in the name of false gods, and then they went straight to the temple as if they and God were fine. God calls this what it is: abomination and profaning His name.

We may not throw children into literal fires, but when we refuse to give our lives to Jesus and live for Him, we set an example that can lead our children—and everyone watching us—toward eternal separation from God. If we model a life where God is optional and idols are normal, we are not leading them toward life.

God takes it very seriously when people claim His name but live in open rebellion.

6. The Verdict and the Purpose of Judgment (Ezekiel 23:40–49)

God concludes by declaring that judgment must fall:

“Thus I will cause lewdness to cease from the land, that all women may be taught not to practice your lewdness.” (Ezekiel 23:48, NKJV)

The nations around them would see what happens when a people who know the true God persist in rebellion and hypocrisy. God is not cruel; He is just. His judgment teaches the world that He is holy and that sin has real consequences.

Yet even here, God’s goal is not just to destroy. It is to purge, awaken, and ultimately restore a people who will truly belong to Him. The story of the Bible does not end with judgment. It moves forward to the cross, where God Himself, in the person of His Son, bears the judgment that we deserve.

7. What This Means for Us Today

Ezekiel 23 is not a chapter we read lightly—but it is one we need.

a) Spiritual Adultery Is Still Real

We may not bow before carved images, but we can:

- Trust in money, power, government, or human relationships more than God.

- Give our deepest affection to pleasure, success, or approval instead of to the Lord.
- Live in ways that clearly contradict His Word while still wanting His blessing.

Whenever we shift our trust and love away from the living God to any created thing, we repeat the pattern of Oholah and Oholibah. It might look more respectable, but the heart issue is the same.

b) It Is Dangerous to Ignore Warnings

Judah saw what happened to Samaria and still went further into sin. We have the Bible, church history, and the lives of people around us to show us what sin does. When we ignore those warnings, our guilt is not smaller—it is greater.

If God is putting His finger on something in your life—an idol, a compromise, a double life—do not brush it off. That is His mercy, calling you back before you drink more fully from the cup of consequences.

c) Our Children Are Watching

Israel literally sacrificed their sons and daughters to idols, then walked into the temple. Today, we may not burn our children, but we can sacrifice their souls to the idols of this age by:

- Modeling a life where Jesus is an accessory, not Lord.
- Teaching them to chase achievement, pleasure, or comfort above the kingdom of God.
- Living one way at church and another way at home.

God has entrusted children to us. They are not ours to offer to idols; they are His. He calls us to lead them toward Christ, not away from Him.

d) God's Jealousy Is the Jealousy of Love

God's anger in this chapter comes from love betrayed. He had rescued Israel, entered into covenant with her, blessed her, and called her His own. His jealousy is not petty; it is the holy passion of a God who wants His people to know life, not death.

The same God has shown His love for us in an even deeper way: He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to stand in our place.

8. The Cross and the Empty Tomb: Our Only Hope

The people in Ezekiel's day broke their covenant again and again. If we are honest, so have we. We have all, in some way, played the part of the unfaithful spouse. We have loved other things more than God, ignored His warnings, and tried to mix sin with worship.

But God did not leave us there.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this broken world and lived a perfectly faithful life—loving the Father with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then He went to the cross:

- He shed His blood to pay for our sins.
- He bore the judgment that we deserve for our idolatry, hypocrisy, and rebellion.
- He drank the cup of wrath in our place.

When Jesus cried, *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30, NKJV), the debt was fully paid. On the third day, He rose from the dead, and His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. The One who tells the truth about sin is also the One who gives His life to save sinners.

Because of the cross and the empty tomb:

- No matter how badly you have failed, you can be forgiven.
- No matter how deep your unfaithfulness, you can be made clean.
- No matter how long you have run, you can come home.

A Challenge for Believers

If you already belong to Jesus, Ezekiel 23 calls you to serious self-examination:

- Are there “lovers” you are chasing—habits, relationships, ambitions—that compete with your love for Christ?
- Are you in danger of living a double life—worshipping on Sunday while knowingly clinging to idols during the week?
- Are you setting an example that leads others, especially your children or younger believers, toward Jesus—or away from Him?

God is not calling you to despair, but to repentance and renewal. Because Jesus shed His blood for you and rose again, you do not have to stay in compromise. You can turn back today.

You might pray:

“Lord, I do not want to be like Oholah and Oholibah. I confess that I have often loved other things more than You. I ask You to forgive me, cleanse me, and tear down every idol in my heart. Thank You that Jesus shed His blood for my sins and rose again. I ask You to fill me with Your Spirit and make me faithful to You in my thoughts, my choices, my relationships, and my home. Help me to live in a way that draws others toward You, not away from You.”

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you have never truly given your life to Jesus, Ezekiel 23 is a warning and an invitation.

The warning is real:

To live without God, to worship idols of any kind, and to pretend all is well is to move toward judgment. There is a “cup” at the end of that road, and you do not want to drink it.

But the invitation is greater:

Jesus has already taken the judgment you deserve. He shed His blood on the cross for your sins. He rose again on the third day, and His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He stands ready to forgive, cleanse, and make you new if you will turn to Him.

You might say to Him:

“God, I admit that I have sinned and gone my own way. I have trusted and loved many things more than You. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, that He shed His blood to save me, and that He rose again and is Lord. I turn from my sin and my idols and give my life to Jesus. Please forgive me, cleanse me, and make me Your own. Teach me to follow You from this day forward.”

If you truly turn to Him, He will not turn you away.

The God who judged unfaithfulness in Ezekiel 23 is the same God who, in love, provided the cross and the resurrection so that you can be forgiven, restored, and brought into a living relationship with Him.