

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 10: Two Sisters; the Boiling Pot; the Prophet's Loss

Ezekiel 23:1-24:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

To expose idolatry and worldly trust as spiritual adultery against the God who is faithful, and to warn that sin left unrepented, like rust in the pot, must finally be dealt with in the fire of judgment.

To handle the death of Ezekiel's wife with pastoral tenderness, drawing from it the seriousness of God's holiness, the costliness of obedience in grief, and the call to hold our dearest treasures with open hands before the Lord who reigns now over our joys and sorrows.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does the allegory of Oholah and Oholibah teach about the nature of idolatry as spiritual adultery, and why does God describe Israel's alliances with the nations in such painful terms rather than in milder language?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord describes two sisters, daughters of one mother, who played the harlot in Egypt in their youth; Oholah is Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

Oholah lusted after the Assyrians, her neighbors arrayed in splendor, and defiled herself with their idols, never giving up the harlotries she had learned in Egypt.

For this the Lord gave her into the hand of her lovers, the Assyrians on whom she doted, who stripped her, took her children, and slew her with the sword.

The names mean roughly 'her tent' and 'my tent is in her,' hinting that Samaria's worship was her own invention while Jerusalem held the dwelling place God had appointed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The frank sexual imagery offends some readers; it is prophetic language for the depth of covenant betrayal, not gratuitous, and should be taught soberly.
- The names Oholah and Oholibah carry meaning that illumines the contrast between Samaria's self-made worship and Jerusalem's appointed sanctuary.
- Some treat Samaria's fall as merely political; the text reads it as the Lord's judgment for idolatry and misplaced trust.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God use the imagery of marriage and adultery to describe idolatry?
- How did trust in Assyria become spiritual unfaithfulness rather than wise diplomacy?
- What 'harlotries learned in Egypt' do God's people carry from their past into the present?

Question 2

Student Question:

Where have you, like the younger sister who saw her elder sister's ruin and sinned worse, failed to learn from the falls of others around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Oholibah, Jerusalem, saw her sister's ruin yet became more corrupt, doting on Assyrians and then on the Babylonians whose images she saw portrayed in red upon the wall.

She sent messengers to Chaldea and was defiled by them, until her soul turned from them in disgust even as it had turned from the Assyrians.

Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth in Egypt, sinking deeper rather than turning back to the Lord.

Jerusalem's greater light and her sister's example should have warned her, but greater knowledge only deepened her guilt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Some ask why Judah is judged more harshly than Samaria; the answer is that she sinned against greater light and a clear warning already given.
- The portrayal of Babylonians on the wall reflects real fascination with foreign power and culture, a turning of the heart away from God.
- The pattern of desire turning to disgust and yet returning to sin illustrates the bondage of idolatry.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does greater knowledge of God bring greater responsibility?
- How does fascination with worldly power draw the heart from the Lord?
- Why do people return to sins that have already left them empty?

Question 3

Student Question:

Oholibah saw what befell Oholah, Samaria, yet went further in corruption than her sister (23:11). What does this teach about the responsibility that comes with greater warning and greater light?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord declares He will stir up Oholibah's former lovers against her, the Babylonians and their allies, to come against her with weapons, chariots, and a great assembly.

They will execute judgment, cutting off her nose and ears, taking her sons and daughters, and consuming her remnant with fire for her harlotry.

She must drink her sister's cup, deep and wide, the cup of horror and desolation, and gnaw its shards in her anguish.

Because she forgot the Lord and cast Him behind her back, she must bear the consequence of her lewdness and her harlotries.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The severity of the punishment reflects ancient penalties for adultery and is meant to convey the gravity of covenant betrayal, not to model literal practice.
- The 'cup' is a recurring biblical image for the portion of judgment a people must drink, here passed from sister to sister.
- 'You forgot Me and cast Me behind your back' names the root sin beneath all the rest, the abandonment of God Himself.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to cast God behind your back, and how does it happen gradually?
- Why must Jerusalem drink the same cup as Samaria?
- How does forgetting God lie at the root of every other sin named here?

Question 4

Student Question:

In what areas of your life do you trust worldly powers, securities, or relationships the way Judah trusted Egypt and Assyria, rather than resting in the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord calls Ezekiel to declare to both sisters their abominations: adultery, blood on their hands, idol worship, and even passing their children through the fire.

They defiled His sanctuary on the same day and profaned His Sabbaths, coming from idol shrines into His house to do so.

Righteous men will judge them as adulteresses and as women who shed blood, and the assembly will stone them and cut them down.

So lewdness will be purged from the land, and all women, that is all peoples, will be warned not to imitate their sin and to know that He is the Lord God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Passing children through the fire refers to child sacrifice to idols, the lowest depth of Israel's apostasy and a grievous shedding of innocent blood.
- Defiling the sanctuary 'on the same day' they came from idols shows hypocritical worship, an outward show joined to inward betrayal.
- The judgment is said to warn others; God's purpose in punishment includes teaching the watching nations and generations.

Discussion Prompts

- How does hollow worship that masks idolatry profane the things of God?
- Why is the shedding of innocent blood treated as such a grave defilement?
- How is God's judgment meant to instruct those who witness it?

Question 5

Student Question:

The parable of the boiling pot speaks of a rust so deep that no scouring removes it, only the fire (24:6–13). What does this teach about sin that is left unrepented until only judgment can deal with it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

On the exact day named, the ninth year, tenth month, tenth day, the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem, and the Lord told Ezekiel to write down the date.

The Lord gives the parable of the pot set on the fire, filled with water and the choice pieces of the flock, the thigh and the shoulder and the best bones.

The wood is heaped beneath it and the contents are made to boil, the bones seething within.

The precise dating, given to Ezekiel in distant exile, marks the certainty and accuracy of God's word, later confirmed when news of the siege arrived.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The exact date later proved true when the fall was reported (33:21), confirming that the prophet truly spoke God's word and that God's word comes to pass.

- The 'choice pieces' do not flatter the besieged; in the parable they too are boiled down, for none escape the judgment of the pot.
- Some read the pot only as the cooking image of Ezekiel 11:3; here the figure is turned against the false confidence the people took in it.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the precise fulfillment of the siege date teach about trusting God's word?
- Why does God set the day down in writing for the exiles to remember?
- How does this parable overturn the false security Jerusalem felt within her walls?

Question 6

Student Question:

Is there a 'rust' in your own heart, a sin you have grown used to and stopped scouring, that you need to bring to repentance before it must be dealt with by harder means?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Woe to the bloody city, the pot whose rust is in it and whose rust has not gone out of it; let its pieces be taken out one by one without choosing by lot.

Her blood is in her midst; she set it on the bare rock and did not pour it on the ground to cover it with dust, so that it cried out for vengeance.

The Lord Himself set that blood on the bare rock so it would not be covered, that fury might come up to take vengeance.

The rust pictures a guilt so ingrained in the city that it stains the very vessel, a corruption that ordinary cleansing cannot reach.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Exposed blood that is not covered with dust calls for vengeance in the Law's reckoning; Jerusalem's unrepented bloodshed cried out openly.
- The 'rust' is sometimes read as mere tarnish; it pictures deep, set-in corrosion that has bonded with the metal itself.
- That God set the blood on the bare rock means He so ordered events that the guilt could not be hidden or excused.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does unrepented sin, like exposed blood, cry out for justice?
- What does the deep rust teach about sin that has bonded with the heart?
- How does God bring hidden guilt into the open so it cannot be excused?

Question 7

Student Question:

The siege of Jerusalem began on the very day named to Ezekiel in exile (24:1–2). How does this precise fulfillment confirm that God's word comes to pass exactly as spoken, and how should that shape our trust in His promises and warnings?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord makes the pile great, kindling the fire, consuming the flesh, spicing it, and burning the bones until the pot stands empty and its bronze glows hot.

Yet even the heat does not remove the great rust; her filthiness is lewdness, and because she would not be cleansed she will not be clean again until His fury has rested on her.

The Lord has spoken; it shall come to pass and He will do it; He will not relent, spare, or repent of the judgment.

The fire that empties the pot pictures the siege that will consume the city, the only remedy left for a corruption that refused every milder call to repent.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 'I will not relent' is read by some as cold finality; it is rather the settled justice of God after long patience and repeated, refused calls to repent.
- The rust that the fire itself can barely touch underscores how deep unrepented sin can go before judgment becomes the only remedy.
- This is not fatalism; the city's state is the fruit of her own refusal, consistent with personal responsibility taught in Ezekiel 18.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God say He will not relent after so long withholding judgment?
- What does it mean that some corruption can be removed only by the fire?
- How does the city's hardness, not God's harshness, bring this end upon her?

Question 8

Student Question:

When God has been patient with you over a long-warned sin, have you mistaken His patience for approval, or have you let it lead you to repentance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel: with one stroke He would take away the delight of his eyes, yet the prophet was not to mourn or weep or let his tears flow.

He was to sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead, keep his turban and sandals on, not cover his lip, and not eat the bread of mourners.

So Ezekiel spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening his wife died, and the next morning he did as he was commanded.

Here the prophet who bore so many signs in his body is asked to bear the heaviest in his own home, obeying God even through the deepest grief of his life.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- This passage must be taught with tenderness; it records a real bereavement, and ‘the delight of your eyes’ speaks of a beloved wife, not a mere illustration.
- The command not to mourn does not mean Ezekiel felt no grief; he sighed in silence, and the restraint was itself the costly sign, not an absence of love.
- Some wrongly infer that God is indifferent to grief; rather, this unique sign was given for a unique moment, and Scripture elsewhere honors mourning and weeping.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it cost a person to obey God in the very hour of his deepest loss?
- How can we hold honest grief and faithful obedience together?
- What does this account teach about the tenderness with which we should treat others in their sorrow?

Question 9

Student Question:

God told Ezekiel that the delight of his eyes, his wife, would be taken with one stroke, and that he must not mourn aloud, as a sign that the exiles would be too stunned to mourn the fall of the temple, the delight of their eyes (24:15–24). What does this deeply personal and costly sign reveal about the seriousness with which God regards the profaning of holy things, about the obedience He asks even in our grief, and about how we are to hold our dearest earthly treasures, including our loved ones, with open hands before Him who alone gives and takes away?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the people asked what these things meant for them, the Lord explained that He would profane His sanctuary, the pride of their power and the delight of their eyes, and that their sons and daughters left behind would fall by the sword.

They would do as Ezekiel had done: not mourn or weep, but pine away in their iniquities and groan to one another.

Ezekiel would be a sign to them, and when it came to pass they would know that He is the Lord God.

The temple was to the people what the wife was to Ezekiel, the delight of their eyes, and its loss would leave them too stunned to mourn in the customary way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Some read the people's silence as hardness; it is rather the numbing weight of a grief so total that the usual rituals fail before it.
- The temple is rightly called 'the delight of your eyes,' yet its loss points beyond the building to the holiness it housed, which they had profaned.
- Premillennial readers long for a rebuilt physical temple here; the New Testament shows God's true dwelling now in Christ and His church, not in a future stone temple (John 2:19–21, Ephesians 2:19–22).

Discussion Prompts

- Why would the people be too stunned even to mourn the temple's fall?
- How was Ezekiel's private grief made a sign to the whole community?
- Where do we today set our hearts on holy things while profaning the holiness behind them?

Question 10

Student Question:

What is the one thing you most fear losing, the delight of your own eyes, and what would it mean this week to surrender it honestly to the God who reigns over both your joys and your griefs, trusting Him with what is dearest to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Lord told Ezekiel that on the day He took from the people their stronghold, their joy, glory, and the delight of their eyes, a fugitive would come to bring the news to him in exile.

On that day Ezekiel's mouth would be opened to the one who escaped, and he would speak and no longer be mute.

So he would be a sign to them, and they would know that He is the Lord.

This promise closes the first great section of the book, binding together the certainty of judgment and the opening of the prophet's mouth when the word is fulfilled.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The lifting of Ezekiel's dumbness, first imposed in 3:26–27, marks a turning point fulfilled when the fugitive arrives in 33:21–22.
- The 'opening of the mouth' shows that God times the prophet's full speech to the fulfillment of His word, vindicating the message.
- The repeated 'they shall know that I am the Lord' frames even judgment as God revealing Himself, holding His justice together with His call that people come to know Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God open the prophet's mouth only when His word has come to pass?
- How does the arrival of the fugitive confirm everything Ezekiel had spoken?
- What does it mean that even judgment is meant to make people 'know the Lord'?