

The Parable of Oholah and Oholibah

Ezek. 23:1-4

Introduction:

1. Two young women, sisters, were living in Egypt.
2. Both of them gave themselves over to prostitution.
3. The oldest was named Oholah (oh HOH luh) and the youngest Oholibah (oh HOL uh buh).
4. "They played the harlot in their youth; in Egypt their breasts were pressed and their virgin bosom was handled."
5. This is the language that God used to describe their violations in Ezek. 23.
6. God said, "Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah."
7. In Ezekiel 16 God had described Jerusalem as a young woman that He had married and lavished with good gifts, only to have her despise Him and go after her many lovers.
8. The theme of a violated marriage covenant permeates this period of the history of God's people, not only in Ezekiel, but Jeremiah and Hosea as well.

Discussion:

- I. God's special covenant relationship with these people traces back to the days of Abraham. (In Deuteronomy Moses warns that generation about breaking their covenant with God. The studies in Ezekiel some 800+ years later address the same issue.)
 - A. Gen. 17:1-14 address the initial covenant with Abraham.
 1. It involved Abraham becoming a father of nations.
 2. It was an everlasting covenant.
 3. It included the promise of the land of Canaan.
 4. Circumcision was the sign of the covenant. The symbolic cutting off of the foreskin symbolized the separation between God's people and the world. They were set apart to God.
 5. The significance of this is evidenced in Gen. 15. Note v. 18 in particular.
 - B. Moses warned those about to go into the land of Canaan about the influence of the world upon God's special covenant people.
 1. He warned them that they should maintain their special covenant relationship with God.
 - a. Deut. 4:23: "Watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord."
 - b. Deut. 5:3: "The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today." This is a reference to the continuation of the covenant marked by God's presence on Mt. Sinai.
 - c. Deut. 5:7: "You shall have no other gods besides Me."
 2. Moses instructed them to teach their children and grandchildren of this exclusive relationship (Deut. 6).
 3. Moses said, "Watch yourself when you enter the land (that you not get focused on houses, cities, cisterns, vineyards, and things). You shall only fear the Lord. You shall not follow other gods, of the peoples who surround you" (Deut. 6:12-14).

4. Moses said, "You shall utterly destroy the Canaanites" (Deut. 7:1-2).
 5. God said, "You shall not intermarry with them for they will turn you from following Me" (Deut. 7:3-4).
 6. Moses said, "So circumcise your heart" (Deut. 10:16).
- C. Now God is describing in Ezekiel 23 how His people had abandoned Him and gone after worldly lovers.

II. Oholah (Samaria) is addressed first (5-10).

- A. "She played the harlot while she was Mine" (v. 5).
- B. The world she was after—the Assyrians.
- C. They are portrayed as desirable young men riding on horses.
- D. Read the complete description.
- E. Ezekiel gives a shorthand description of the barbaric treatment inflicted by the Assyrians. In the annals of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) his actions in Kinabu are reported as follows:

I felled with the sword 800 of their combat troops, I burnt 3,000 captives from them. I did not leave one of them alive as a hostage. I captured alive Hulaya their city ruler. I made a pile of their corpses. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I flayed Hulaya their city ruler (and) draped his skin over the wall of the city Damdammusa. I razed, destroyed, (and) burnt the city Moving on from the city Kinabu I approached the city Tela. The city was well fortified I felled 3,000 of their fighting men with the sword. I carried off prisoners, possessions, oxen (and) cattle from them. I burnt many captives from them. I captured many troops alive: I cut off some of their arms (and) hands; I cut off of others their noses, ears (and) extremities. I gouged out the eyes of many troops. I made one pile of the living (and) one of heads. I hung their heads on trees around the city. I burnt their adolescent boys (and) girls. I razed, destroyed, burnt (and) consumed the city (A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions*, p. 126).

III. Oholibah (Jerusalem) is addressed second (11-21).

- A. She was worse than her sister.
- B. The world she was after—both the Assyrians and the Babylonians.
- C. The language is very graphic.
- D. Read the complete description.

IV. Those they lusted after turned on them and destroyed them.

- A. To Samaria God said (9-10).
- B. To Jerusalem God said (22-35).

V. God calls on Ezekiel to condemn them (36-39).

VI. After all of this and after she was worn out by adulteries she invited others in (40-45).

VII. The penalty (46-49).

VIII. Now there are some obvious lessons to be drawn about marriage commitments from this text. But more than these the message here is that the people of God stand in constant danger of desiring the world.

A. Today, we are the people of God.

1. As such we belong to the Lord purchased with the precious blood of the Lord (1 Pet. 1:19).
2. A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
3. In covenant relationship with God (Matt. 26:28) evidenced by our observance of the Lord's Supper.
4. Therefore let us come out and be separate (2 Cor. 6:14-18).
5. We are vulnerable to the seductive appeal of the world. But let us be aware of our marriage to Christ and be faithful (Eph. 5:26-27). Let us heed well the warning of James: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (4:4).

B. Understand the significance of biblical teaching about marriage, and about adultery.

Understand why adultery is such an abhorrent evil, not only because it perverts the sex act but especially because it violates the covenant bond of marriage. Marital infidelity is self-destructive and brings one under the wrath of God.

C. Only by the grace of God can one overcome the sinful behavior from our youth. Israel was promiscuous in Egypt, promiscuous in Canaan, generation after generation. Unless one maintains their special covenant relationship with God, the temptation to sell one's soul to the desires of the world results in destruction! God jealously desires the spirit He has made to dwell within us. Let every first day of the week and the remembrance of our covenant relationship with the blood of the Lord motivate us to loyalty! Let us be that people of FAITHFULNESS that is the treasure of the Lord.

Conclusion:

1. Have you entered into covenant with the Lord?
2. The blessing of forgiveness awaits you.
3. Be faithful until death!