

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

EZEKIEL 21-23

Not only do we give people nicknames... have you ever noticed that we also give nicknames to cities...

New York is known as “The Big Apple.” **Chicago** is “The Windy City.” **New Orleans** is nicknamed, “The Big Easy.” **Detroit** is “Motor City.” **Atlanta** is “Hot ‘Lanta.”

And God gave a nickname to the city of **Jerusalem**. In Chapters 22, and twice in Chapter 24, He calls her by the very unflattering nickname... *“the bloody city.”*

The rulers of Jerusalem were guilty of shedding innocent blood. And God warns *“the bloody city”* of coming judgment. His warnings climax in Chapter 24, when the siege and destruction of the city begin.

Chapter 21 sets the stage, *“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, preach against the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel...”* Remember Ezekiel is in Babylon, along with King Jeconiah, and the Jews taken into exile by the Babylonians in 597 BC. It was the second of three deportations to Babel.

Three times the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem. In 605, 597, and the final siege started in 588 BC. It ended 18 months later, in the summer 586 - with the burning of the city and the destruction of their Temple.

The prophecies given in Ezekiel 21-23 were eleventh hour warnings. They were uttered in August, 591 BC - 3.5 years before the final siege of the city commenced. And notice,

Ezekiel directs these warnings not only against the Temple, but against all *“the land of Israel.”*

Verse 3, *“And say to the land of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am against you, and I will draw My sword out of its sheath and cut off both righteous and wicked from you. Because I will cut off both righteous and wicked from you, therefore My sword shall go out of its sheath against all flesh from south to north, that all flesh may know that I, the Lord, have drawn My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return anymore.””*

Notice, both the righteous and wicked will suffer in the coming judgment. Babylonian troops are not going to knock on every door and ask each person if they’ve been bad or good. That’s not how an invasion works.

Often, the righteous are effected by the temporal consequences of God's judgment. Their inconvenience is more than made up for in heaven, but for a season they may have to suffer with the people around them.

In fact, if God chooses to judge our nation, Christians in America may end up victims. God’s judgments don’t always slice with the precision of a surgeon’s scalpel.

At times God’s judgments involve military action, or natural disasters, or economic collapses. God sets His judgment in motion, but then leaves it to its natural course to cut a broad swath across the society at large.

Verse 6, *“Sigh therefore, son of man, with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes.”* God orders

Ezekiel to act out another spiritual skit *or living parable*. He's to utter a sigh. Literally, **moan and groan**.

Hey, a *sigh* is a powerful *sign*...

You're presenting an idea to your boss, and he sighs... You're proposing to your girlfriend and she sighs... You're preaching and tell a great joke, but the congregation sighs... Sighs send a powerful message.

When Ezekiel sighed it got people's attention.

“And it shall be when they say to you, ‘Why are you sighing?’ that you shall answer, ‘Because of the news; when it comes, every heart will melt, all hands will be feeble, every spirit will faint, and all knees will be weak as water. Behold, it is coming and shall be brought to pass,’ says the Lord God.” When news arrives in Babylon of Jerusalem's destruction *everyone* will sigh.

Notice too, their **“knees will be weak as water.”**

Did you know the expression, **“weak as water”** comes from the Bible. In fact, I'm a bit of a collector of modern cliches with biblical origins. Here're a few...

“Escaped by the skin of my teeth,” Job 19:20 - **“A drop in the bucket,”** Isaiah 40:15 - **“Rise and shine,”** Isaiah 60:1 - **“Catch my breath,”** Job 9:18 - **“A hole in the wall,”** Ezekiel 8:7 - **“A little bird told me,”** Ecclesiastes 10:20 - And the list goes on and on...

Verse 8, **“Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord!’ Say: ‘A sword, a sword is sharpened and also polished! Sharpened to make a dreadful slaughter, polished to flash like lightning!**

Should we then make mirth? It despises the scepter of My son, as it does all wood.” This sharp sword was the Babylonian army.

Pagan troops were acting as the sword of the Lord.

Notice God says His sword will strike “the scepter of My son.” The “scepter” was the royal authority that belonged to the sons of David... Ultimately the monarchy boils down to just one Son, God’s Son. Messiah, our Lord Jesus, is God’s only begotten Son.

Yet the scepter - the kingly authority at the time of Ezekiel - will go the way of wood. It’ll be cut into pieces. Like a limb going through a wood chipper...

“And He has given it to be polished, that it may be handled; this sword is sharpened, and it is polished to be given into the hand of the slayer.’ “Cry and wail, son of man; for it will be against My people, against all the princes of Israel. Terrors including the sword will be against My people; therefore strike your thigh.” *Striking your thigh* was a symbolic means of showing disgust.

“Because it is a testing, and what if the sword despises even the scepter? The scepter shall be no more,” says the Lord God. “You therefore, son of man, prophesy, and strike your hands together.” “*Striking your hands*” like striking your thigh was a sign of angst.

When Babel comes against Jerusalem, God’s people will “*strike their thigh*” and “*strike their hands,*” but won’t bother to bow to their knees and humble their hearts.

“The third time let the sword do double damage. It is the sword that slays, the sword that slays the great men, that enters their private chambers.” The third and final Babylonian invasion was the most decisive.

The sword of the Lord did “*double damage.*”

King Zedekiah had acted treacherously toward the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar. He refused to submit to the Gentile’s authority. Nebuchadnezzar had enough of the Jews rebellion and launched this attack.

Verse 15, “I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that the heart may melt and many may stumble. Ah! It is made bright; it is grasped for slaughter: “Swords at the ready! Thrust right! Set your blade! Thrust left - wherever your edge is ordered!

Ezekiel hopes God’s people get *the point!*

God’s judgment is inevitable! Verse 17, “I also will beat My fists together, and I will cause My fury to rest; I, the Lord, have spoken.” God will land a knock-out punch. His people, Judah, will go down for the count.

“The word of the Lord came to me again, saying: “And son of man, appoint for yourself two ways for the sword of the king of Babylon to go; both of them shall go from the same land. Make a sign; put it at the head of the road to the city. Appoint a road for the sword to go to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah, into fortified Jerusalem. For the king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination: he shakes the arrows, he consults the images, he looks at the liver.” Ezekiel was to

make a **sigh** and a **sign**. God said to put a road sign at a fork in the road. One arrow pointed to Ammon - the other to Judah. Nebuchadnezzar would choose his destination.

And notice how the pagan king went about making his decision. He formed his battle plans through occult divination. And here Ezekiel mentions three forms...

“He shakes the arrows...” He’d throw down his arrows and go which way they pointed. - *“He consults images...”* The images were teraphim or good luck charms. The rabbis said they were mummified heads of sacrificed children... And he *“looks at the liver...”*

Since the liver was full of blood the ancients saw it as the source of life. A sheep was sacrificed; then its liver scrutinized. Marks or discoloration had meaning. Today’s name for this type of sorcery is **haruspicy**.

So the Babylonian king is at a crossroads deciding whether to march his army to Ammon or Jerusalem.

“In his right hand is the divination for Jerusalem: to set up battering rams, to call for a slaughter, to lift the voice with shouting, to set battering rams against the gates, to heap up a siege mound, and to build a wall.

And it will be to them like a false divination in the eyes of those who have sworn oaths with them; but he will bring their iniquity to remembrance, that they may be taken. “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear - because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand.” In other words, don’t think Nebuchadnezzar’s

decision to take the road to Jerusalem had anything to do with his superstition or occult practices. God was directing him.

It's not that God condones occult guidance. The point of the passage is that God is sovereign. He works behind the scenes - God even overrides and manipulates all things - to accomplish His will.

In verse 25 a heavy judgment falls on the heir to the throne of David. At the time, it was the Jewish King Zedekiah, **“Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord God: “Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same.”** The Judean king will lose his royal turban (*aka, his crown*).

“Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted.

Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.” This is an ominous judgment.

The Davidic throne will be overthrown. It ***will no longer exist, until He comes whose right it is...***”

In Genesis 49:10, before Israel became a nation, God promised that an eternal King would come from the tribe of Judah... In 2 Chronicles 17 God narrowed the King's pedigree to the family of David... The Jews even referred to this coming King, or Messiah, as **“the branch.”** He would be a branch of David's family tree.

But since 586 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed, and King Zedekiah overthrown, Israel never again had a king to rule

over them... *Babylon and Persia appointed governors... Afterwards, for a time Judah was ruled by a clan of priestly warriors called **the Maccabees**... Rome installed a puppet king, Herod, but he was Idumean, not Jewish... Even today, Israel is not a monarchy. It's a Parliamentary democracy with a President and Prime Minister, but no king...*

Again, after Kings Jeconiah and Zedekiah, Israel has never had a descendent of David sit on its throne.

Jewish scholars say that in 70 AD when the Romans burned the Temple, its extensive genealogical libraries were lost forever. That means no one living after 70 AD can produce proof of their pedigree, to lay claim to the throne. If Messiah had not arrived before 70 AD there would never be a King in Israel, since no one could possibly prove their ancestry back to David.

But that's why Matthew and Luke were so careful to preserve the genealogies of Jesus - through his step-father, Joseph (Matthew), and his mother, Mary (Luke).

What we sometimes read and describe as *boring begots* are actually God's means of proving that Jesus is the one spoken of by Ezekiel "*whose right it is.*"

The Davidic throne belongs to Jesus, and one day He'll return to rule... When Jesus was born the Angel told Mary, "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Our big concern today is human rights or individual rights. Everyone cares about **their right** to this or that.

But never forget Jesus is the only One with *the right to rule*. And as you study the Scriptures you'll discover His right encompasses heaven and earth - including our hearts! We are not our own. We've been bought by Jesus. He has won the right to rule over our lives.

Our best choice is to surrender our rights and let Him rule over our lives. If we fight Him, we are sure to lose.

Verse 28, “And you, son of man, prophesy and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God concerning the Ammonites and concerning their reproach,’ and say: ‘A sword, a sword is drawn, polished for slaughter, for consuming, for flashing...’” I once officiated a military wedding at the Citadel in SC. The newlyweds passed threw a line of soldiers and under an arch of shiny, flashing swords.

Those swords flashed for *celebration*, but these that Ezekiel mentions are for *devastation* - and slaughter.

Remember, the Babylonian army took the fork in the road to Jerusalem, not Ammon. *But what about the Ammonites, will they escape the judgment of the Lord?*

“While they see false visions for you, while they divine a lie to you, to bring you on the necks of the wicked, the slain whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end. ‘Return it to its sheath. I will judge you in the place where you were created, in the land of your nativity. I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow against you with the fire of My

wrath, and deliver you into the hands of brutal men who are skillful to destroy.”

Not only did the Babylonians conquer Jerusalem, they also defeated Rabbah, the Ammonite capitol. And rather than slaughtering them there, the Babylonians brought them back to Babel - the place of their nativity.

Ammon’s father was Lot, and thus, was from Babel.

“You shall be fuel for the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land. You shall not be remembered, for I the Lord have spoken.” Notice, another cliché with biblical origins. How many times have you heard, “*fuel for the fire.*” Did you know it comes from Ezekiel 21?

Chapter 22, “Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Now, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yes, show her all her abominations!” Here’s the infamous name, “*The Bloody City.*” The imagery occurs 7 times in the chapter.

“Then say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “The city sheds blood in her own midst, that her time may come; and she makes idols within herself to defile herself.”’

Rebellious, wicked people seldom stop with *rejecting God’s message*, they resist to the extent of *ejecting the messenger*. Down through the centuries stubborn Jews persecuted, sometimes even murdered, the faithful men and women, prophets and prophetesses, that God sent to awake His people from their spiritual slumber.

Stephen asked in Acts 7:52, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” Jesus said in Luke 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and

stones those who are sent to her.” The city of Jerusalem had done plenty to earn its nickname.

Verse 4, “You have become guilty by the blood which you have shed, and have defiled yourself with the idols which you have made. You have caused your days to draw near, and have come to the end of your years; therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all countries. Those near and those far from you will mock you as infamous and full of tumult. “Look, the princes of Israel: each one has used his power to shed blood in you. In you they have made light of father and mother; in your midst they have oppressed the stranger; in you they have mistreated the fatherless and the widow.” In addition to their violence against the prophets God sent them, and their spiritual authority - Jerusalem had resisted all authority, even the natural authority of father and mother...

Sad, but much of the message espoused by today’s society is similar. Shake off the oppression of authority and be yourself. March to your own drumbeat.

Notice too, they oppressed the stranger - mistreated the orphan and widow. I’ve heard it said, “You can tell the character of a society by how it treats its weakest.”

And when you factor in how America has sanctioned the killing of “*weakest*” - our unborn. Since 1973 Uncle Sam has the blood of 58 million aborted babies on his hands. If ever there was “*a city of blood,*” it’s the USA.

Verse 8, “You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths. In you are men who slander to cause

bloodshed; in you are those who eat on the mountains; in your midst they commit lewdness.”

Ezekiel isn't picturing a Saturday picnic in the North Georgia mountains. The Canaanite fertility cults met on the mountains - even on the Sabbath. They had zero regard for God and His Law. Ezekiel is referring to the pagan festivals associated with the people's idolatry.

These cults worshipped gods and goddesses with lewd sexual practices, orgies, and perversions. Stuff that would make modern day pornographers blush.

“In you men uncover their fathers' nakedness; in you they violate women who are set apart during their impurity. One commits abomination with his neighbor's wife; another lewdly defiles his daughter-in-law; and another in you violates his sister, his father's daughter.”

Someone has called incest “the last taboo.” In the Israel of Ezekiel's day it was flaunted and celebrated.

Verse 12, “In you they take bribes to shed blood; you take usury and increase; you have made profit from your neighbors by extortion, and have forgotten Me,” says the Lord God. “Behold, therefore, I beat My fists at the dishonest profit which you have made, and at the bloodshed which has been in your midst.”

Verse 14, “Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you?”

I, the Lord, have spoken, and will do it. I will scatter you among the nations, disperse you throughout the countries, and remove your filthiness completely from you. You shall

defile yourself in the sight of the nations; then you shall know that I am the Lord.”” God is going to scatter *the city of blood* and judge them for their sin.

I think you'll find throughout Scripture that generally speaking cities are notoriously evil places. Where sinners gather, sin seems to blossom. Even today, our cities are the hothouses of immorality and blasphemy.

It's interesting, God judges “*the city of blood*” by scattering its residents. In contrast, when He wants to speak to a person He usually draws them away to a remote, isolated place. There're exceptions, but usually holiness is bred in the country - and sin in the city.

Verse 17, “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; they are all bronze, tin, iron, and lead, in the midst of a furnace; they have become dross from silver.” In other words, they're like an impure mix of medals.

“Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As men gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt it; so I will gather you in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. Yes, I will gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. As silver is melted in the midst of a furnace, so shall you be melted in its midst; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have poured out My fury on you.’”

God will put Jerusalem through a smelting process.

The silver was heated to high temperatures, which cause the impurities to rise to the top. They were then skimmed off, and the process was repeated as many times as it took to purge the silver of all its impurities. *Well, God is about to turn the heat up on Jerusalem.*

“And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, say to her: ‘You are a land that is not cleansed or rained on in the day of indignation.’ Everyone was guilty before the Lord - *prophets, priests, princes, and people* - as he demonstrates in the following verses...

“The conspiracy of her prophets in her midst is like a roaring lion tearing the prey; they have devoured people; they have taken treasure and precious things; they have made many widows in her midst.

But not only the prophets, “Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”

And not just the religious leaders, but “Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood, to destroy people, and to get dishonest gain. Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord God,’ when the Lord had not spoken.” Even “The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the

stranger.” This was a sad state of affairs. Jerusalem’s prophets, priests, princes, *and* people were all corrupt.

False prophets delivered lying prophecies, and gave religious cover to wicked princes. Greed permeated the society. Everyone was going to hell in a hand-basket.

So how did God respond... Verse 30, **“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it...”** God sought for a godly man.

In the midst of corruption God knew that the answer was a godly man. Jeremiah was in prison at the time. Ezekiel and Daniel were in Babylon. What was needed was a leader - a man who would take a stand for God!

And this is the way God always works. It’s been said, **“The Church is looking for better methods, but God is looking for better men.”** And this is the answer to today’s crisis... *godly men*. Fathers and husbands willing to stand in the gap and take responsibility for their families, wives, kids, communities, and churches.

Men willing to build walls of protection - walls of morality and spirituality - around those under their care.

Sadly, God shares with Ezekiel the results of His search, **“but I found no one. Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads,”** says the Lord God.”

Ultimately, only one man can fill the gap between God and mankind - and that's the man, Christ Jesus. He is the bridge between a holy God and sinful men.

In an atoning sense, Jesus is the man God found.

But **in a diplomatic sense**, we're all called to be that man. Paul calls us "**ambassadors for Christ.**" In a world where folks have lost sight of God, we can point them to Him. You and I can fill the gap. We can represent God to man, and intercede for man before God.

Moses was a man who stood in the gap. He loved God and loved people. He never turned His back on God, but never forgot Israel. He was loyal to both.

Moses lived in the gap. He declared God's will to Israel, and he pleaded for Israel with God. He lived with one foot on earth and another foot in heaven.

And Moses is an example of how it only takes one. God is looking for "**a man**" - not necessarily *men*. God never begins with a committee or a board. He starts with one person, who'll dare to make a difference.

Perhaps, in your family, your work, your community, your friends... you can be the one to stand in the gap!

Chapter 23, "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 breasts were there embraced, their virgin bosom was there pressed. Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters." *And who are they?*

“As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

Here's the sad story of two *sisters* turned *sluts*.

These sisters were the capitol cities of the Hebrews. Samaria or “*Oholah*” was the capitol of the northern kingdom of Israel. And “*Oholibah*” or Jerusalem was the capitol of the southern kingdom of Judah. “*Oholah*” means “her tent.” “*Oholibah*” means “my tent in her.”

Remember, after the death of Solomon, the northern ten tribes succeeded from the southern two tribes to form a separate kingdom under their own leader.

To keep his people distinct, King Jeroboam of Israel concocted a rival religion. He didn't want his subjects returning to the southern kingdom and worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem, so he set up a rival system of sacrifice in his own borders - in Bethel and in Dan.

He even established their own priesthood and feasts.

Supposedly, they were still worshipping Jehovah, but it was no longer in the way He wanted to be worshipped. God was clear, He had only one Temple and sacrifice and priesthood - the one in Jerusalem. God considered the religion of Jeroboam to be idolatry.

This is why He calls Samaria “*Oholah*” or “her tent.” She was not God’s dwelling, but a tent of her own making... Whereas, Jerusalem was “*Oholibah*,” “my tent in her.” God’s tent or *Temple* was in Jerusalem.

Always remember **it’s not enough to worship God, we must always worship Him in the way He wants to be**

worshipped. Worship that has to be convenient for me, or socially acceptable, is not real worship.

It's easy to say we love God, but if we aren't willing to come to God on His terms; then our love is suspect.

Verse 5 continues the story of Samaria, “Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians, who were clothed in purple, captains and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses. Thus she committed her harlotry with them, all of them choice men of Assyria; and with all for whom she lusted, with all their idols, she defiled herself. She has never given up her harlotry brought from Egypt, for in her youth they had lain with her, pressed her virgin bosom, and poured out their immorality upon her.”

And as is often the case in Scripture God uses *sexual infidelity* to illustrate *spiritual unfaithfulness*. Israel had been wed to God, but they broke their vow.

“Therefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted.” Samaria was infatuated with Assyrian idols.

“They uncovered her nakedness, took away her sons and daughters, and slew her with the sword; she became a byword among women, for they had executed judgment on her.” In 722 BC God brought judgment on Israel at the hands of Assyrian warriors.

They sacked Samaria and scattered her people.

Verse 11, “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.”

Now God shifts the spotlight onto Jerusalem. She’d been privy to the example of her northern sister, but she’d learned nothing. Hegel once said, “The only thing man has learned from history is that man learns nothing from history.” This was true of OT Jerusalem.

The Jews had the advantage of watching the plight of Samaria. They saw her compromise and its terrible consequences. *How did they miss the application?*

He continues to speak of Jerusalem, verse 12, “She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.” This refers to an incident in 2 Kings 16. King Ahaz of Judah visited an Assyrian general in Damascus. While he was there he saw a beautiful altar dedicated to an Assyrian idol.

Ahaz commissioned the priest at the time, Urijah, to replicate the altar for use in God’s Temple. This infuriated God - a pagan altar desecrated His Temple.

God says, “Then I saw that she was defiled; both took the same way. But she increased her harlotry; she looked at men portrayed on the wall, images of Chaldeans portrayed in vermilion...” a yellowish red.

“Girded with belts around their waists, flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like captains, in the manner of the Babylonians of Chaldea, the land of their nativity.”

Jerusalem longed to be like Babel. She mimicked her... Notice, Ezekiel considers Chaldea as the birthplace of the Jews. This is because their father, Abraham, was from Ur of the Chaldeas.

“As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their immorality; so she was defiled by them, and alienated herself from them. She revealed her harlotry and uncovered her nakedness.

Then I alienated Myself from her, as I had alienated Myself from her sister. “Yet she multiplied her harlotry in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, when she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.”

The spiritual infidelity of Jerusalem, was ultimately worse than of Samaria. God cut Himself off from her.

Verse 20, “For she lusted for her paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is like the issue of horses.” In other words, Jerusalem acted like a wild donkey in heat. She was consumed with lust - any perversion, any tease - just to excite her.

As we were told in Ezekiel 16:25 (NASB), “You built yourself a high place at the top of every street, and made your beauty abominable; and you spread your legs to every passer-by to multiply your harlotry.”

“Thus you called to remembrance the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians pressed your bosom because of

your youthful breasts.” God traces their spiritual promiscuousness to their time in Egypt. As slaves they worshipped the idols of their oppressors.

“Therefore, Oholibah, thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I will stir up your lovers against you, from whom you have alienated yourself, and I will bring them against you from every side: The Babylonians, all the Chaldeans, Pekod, Shoa, Koa, all the Assyrians with them, all of them desirable young men, governors and rulers, captains and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.’ We’re not sure of the identities of *“Pekod, Shoa, Koa”* - maybe Babylonian generals.

Verse 24, “And they shall come against you with chariots, wagons, and war-horses, with a horde of people. They shall array against you buckler, shield, and helmet all around. ‘I will delegate judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments. I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal furiously with you; they shall remove your nose and your ears, and your remnant shall fall by the sword; they shall take your sons and your daughters, and your remnant shall be devoured by fire.’”

Conquering armies were generally very cruel to their defeated foes - to the point of cutting off appendages, nose and ears - or slaughtering the heirs to the throne.

And the punishment inflicted on a conquered king, was often the same dealt to a prostitute. Her beauty - her nose or ears - would be disfigured. God is saying to Jerusalem, since you’ve played the prostitute don’t be surprised if the Babylonians treat you like one.

Verse 26, “They shall also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewelry. ‘Thus I will make you cease your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt, so that you will not lift your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt anymore. For thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will deliver you into the hand of those you hate, into the hand of those from whom you alienated yourself. They will deal hatefully with you, take away all you have worked for, and leave you naked and bare. The nakedness of your harlotry shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotry.

I will do these things to you because you have gone as a harlot after the Gentiles, because you have become defiled by their idols. You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will put her cup in your hand.’ “Thus says the Lord God: ‘You shall drink of your sister’s cup, the deep and wide one; you shall be laughed to scorn and held in derision; it contains much.

You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You shall drink and drain it, you shall break its shards, and tear at your own breasts; for I have spoken,’ says the Lord God. “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, therefore you shall bear the penalty of your lewdness and your harlotry.’”

Wow, Jerusalem is headed for serious judgment. Don’t think God will watch His bride prostitute herself over and over - bringing shame to His name, and not respond. There comes a point where He punishes her.

And note a root cause of her sin. Verse 35, *“because you have forgotten Me...”* She was guilty of the sin of forgetfulness. A subtle sin can cause great horror.

Did you hear about the man who discovered the cure for amnesia? *His only problem... he forgot what it was.*

The children of Israel had so much to remember that spoke to them about God’s faithfulness - *the parting of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, water from the rock, their sandals didn’t wear out for forty years...*

Think of the miracles they saw... but even miracles from God don’t do any good if you don’t remember...

I wonder how often we’ve forgotten the miracles God did for us? Just last month we were rejoicing over a miracle. Now circumstances have changed, and once again we’re bound up in fear. *Remember the miracles!*

If God did it once, He’ll do it again. Don’t forget Him. *One of the keys to a strong faith is a good memory.*

Verse 36, *“The Lord also said to me: “Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. For 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.”* They’d even stooped to child sacrifice. They aborted their babies to Molech.

“Moreover they have done this to Me: They have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths. 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. “Furthermore you sent for men to come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and there they came. And you washed yourself for them, painted your eyes, and adorned yourself with ornaments.” Like a prostitute, the sisters were a flirt...

They courted the favor of the pagans and their gods.

Verse 41, “You sat on a stately couch, with a table prepared before it, on which you had set My incense and My oil. The sound of a carefree multitude was with her, and Sabeans were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort, who put bracelets on their wrists and beautiful crowns on their heads.

Then I said concerning her who had grown old in adulteries, ‘Will they commit harlotry with her now, and she with them?’ Yet they went in to her, as men go in to a woman who plays the harlot; thus they went in to Oholah and Oholibah, the lewd women.”

The final days of both Samaria and Jerusalem were full of political intrigue and compromise. Both kings bowed to the idols of the pagan nations threatening them - hoping to stave off their invading armies... All the while they never remembered to trust in God!

“But righteous men will judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses, and blood is on their hands.” In the Bible, adultery is equated with the shedding of blood. It’s a violent crime. Malachi 2:16 reads, “For the LORD

God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence."

If you've ever been through a divorce you know how emotionally violent it can be - a part of you gets ripped away. In marriage, two become one - the two don't become one again without some tearing and violence.

The chapter ends, "For thus says the Lord God: 'Bring up an assembly against them, give them up to trouble and plunder. The assembly shall stone them with stones and execute them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn their houses with fire. Thus I will cause lewdness to cease from the land, that all women may be taught not to practice your lewdness. They shall repay you for your lewdness, and you shall pay for your idolatrous sins.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord God.'"

In the end the two sisters will learn the hard way not to play the harlot and forsake the Lord their God.