

Ezekiel 23

Read Ezekiel 23:1-4: God is describing the history of Judah and Israel's northern tribes with a metaphor of two naughty sisters. Perhaps daughters are used in this story to describe the devaluation that comes from losing one's holiness. Holiness (specialness, preciousness) is what gives us value. Two sisters are used here, to contrast the difference between what happened to the northern kingdom and what happened to Judah. The combined nation Israel at large, is the mother in this story, and throughout scripture she is seen as the wife of Jehovah God. That would sort of make these girls like God's wayward kids; but that would be taking the metaphor beyond its intention. Israel (the nation) was formed in Egypt. Before that it was just known as Jacob's family.

³ So He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. (Genesi 46: 3)

⁴ 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Exodus 19)

The northern 10 tribes are often referred to as Samaria (its capital), or even as Israel. They are being described as the older sister who is named Aholah. She made her money and turned her back on God. Her name means *her own tent*. The tribe of Judah is being called Aholibah. Her name means *my tent is in her*. The younger sister acted out in an even worse way; but she will repent.

Telling this story helps us to understand God's personal investments of time and life and creation and energy to be intimate spiritually with all of us. We can become casual or loose with things that matter greatly to him.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. (Psalm 42:1)

Like a virgin, we are the apple of her suitor's eye. God traded everything to be with us.

⁴⁴ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

A young man will trade everything for that special girl. Another way of saying *holy* is special. A virgin is the most valuable thing that parents have to give away. The ancient middle eastern bride dowries were an indirect form of inheritance. In the case of adultery, the inheritance was forfeited.

We too are a bridge to the future generations in this family of faith. If we go off of the reservation, our kids are not likely to look for God. When we do not walk in faith our entire lineage is broken from the tree of life. We think we only effect ourselves. That view is not even close. There has to be a thread connecting the past generations of faith to the future. We all owe something to Abraham. God kept intervening into humanity to give us our chance to walk hand in hand with God. The Bible could also be described as God’s interventions to connect the past to the future.

There is much pride and satisfaction that goes with giving away your daughter under the right circumstances. God sees believers as precious and valuable. He is excited about spending his life with us. Perhaps God is using the comparison to these once-valued young women to incite our feelings and thoughts. It's not just about keeping to the calling of our faith. It's about making it as personal as it gets.

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. (Revelation 2)

This is why idolatry and betrayal hurt so badly.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7)

Idolatry is often compared to adultery. Both of the young ladies became corrupted in Egypt. They embraced the desires of the Egyptians and their gods. Once you become an easy mark you become an advertised target. There were so many idols in Egypt, that I could not list them all. I just pasted a starter list below.

	Deities (list) [hide]
Ogdoad	Amun and Amunet · Heh and Hauhet · Kek and Kauket · Nu and Naunet
Ennead	Atum · Geb · Isis · Nephthys · Nut · Osiris · Set · Shu · Tefnut
Triads	Theban Triad · Elephantine Triad
A	
Aani · Aati · Abaset · Abtu · Ahmose-Nefertari · Aker · Akhty · Amenhotep, son of Hapu · Amesemi · Am-heh · Ammit · Amu-Aa · Anat · Andjety · Anput · Anubis · Anuket · Apedemak · Apesh · Apis · Apophis · Aqen · Arensnuphis · Arsinoe II · Ash · Assessors of Maat · Astarte · Aten	
B	
Baal · Baalat Gebal · Babi · Banebdjedet · Ba-Pef · Bastet · Bat · Bata · Bennu · Bes · Beset · Buchis	
C	
Cavern deities of the underworld · Celestial Ferryman	
D	
Dedun · Dionysus-Osiris · Djedefhor · Duamutef · Duau	
G	
Gate deities of the underworld · Gengen-Wer	
H	
Ha · Hapi · Hapy · Harmachis · Harpocrates · Harsomtut · Hathor · Hatmehit · Hauron · Hedetet · Hedjhotep · Heka · Hemen · Hemsut · Henet · Henkhisesui · Heqaib · Heqet · Hermanubis · Hermes Trismegistus · Heru-ur · Heryshaf · Hesat · Horus · Hu · Hutchai	
I	
Iabet · Iah · Iat · Igai · Ihy · Ikhemu-sek · Imenet · Imhotep · Imsety · Ipy · Irer · Ishtar · Iunit · Iusaaset	

We also know that the following 40 years in the wilderness was a time of idolatry to that first generation. It was supposed to be a honeymoon between God and his people.

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ² “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. ³ Israel was holiness to the LORD, The firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them,” says the LORD.’ ” ⁴ Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the LORD: “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That

they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters?
(Jeremiah 2)

It was literally a situation where they saw the pillar of fire by night, and the covering cloud by day, and the miraculous daily manna and water for 2.5 million people in the desert...and they thought it was ok to worship their silly figurines? Humans can be so gullible. Sin causes mental illness.

³⁸ “*This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us,* ³⁹ *whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,* ⁴⁰ *saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’* ⁴¹ *And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.* ⁴² *Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’* ⁴³ *You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, Images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’* (Acts 7)

Read Ezekiel 23:5-10: God exposes some details about the northern kingdom (miss Oholah) first. Both girls fell for the pop culture in Egypt, and its world views. It can be almost impossible to reach someone who loves the world. Once you start listening to that garbage, it becomes your truth.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
(1 Corinthians 2:14)

Next, we fast-forward, as the twelve tribes are described after having relocated back to the land of Canaan. The northern tribes are tired of being nobodies and they impressed by the mighty Assyrians. They were impressive and powerful. They had mighty kings instead of prophets. They had colored uniforms instead of tan cloth. They had been racking up military victories. They were going places; and seemed unstoppable. Aholah fell over herself to get the attention and prestige of the Assyrians.

Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. ² And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not as the kings of Israel who were before him. ³ Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute money. ⁴ And the king of Assyria uncovered a conspiracy by Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no tribute to

the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison.⁵ Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. ⁶ In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:1-6)

The northern tribes wanted to be big shots. They had made more money than Judah. They were kind of *done* with their shared history with Judah. So much so, that they even attacked their own relatives.

Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought them to Damascus. Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter. ⁶ For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. (2 Chronicles 28)

Israel attacked Judah. When Israel split into two kingdoms, the northern tribes followed the idolatry from Egypt (2 golden calves). They were turning into something completely different.

²⁵ Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Peniel. ²⁶ And Jeroboam said in his heart, “Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: ²⁷ If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.” ²⁸ Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” ²⁹ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰ Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. ³¹ He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. ³² Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense. (1 Kings 12)

Then the northern tribes went crazy on the Canaanite idols.

In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel; and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. ³⁰ Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. ³¹ And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. ³² Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. ³³ And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (2 Kings 17:29-33)

Life has roadblocks that should cause us to reconsider things and to pray. They are like bumps on the shoulder of the highway. The northern tribes did not re-focus on God. They found other forms of help. That is the problem. Once you become disconnected from God there is nothing to draw you back. The spirit of antichrist means any solution but Christ. If God gives them easy living, they go to party. If he brings them hardship, they turn to something else for help. The people they admired enslaved them and took them captive. God brought in the Assyrian army to take away the wicked northern tribes of Israel. Assyria turned against Israel and forced her to pay tribute. They did not pray to God for deliverance from Assyria. She got re-involved with Egypt for help against Syria...instead of turning to God. She tried to buy her way out of it by luring in an Egyptian alliance. She used the tribute money she was forced to pay Assyria and used it to buy off Egypt. Once Assyria heard about that, they took all of the 10 tribes away to other lands.

The Assyrian King went from status symbol to a hated punisher.

“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hand is My indignation. ⁶ I will send him against an ungodly nation, And against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, To seize the spoil, to take the prey, And to tread them down like the mire of the streets. ⁷ Yet he does not mean so, Nor does his heart think so; But it is in his heart to destroy, And cut off not a few nations. ⁸ For he says, ‘Are not my princes altogether kings? ⁹ Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? ¹⁰ As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, ¹¹ As I have done to Samaria and her idols, Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’ ” (Isaiah 10)

Read Ezekiel 23:11-21: Judah had the full benefit of seeing her big sister go down the drain. That should have been her cautionary tale. Instead, she went into idolatry full bore. Judah became worse than Israel. Both girls were envious of how other ‘legit’ countries were run. God was trying to protect them. We always see the shiny side of things.

4 Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, 5 and said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” 6 But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, “Give us a king to judge us.” So Samuel prayed to the LORD. 7 And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. (1 Samuel 8)

They idolized the mighty Assyrians. After all, they were related way back up the family tree. Judah also thought of the Babylonians as being very impressive. She was going to outdo her sister. The Assyrians and the Babylonians both marched over nations all over the world. They were powerful. They took what they wanted away from all nations. The desire to be just like them almost turned into something like a form of adultery. They drew their impressive cavalries on the wall. These are not super friends who will regard you any different than those they crush. God put an end to both, by showing Judah that this wishful oneness was far from reality. The Assyrians attacked Judah; and Babylon destroyed their city, took them captive and killed many.

After this King Sennacherib of Assyria and all his army surrounded and attacked Lachish. Then he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for King Hezekiah of Judah and all the people of Judah in Jerusalem: 10 Sennacherib king of Assyria says this: “You have nothing to trust in to help you. It is no use for you to stay in Jerusalem under attack. 11 Hezekiah says to you, ‘The LORD our God will save us from the king of Assyria,’ but he is fooling you. If you stay in Jerusalem, you will die from hunger and thirst. 12 Hezekiah himself removed your LORD’s places of worship and altars. He told you people of Judah and Jerusalem that you must worship and burn incense on only one altar. 13 “You know what my ancestors and I have done to all the people in other nations. The gods of those nations could not save their people from my power. 14 My ancestors destroyed those nations; none of their gods could save them from me. So your god cannot save you from my power. (2 Chronicles 32)

12 At that time Berodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13 And Hezekiah was attentive to them, and showed them all the house of his treasures—

the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came from a far country, from Babylon.” ¹⁵ And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.” ¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷ ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the LORD. (2 Kings 20)

The Jews actually drew unclean things on the inside of the temple, like graffiti. That reflects an extremely low view of God.

⁹ And He said to me, “Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.” ¹⁰ So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. (Ezekiel 8)

Read Ezekiel 23:22-35: Now, all of the worldly powers that Judah has called upon will turn on her like rabid dogs. Those soldiers don’t look so noble when they are coming to take you captive. The Assyrians cut off the noses and ears of the Israelis and led them with fishhooks through their face, tied to ropes. They wanted to be cute but became hideous. This extreme treatment was to break them of their quest for more sin.

Read Ezekiel 23:36-49: This seems terribly harsh until you think back on these people frying their babies and fleecing the weak and elderly. Not only did they commit terrible crimes against their own people, but they also completely thumbed their nose at God. They basically tempted God by placing all kinds of idols in his own temple! Some people cannot handle mercy and freedom.