

## October 11

**Scriptures:** Read Ezekiel 23 & 24

**Key Verse:** "... you shall know that I am the Lord God." (Ezekiel 24:24)

### Overview

Chapter 23 is an allegory which condemns the apostasy of both Samaria and Jerusalem (the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah), represented by two sisters. They continually committed spiritual and political harlotry against their divine spouse, the Lord God. Like chapter 16, this present chapter uses very strong terms to describe their treacherous sins; but the emphasis is not only upon Judah's idolatry, it also displays the disgust of the Lord and Ezekiel because of their alliances with heathen countries. Rather than looking to the Lord and trusting in Him to provide for and help them, they lusted after the power and material things of the pagans. This led to trading relationships and political and military alliances, which brought the people of God into close contact with the heathen — the very thing the Lord had commanded them not to do, lest they become contaminated. Separation from the heathen was imperative in order for the people of God to remain consecrated, pure, and undefiled.

Significantly, Oholah , the name of the older sister in the allegory, means "her [own] tent or tabernacle". Ever since the kingdom was divided, the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, under Jeroboam, rejected the Temple worship at Jerusalem and established calf worship adopted from Egypt, with their main shrine at Bethel (1 Kings 12:27-33). They also instituted Baal worship under King Ahab, largely due to the influence of his wicked wife Jezebel from Phoenecia. The name of the younger sister, Oholibah, means "My tent or tabernacle [is] in her", for the Lord's dwelling place, the Temple, was in Jerusalem.

The sins of Israel (Oholah, 23:5-15) are listed to serve as a background for the judgment that Judah (Oholibah) deserved, for they were both guilty of the same sins against God, including the atrocity of child sacrifice to the heathen god Molech (23:37-39). But the people of Judah were the most guilty (23:11), for they had the privilege of having the Lord's House in their midst and had many opportunities to reform under the godly kings and the many prophets; they also saw Israel's fall, which should have warned them. Rather than learning from Israel's example, they too committed harlotry with even more idols and made more alliances with heathen nations than did Israel (cf. Jer. 3:8, 11). In the providence of God, however, these very nations would form the Babylonian coalition that would judge Judah by their cruel methods (23:24). Judah would have to drink from the same cup of the Lord's fury that Israel (her sister) had drunk many years earlier through the Assyrian captivity (23:31-34; cf. Isa. 51:17; Jer. 25:15-18). The sisters deserved the same penalty prescribed in the Old Testament for an adulterous wife: death by stoning (23:45-47; Deut. 21:21). For the people, however, the Lord had a redemptive purpose. Those who survived the judgment and chastisement would forsake idolatry and know that He is the Lord (23:48-49).

In chapter 24, we see the confirmation of the many prophecies spoken by Ezekiel (from the exile) and by Jeremiah (from Jerusalem). These prophets had given continuous warnings, but they went unheeded. Now the time had come for the people to see the fulfillment with their own eyes. On

the very day that Nebuchadnezzar laid the final siege to Jerusalem, the Lord revealed it to Ezekiel while he was 300 miles away (24:1; cf. 2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 39:1; 52:4). In those days, news traveled by runners, and to reach such a distance would take days. When the messenger finally arrived in Babylon, the people would know for sure that Ezekiel was a true prophet who had heard from God, and the false prophets' lies would be exposed.

To illustrate the siege, Ezekiel was to put a pot of choice cuts (representing the people) over a strong fire and bring it to a vigorous boil (representing the siege). This sign would strongly refute the people's notion that they (the meat) were safe within Jerusalem (the caldron; 11:3), for Ezekiel was to leave the pot on the hot fire until all the contents were burned up, even until the pot was destroyed; this would symbolize the actual fire that would burn Jerusalem, as well as the completeness with which God would purge Jerusalem. The holy city of peace had become "the bloody city" (24:6, 10-13; cf. Jer. 52:13). The sign of the scum in the pot (formed from the blood within the boiled meat) was to further illustrate their guilt in shedding much innocent blood (murdering the righteous and sacrificing children) and not upholding the sanctity of life, for the Mosaic law specified that blood was to be buried (Lev. 17:13-14). The wicked of Jerusalem had spilt much blood and left it out for all to see, which Ezekiel appears to dramatize by removing some pieces of the scum and placing them upon a rock in the clear view of everyone. As God had heard Abie's righteous blood crying out from the ground, so too He heard the blood of the innocent in Jerusalem crying out for vengeance (24:6-8; cf. Gen. 4:10). The remainder of the scum (the blood of the wicked) was to stay in the pot and be consumed (24:11-12).

Yet another sign in chapter 24 was Ezekiel's abstaining from mourning the death of his beloved wife when God had taken her, though inwardly he felt much sorrow. So too, when Jerusalem would be destroyed, the people would feel grief but show no open displays of mourning, for they will know that it was the Lord's doing and will recognize and accept the fact that justice and God's will had been accomplished. At that time, Ezekiel will no longer be constrained but will freely speak the word of the Lord to the captives who escaped death in Jerusalem (24:27).

## **Prayer**

Lord, how majestic is Your name! It is in You that we move and live and have our being. You set the captives free and bring healing to the wounded. Thank You Lord — we praise Your name.