

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 10: Two Sisters; the Boiling Pot; the Prophet's Loss -- Ezekiel 23:1–24:27

These two chapters bring the first great section of Ezekiel toward its close. Chapter 23 tells the painful allegory of two sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, who picture Samaria and Jerusalem. From their youth they played the harlot, lusting after the nations and their idols, trusting in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon rather than in the Lord their husband. The language is deliberately stark, for spiritual unfaithfulness is no small matter, and God will not gild what He hates.

Chapter 24 opens on the very day the king of Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem. The Lord gives the parable of the boiling pot, a cauldron caked with rust that no scouring can cleanse, set on the fire with its choice pieces until even the bones burn and the rust is consumed in the flame. The pot is the bloody city, and the fire is the siege; the rust is a corruption so deep that only the furnace can deal with it.

Then the word of the Lord comes near to Ezekiel himself in a way that must have stopped his heart. The Lord tells him that with one stroke He will take away the delight of his eyes, his wife, and that he must not mourn or weep or let his tears run down. The prophet who has carried so many hard signs in his body is now asked to bear the hardest of all in his own home. We should read these verses slowly and gently, with reverence for a man's grief.

Ezekiel's silent sorrow becomes a sign to the exiles. When Jerusalem falls and the temple, the delight of their eyes, is profaned, the people will be too stunned to mourn in the ordinary way. They will pine away in their iniquities and groan to one another. On that day Ezekiel's mouth, long bound to signs, will be opened, and they will know that He is the Lord. Judgment and the certainty of God's word stand together to the end of this section.

Group Discussion: Read Ezekiel 23:1–24:27 together, handling chapter 23 with sober care, for its imagery is frank. Trace how the two sisters stand for Samaria and Jerusalem and how each refused to learn from the other's fall. Move to the boiling pot and ask what the rust pictures. Then read 24:15–27 slowly and quietly, and let the class sit with the weight of Ezekiel's loss before discussing what his silent grief was meant to teach the exiles.

Personal Reflection: Read the account of the death of Ezekiel's wife with a tender heart, remembering that behind the sign stood a real grief borne in obedience. Ask where you have been unfaithful in the small idolatries of the heart that chapter 23 exposes, trusting in worldly powers and comforts rather than in the Lord. And ask whether the things dearest to you, the delights of your own eyes, are held with open hands before God.

Read Ezekiel 23:1–24:27

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Jeremiah 3:6-10, Israel and Judah as two faithless sisters; Hosea 1:2-3, the prophet's marriage made a living sign of God's covenant grief; Job 1:21, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; 2 Kings 17:6-18, the fall of Samaria for her idolatry; James 4:4, friendship with the world as adultery against God.

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