



Welcome back!

Let's pray.

Once again we have a lot of material to cover. In fact, we have only one less verse than last week.

However, I would like to relate one quick item of current events. This news story comes from the January 16th Jerusalem Post. It was titled, "THE BIBLE IS 'COMING TO LIFE,' PROMINENT CHRISTIAN AUTHOR SAYS".

The article begins by saying, "In his latest book, author Bill Koneig offers a new outlook for Christians: The Bible is coming to life and no one is noticing."

The article is not very long, but there was one quote that really jumped out at me:

"The Bible is playing out right before our eyes. The Jewish prophets of the [Bible] spoke of these days. And we are honored and privileged and blessed to be living in this day."

This is what the Ezekiel Bible Study is all about. God is speaking to us through the prophet Ezekiel, who lived over 2600 years ago, but he saw and wrote about his visions of our world today.

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The slide features a vertical title 'EZEKIEL' on the left, with each letter aligned with a corresponding image of a cityscape at night. The main title 'OVERVIEW' is in a blue box at the top right. Below it, the text 'Sins of Jerusalem; The Wicked Sisters (Ezek 22-23)' is followed by a bulleted list of topics. At the bottom, there is a date '01/19/2018', a name 'B. G. Hirsch - Ezekiel 22-23', and a small icon of a person.

In this lesson we will study chapters 22 and 23 of the book of Ezekiel.

This material contains a lot of unpleasant and graphic language. It was some of the last material taught to young men who were studying to be rabbis, because it has the potential to offend. However, the LORD relates this information precisely to show how offensive the behavior of the people was.

In chapter 22 the LORD will list for us the terrible sins of the people of the city of Jerusalem. He will use the metaphor of a furnace smelting silver to describe the House of Israel. And the LORD will recount how the land and the people are hopelessly corrupt.

Then, in chapter 23, the LORD will once more use allegories to relate the story of, and His judgment upon, the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem.

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Review

- Ezekiel, a priest, a prophet, and a watchman in Babylon continues his ministry to the exiles
- The LORD refused to respond to the elders due to their history of sin
- Throughout scripture, the LORD promised to scatter and restore Israel
- The LORD will bring a sword on Israel and Ammon
- The kingship of Israel ends with Zedekiah

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Let's review.

Ezekiel is a priest from Jerusalem who was taken to Babylon more than 8 years ago in Nebuchadnezzar's second conquest in 598 B.C. Ezekiel is the LORD's prophet and watchman to the exiles in Babylon. We are now quite close to the final siege of Jerusalem, and it is around 590 B.C. as we begin our study.

The last time we met The LORD refused to be inquired of by the elders in exile in Babylon due to their past and current sins. The LORD then related the history of the Jewish people's idolatry from their time in Egypt to the current time in Babylon.

We also saw how the LORD throughout scripture promised to scatter the Jewish people, if they were disobedient to His laws. And He nevertheless promised to restore them to the land. We heard how the LORD promised to restore them a 2nd time. And we discussed that the 1st restoration was from Babylon in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and the 2nd time was on May 14, 1948 when Israel became a nation once again.

We will also see God's use of a sword to proclaim warfare and judgment against Jerusalem, the remainder of the nation of Israel, and against the Ammonites. We saw the LORD declare Zedekiah's reign was at an end, and with the end of Zedekiah's reign, the kingship passed from Israel until Jesus the Messiah sits upon the throne of David.

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List of Sins

- The bloody city: blood or bloodshed used 7 times; דָּם dam = blood
- God has made them a reproach and a mockery to the other nations for her sin
- Ezekiel called to judge Jerusalem
- The LORD lists the violations of the leaders and the people as though in a court room
- The LORD (the true judge) pronounces the sentence of exile and scattering among the nations in order to eliminate their filthiness

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Let's read chapter 22 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 16. *(Read verses 1-16.)*

In this section the LORD speaks to Ezekiel regarding the “bloody city” of Jerusalem. The LORD intends to bring a detailed and specific indictment against Jerusalem and its people. In fact, the LORD places an unusual emphasis on the bloodshed by using the plural form of the word “blood”. The word for blood in Hebrew is דָּם dam. However, the plural דָּמִים dameem is used by the LORD. Seven times the term blood or bloody is used in the first 13 verses.

Because of their abominations, the LORD says He has made Jerusalem a reproach and a mockery to all countries.

Ezekiel is called to act as judge for the case the LORD will bring against Jerusalem and its people.

Chuck Missler states that “God links His honor and dignity among the nations with the actions His people display.” Therefore, when the people conduct abominable practices, then the name of the LORD is profaned, and occasion is given to the enemies of God to blaspheme. We are really in the same boat. People who know we are Christians watch us to see if our behavior is in line with our professed beliefs.

The LORD proceeds with His case starting with the rulers first. He indicts them for many violations of the law including judicial murders, where they have accepted bribes to murder people. The LORD also says they have forgotten Him.

Then the LORD, who is the true judge, basically declares them guilty and passes sentence upon them. God declares that He will scatter them throughout the countries, and that they will learn that He is the LORD.

Last study I read and listed other places in scripture where the LORD said He would scatter and restore the people of Israel. In my daily study, I recently read the 1st chapter of Nehemiah which has the following part of Nehemiah's prayer of repentance and request for forgiveness to the LORD:

Neh 1:8-9 (ESV)

⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples,

⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.'

It is noteworthy that the reason the LORD gives for scattering the people is to remove their filthiness. So, the process of being removed from the source of pollution, Jerusalem and the corrupting influences there, and being in trials in exile and in the diaspora was meant to purge the evil from the people.

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House of Israel like Dross

- The LORD likens House of Israel to dross
- The LORD will gather people to Jerusalem and blow on them with the fire of His wrath
- God will destroy the source of corruption and the incitement to sin
- Fiery furnace metaphor used elsewhere

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Let's read chapter 22 of Ezekiel verses 17 – 22. *(Read verses 17-22.)*

The LORD speaks again to Ezekiel. He likens the House of Israel to dross produced when smelting silver. Smelting is the process of refining metal, and dross is the waste product that is poured or scooped off and discarded or burned off. The LORD says that all of the House of Israel is like bronze, tin, iron, and lead, which are the waste metals of the silver refining process.

The LORD says that in His wrath, He will gather the people into Jerusalem. And as the refiner heats the metal and burns off the dross, even so will the LORD blow the fire of His wrath on Jerusalem to destroy them. Then they will know that He is the LORD. We usually think of the furnace being used to produce purity, but here it is being used to destroy the corruption that prevents purity.

Hebrews 12:29 says, "For our God is a consuming fire." This is one reason to be extremely thankful for His grace. Those who are in Christ will not face His wrath as those who have rejected Jesus will, as it says in 1 Thess 5:9.

The LORD uses the refining fire metaphor elsewhere in scripture, such as Is 1:22-25, Jer 6:28-30, Zech 13:9, and Mal 3:2-4.

The concept of a fiery furnace is a familiar one. The fiery furnace is an idiom of the Tribulation. We are also familiar with the fiery furnace spoken of in Daniel 3, which is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

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Classes of Corruption

- A land without rain and cleansing
- Corrupting Leadership
 - Kings (prophets not the original word)
 - Priests
 - Princes (officials)
 - Prophets (false)
 - People of the land (prominent landholders)
- God could find no intercessor, so He will consume them with the fire of His wrath

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Let's read chapter 22 of Ezekiel verses 23 – 31. (*Read verses 23-31.*)

The LORD speaks again to Ezekiel.

The LORD says that in the day of indignation the land is not receiving rain. Rain is a blessing from God, particularly in such a normally dry land. But this is a land that is in rebellion and deep in corruption. Hence, the LORD is withholding the rain.

The LORD indicts five classes or instigators of corruption in Jerusalem and the nation of Israel. God is in effect calling out the leadership that has influenced and assisted the progression of the people into sin and their decline into abomination.

The 1st group is the kings. The word prophet is not in the original texts. It is the kings who have made themselves rich by taxing and gouging the people. They have done this even to the point of causing the death of many, making many widows.

The 2nd group is the priests. The priests are the keepers of the covenant and instructors in the law of the LORD. But, instead they are not living holy lives. They have sinned by not making people know the difference between what is good and bad, what is clean and unclean. They have disregarded and allowed the people to disregard the Sabbath. The LORD says that He is profaned among them, meaning that His name is profaned.

The 3rd group is the princes or officials. The government officials were supposed to protect the people. Instead, they are using their authority to drain the people of their resources in order to become rich.

The 4th group is the false prophets. We have already seen God's anger at the false prophets. Here the LORD states the false prophets "whitewash" or make allowance for the sins of the leaders rather than condemning them. They speak lies in the name of the LORD, when the LORD has not spoken. This also suppressed the effectiveness of the message of the true prophets.

The 5th group is the prominent landholders. They are extorting and robbing the people. And they are oppressing the poor.

Verse 30 is a famous verse in Ezekiel. The passage says the LORD sought for a man to intercede for the land, so that the LORD would not destroy it, but He found none. In Hebrew the word sought is שָׁקַח baqash (baw-kash'), which means to search out or to strive after.

The Bible speaks of other intercessors. Abraham in Genesis 20 intercedes for Abimelech and his family. Moses in Exodus 32 intercedes to prevent God from destroying the people after Aaron made them a golden calf. And there is the ultimate intercessor, our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ.

However, because the LORD finds no intercessor for the land, He determines to pour out His wrath on Jerusalem and the land as we have heard Him say for many chapters now.

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Oholah and Oholibah

- Allegory of two wicked sisters
- Oholah – “her tent”
= Samaria (northern kingdom)
- Oholibah – “my tent is in her”
= Jerusalem (southern kingdom)
- One Mother = Israel (started as one nation)
- Samaria is “elder” sister though younger
- Compliments chapter 16 – Faithless Bride

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Let's read chapter 23 of Ezekiel verses 1 – 4. (*Read verses 1-4.*)

In chapter 23, Ezekiel is given another allegory to relate to the exiles.

In this case, the LORD speaks of two sisters who were the daughters of one mother. The mother the LORD is speaking of here is the nation of Israel, which began as a unified nation and then broke into a northern and southern kingdom after the reign of Solomon ended. Solomon's son Rehoboam got into a conflict with Jeroboam. The result was the split of ten tribes in the north into the northern kingdom Israel, with its capital of Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah (and Benjamin) with its capital of Jerusalem.

God says that the sisters were harlots in Egypt. This refers to the Jewish peoples idolatry in Egypt. You may remember that last week, in chapter 20, we learned that the LORD said He should have destroyed the people in Egypt for their idolatry, but He did not for His name's sake.

The elder sister's name is Oholah, which means “her tent”. We are told by the LORD that Oholah is Samaria. The LORD uses the term her tent, because the LORD never recognized the worship of Jeroboam and the northern kingdom. You may remember that Jeroboam set up two golden calves in Bethel and Dan, and he told the people of Israel that these were their gods that brought them out of Egypt. There were no good kings in the northern kingdom, only 19 bad and very bad kings.

The younger sister's name is Oholibah, which means “my tent is in her”. The LORD says that Oholibah is Jerusalem. The LORD did recognize the worship in the southern kingdom, and there were 8 good kings. Hence the LORD said that His tent, His temple in this case, is in her. However, there were also 12 bad kings in Israel including the worst, Manasseh.

Samaria is called the elder sister even though, in reality, Jerusalem is far older. This is due to Samaria and the northern kingdom being the first to engage in abomination and to be taken into captivity. This occurred in 722 B.C. more than 100 years before Jerusalem's first conquest in 605 B.C.

This chapter compliments chapter 16 where we had the allegory of Jerusalem and Judah as the LORD's faithless bride. This is where the LORD said, “How sick is your heart.”

As extra credit, read Nehemiah chapter 8, which includes a prayer of confession of their terrible history after their return from captivity in Babylon. Also compare Neh 9:32,34 to the 5 corrupt groups in Ezek 22. (next slide)

EZEKIEL

Story & Judgment of Oholah

- Story and judgement of Oholah much shorter than Oholibah
- Harlot who lusted for Assyrians
- Defiled herself with Assyrian idols
- Continued her idolatry from Egypt
- Given into the hands of the Assyrians
- Taken into captivity and served as a sign to other nations

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Let's read chapter 23 of Ezekiel verses 5 – 10. *(Read verses 5-10.)*

The story of Oholah is much shorter than the subsequent story of Oholibah. The LORD's focus appears to be as always on the groups that ultimately produce the Messiah.

However, the LORD does still say that Oholah was His. Nevertheless, she acted as a harlot who was enthralled with her lover Assyria.

The northern kingdom was sought after Assyria, and she got involved with the worship of her gods and idols.

Despite Samaria's idolatry with the Assyrian gods, she still maintained her idolatry with the Egyptian gods. In fact, the northern tribes never gave up the idolatry they had carried from the captivity in Egypt.

Because of her adultery and her immorality, the LORD causes the northern tribes to be conquered and they go into captivity in Assyria.

Archeological corroboration for this period can be found in the British Museum on a black obelisk that records King Jehu's tribute to Shalmaneser III in 841 B.C.

One interesting note here is that the Oholah the harlot is destroyed by the very nation that was her lover. In the book of Revelation in chapter 17 there is a harlot, Mystery Babylon, that rides a beast. She is also destroyed by the nations that she is riding.

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Story of Oholibah

- Oholibah (Jerusalem) saw the fate of Ohlah, and became even more corrupt
- Lusted for Assyrians and Chaldeans
- She turned away from Chaldeans
- The LORD turned from her open harlotry in disgust like he had from her sister
- She then involved herself with Egypt, whose lewdness and lust is likened to donkeys and horses

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Let's read chapter 23 of Ezekiel verses 11 – 21. (*Read verses 11-21.*)

The LORD now moves on to tell the story of Oholibah, the southern kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem. And it is apparent immediately, that the southern kingdom learned nothing from its observation of the corruption and destruction of their northern sister!

As is true of the people in the nations today, we, by and large, learn nothing from the lessons of history. Hence, we should not be too quick to judge the people of Judah lest we indict ourselves at the same time.

The southern kingdom was enamored with the look and customs and might of Assyria and later of Babylon. They formed political alliances that led to their adoption of the religious practices of those countries. This of course meant that they adopted false gods and fell into the same idolatry as the northern kingdom.

Ultimately, Babylon conquered Assyria. And later, the threat that Babylon posed caused Judah to attempt to align itself with Babylon. This included good king Josiah's campaign at the battle of Carchemish against Assyria and Babylon's enemy Egypt, which cost him his life. Even so, there was no gratitude from Babylon. So, Judah "turned in disgust" from Babylon as our passage said.

Rather than repenting and seeking the LORD, Judah's harlotry had driven the LORD away in disgust.

Still seeking to save herself, Judah tried to align herself with Egypt. But Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt, and, as we know, conquered Jerusalem in 605 B.C.

The LORD uses an unusual metaphor when He says that Oholibah lusted after the Egyptians whose flesh was like that of donkeys and horses. Horses in Egyptian hieroglyphics are symbolic of lustful people. Also, donkeys and horses are used proverbially of the lustful in Jeremiah 2:4, 5:8, and 13:27. These are unusual to us because we don't really use these metaphors in our culture. Although, there are other crude metaphors in common usage that we won't discuss here.

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Judgment of Oholibah

- God will bring Oholibah's alienated "lovers" to deliver His wrath
- The Babylonians and those that were part of their empire and army will bring Judah's destruction as her sister Samaria had been taken
- The punishment will be severe and all her former glory will be destroyed
- Oholibah will drink of the cup of horror and desolation because they have forgotten the LORD

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Let's read chapter 23 of Ezekiel verses 22 – 35. *(Read verses 22-35.)*

After completing the tale of Oholibah's infidelity, the LORD now moves to His judgment of the wicked sister, Jerusalem and the southern kingdom.

God will bring upon Judah the very thing that Judah sought to avoid, by trying to align themselves with the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Egyptians. The southern kingdom attempted to circumvent their destruction, but God will bring their destruction via the very same nations that were her "lovers".

The LORD makes it clear that the Babylonians, who now include the Assyrians as well as other nations, will administer a severe "justice" to Judah. That justice will include mutilation, the cutting off of nose and ears. This was a punishment done to harlots for adultery. The justice would include death by the sword, and the city being "devoured by fire".

God intends that Judah's lewdness and harlotry will be ended. All their longing for Egypt will also end.

The LORD will deliver the nation into the hands of Babylon, who will take everything from them, take the people captive, and leave the city desolate.

The LORD says that Judah will drink the cup of her sister Samaria. It is a cup of horror and desolation, because they have forgotten the LORD and must now bear the consequences.

The cup of God's wrath is a familiar idiom. We see it in Ps 75:8, Is 51:17, Jer 25:15, and Hab 2:16. But, the most significant usage is Matt 20:22, where Jesus asks John and James if they can drink of the cup that Jesus will drink of.

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Judgment of Both Sisters

- God delivers a final detailed indictment of the wicked sisters
- The sisters have shed blood, committed adultery, murdered their children
- They have profaned His Temple
- Prostituted themselves with other nations and idols
- The LORD will bring their total destruction upon them

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Let's read chapter 23 of Ezekiel verses 36 – 49. *(Read verses 36-49 .)*

This final section is a detailed indictment of both sisters, Ohola and Oholibah.

The LORD says that both sisters, Samaria and Judah, have shed blood, committed adultery, and have murdered their children by sacrificing them to idols.

Ohola and Oholibah have profaned the LORD's Temple as we saw in detail in chapter 8.

They aggressively courted foreign nations and prostituted themselves with those nations. They wrongly used the incense and oil meant only for the LORD for themselves.

In the end, righteous men will judge them and treat them as adulteresses.

God says to bring up an assembly or army against the sisters. That assembly will stone the sisters, execute them with swords, and burn their houses with fire. By this process, the LORD will remove their lewdness and idolatry from the land, and their example will be a message to all others. Then they will all know that He is the Lord GOD.

Questions? Please read chapters 24 and 25 for next time.

Let's pray.