

Ezekiel 23-24

- We now reach the final, climatic end to the first half of Ezekiel, the part of the book devoted to chastising Israel for their unfaithfulness
 - Over the past 22 chapters, the Lord has taken Israel to task for their centuries of extreme ungodliness
 - The nation has played the harlot with God, chasing after idols which the enemy used to entrap God's people
 - During that pursuit, the people fell prey to some of the most egregious behavior we've ever seen
 - Rampant immorality, sexual depravity, depraved indifference to human life, corrupt leadership and evil hearts
 - As a result, the people of Israel have already experienced severe retribution by the Lord, and the worst is yet to come
 - The Lord withheld rain for long periods leading to drought and starvation
 - He removed His protection of the nation from her enemies
 - Jerusalem and its kings have fallen repeatedly
 - And the Lord withdrew His Shechinah glory from the temple
 - Now the nation sits on the threshold of complete destruction
 - Ezekiel has spent the last several years warning the exiles that the Babylonians are coming back soon
 - And when they do, it will result in a devastation beyond anything the people could possibly imagine
 - Meanwhile, the people have dismissed Ezekiel's warnings, making excuses and choosing to cling to unrealistic hopes of rescue
- So as the Lord wraps up His words of warning through Ezekiel, He ratchets up His rhetoric to the nation using some of the most extreme language found anywhere in Scripture
 - The final two chapters of this first half of the book consist of an allegory and parable

- Together, these stories make abundantly clear how deserving Israel was of her judgment and explain what the consequences would be
- So chapter 23 uses an allegory of two sister harlots to explain Israel history of idolatry
- While chapter 24 is a parable explaining the beginning of Babylon's third attack
- The language in each chapter is rough, especially in chapter 23, but the Lord's language is intended to reflect the extreme nature of Israel's sin
 - We will take each chapter in large chunks so we can hear the Lord telling this story the way Israel heard it from the prophet
 - But we begin with a short introduction

Ezek. 23:1 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying,

Ezek. 23:2 "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother;

Ezek. 23:3 and they played the harlot in Egypt. They played the harlot in their youth; there their breasts were pressed and there their virgin bosom was handled.

Ezek. 23:4 "Their names were Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister. And they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Samaria is Oholah and Jerusalem is Oholibah.

- In v.1 the prophet says he received this word from the Lord, so the rest of the chapter is written in the first person as from the Lord
 - That reminds us that the things said here are the word of God, and therefore are not "sin" even if they describe sinful things
 - And the prophet announces a story or allegory about two sisters of one mother
 - These two sisters engaged in harlotry in Egypt in their youth
 - Even as young women they allowed men to become intimate with them, violating their purity
 - The Lord makes clear right from the start that this allegory will be provocative, referencing the women's breasts for example
 - The point in that was to gain attention for the prophet's words and shock the conscious of the people of Israel

- In other words, if the Lord was willing to resort to such language, then something serious was afoot
- This is similar to the way a mother might call her child using his full name (e.g., Stephen Daniel Armstrong!) indicating she's upset
- The Lord is speaking through Ezekiel in a similar way to show just how far the people have pushed the Lord
- The names of these sisters were Oholah and Oholibah, two girl names that have fallen out of favor ever since this chapter was written
 - Oholah means "she who has a tent"
 - Oholibah means "my tent is in her"
- And then the Lord identifies each character specifically for us
 - Oholah represents Samaria, which was capital of the northern kingdom of Israel
 - Oholibah represents Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah
- So right away we begin to see where this allegory is taking us
 - First, we have a story about two sisters which collectively represent the division of Israel into two kingdoms following Solomon
 - These two kingdoms were sisters in the sense that they had a single "mother" who is the Lord
 - So the Lord gave birth to the nation of Israel, and in time the nation divided to become like sisters
 - And the names of each sister point us to the spiritual heart of each
 - Samaria was the site of the false temple of the northern kingdom, which was Oholah's "tent"
 - And Jerusalem was the location for the Lord's true temple, which the Lord says was "my tent" in the name Oholibah
 - Then we hear that these two sisters engaged in harlotry while the young nation was growing up in Egypt

- Remember we learned in an earlier week that the nation of Israel engaged in idol worship while it was still in Egypt before the Exodus
- As a result of that idolatry, the Lord put Israel in slavery under the Pharaoh after Joseph died
- Then when the nation was freed from slavery in Egypt, they quickly returned in idolatry at the mountain of Moses
- So the nation showed an early interest in idolatry, and the Lord compares worshipping false gods to the sexual act of prostitution
 - It's a perfect comparison, because what prostitution is to the covenant of marriage so is idolatry to our covenant with the Lord
 - Prostitution is a counterfeit marriage of sorts
 - It gives the illusion of obtaining things that what can only be found through a proper covenant marriage relationship
 - In the end, the illusion fails, because harlotry results in great physical and emotional devastation for both parties
 - Rather than finding the love and fulfillment only possible in marriage, harlotry produces guilt, abuse, and physical harm
 - That makes harlotry a perfect picture of idolatry, because in a spiritual sense the same things happen in idolatry
 - Idolatry counterfeits a true spiritual relationship with the Lord, and the benefits it promises are merely illusion
 - Like harlotry, idolatry results in great spiritual devastation
 - Rather than obtaining a loving, peaceful relationship with the Lord, the idol worshipper become captive to a cruel, lying merciless master
 - Idolatry yields corrupted heart, deceived mind and debased spirit
 - In time, the flesh and the enemy gain complete control of the person
 - And as Paul says in Romans the idolator eventually receives the penalty of their sin in their own body

- The Lord now recaps how that process went in Israel's history of idolatry, beginning with the northern kingdom Oholah

Ezek. 23:5 “Oholah played the harlot while she was Mine; and she lusted after her lovers, after the Assyrians, her neighbors,

Ezek. 23:6 who were clothed in purple, governors and officials, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.

Ezek. 23:7 “She bestowed her harlotries on them, all of whom were the choicest men of Assyria; and with all whom she lusted after, with all their idols she defiled herself.

Ezek. 23:8 “She did not forsake her harlotries from the time in Egypt; for in her youth men had lain with her, and they handled her virgin bosom and poured out their lust on her.

Ezek. 23:9 “Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted.

Ezek. 23:10 “They uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, but they slew her with the sword. Thus she became a byword among women, and they executed judgments on her.

- The northern kingdom became enamored with the gods of Assyria, which the Lord compares to a lustful young woman eyeing attractive men
 - Historically, the Lord's is referring to the northern kingdom's political and military alliance with their northern enemy, Assyria
 - The kings of the northern kingdom sought an alliance with Assyria as a “lessor of two evils” strategy
 - The northern kingdom was in their conflict with their sister, Judah, so they wanted an ally in that fight
 - But in order to gain the trust and allegiance of Assyria, the king of Israel had to pledge loyalty to the Assyrian gods and king
 - An ancient archeological artifact called the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser depicts the moment that King Jehu met with King Shalmaneser III of Assyria
 - The obelisk shows Jehu bowing before Shalmaneser and paying a tribute of money
 - So as the Lord says in v.8, the people of the northern kingdom didn't learn the lesson of Egypt and continued in their harlotries
 - Eventually this caught up with them, as the Lord describes in vs.9-10

- The Lord called Assyria to attack and conquer the northern kingdom in 722 BC
- Metaphorically, Assyria exposed Oholah nakedness in that Lord withdrew His protection exposing His people to harm
- They fell into the angry hand of their lover, and many died by the sword
 - Finally, the Lord says they became a byword
 - The Hebrew word there is shem, which simply is the word for name
 - The Northern kingdom became known by a name, and that name was Jezebel
 - The name of the infamous queen came to represent the entire people...treacherous, evil and ultimately vanquished
- Now Part II, the harlotry of the younger sister, Oholibah

Ezek. 23:11 “Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she, and her harlotries were more than the harlotries of her sister.

Ezek. 23:12 “She lusted after the Assyrians, governors and officials, the ones near, magnificently dressed, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.

Ezek. 23:13 “I saw that she had defiled herself; they both took the same way.

Ezek. 23:14 “So she increased her harlotries. And she saw men portrayed on the wall, images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermilion,

Ezek. 23:15 girded with belts on their loins, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them looking like officers, like the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth.

Ezek. 23:16 “When she saw them she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.

Ezek. 23:17 “The Babylonians came to her to the bed of love and defiled her with their harlotry. And when she had been defiled by them, she became disgusted with them.

Ezek. 23:18 “She uncovered her harlotries and uncovered her nakedness; then I became disgusted with her, as I had become disgusted with her sister.

Ezek. 23:19 “Yet she multiplied her harlotries, remembering the days of her youth, when she played the harlot in the land of Egypt.

Ezek. 23:20 “She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses.

Ezek. 23:21 “Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom because of the breasts of your youth.

- Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah may have been late to this party, but in the end they did even worse than their northern sibling
 - She saw what the northern kingdom did and how it was judged and yet persisted in following after the same things
 - Like the northern kingdom, the southern kingdom eventually tried to enter into an alliance with Assyria to battle a common enemy, Egypt
 - That alliance resulted in the King Josiah dying in battle against Egypt at Megiddo
 - But as Judah became more familiar with the Assyrian military culture and later Babylonian culture, they fell in love with its power
 - In vs.14-15 the Lord describes how some in Israel saw murals in Babylon and Assyria depicting military might in all their regalia
 - The imperial splendor of the Chaldeans was unequalled in the world
 - Babylon's hanging gardens are one of the seven wonders of the ancient world
 - And Israel lusted after it all
 - Their fascination led Judah's final set of evil kings to become entangled with the idolatry of Chaldean culture
 - The Lord says the harlot Oholibah allowed the Babylonians to take her in prostitution
 - By worshipping the idols of Babylon, the people of Judah put themselves in bed with the Babylonians
- But like all adulterous relationships, eventually it goes badly,
 - After a time, Israel decides that Babylon wasn't the lover they wanted we're told in v.17
 - So the nation rebelled against this suitor
 - The Lord is describing the king of Judah rebelling against Nebuchadnezzar
 - Seeking to throw off the rule of Babylon, the king of Judah tried establishing a new alliance with Egypt, Babylon's enemy

- We studied that moment earlier in this study, when the king installed by Nebuchadnezzar rebelled and asked Egypt for help
- That went poorly for the nation as Babylon's army returned and easily defeated Jerusalem a second time
- In vs.18-21 the Lord describes that episode as an insatiably lustful woman seeking sex with any man she can find...
 - The stronger and more virulent the man, the better
 - Originally, she went to Babylon because that nation's strength attracted her
 - But now after having exhausted her interest in that man, the Lord says she seeks an even stronger man to take her
 - And she remember her youthful love for Egypt and returns to that nation because of its strength
- Then in vs.20-21 the Lord describes this relationship is especially strong and graphic language
 - In ancient culture, donkeys and horse were renown for their sex drive in heat and as a result they were metaphor for an hyperactive sexual lust
 - In fact, the Egyptian hieroglyphic for a lustful person is a picture of a horse
 - So the Lord uses that association here to condemn Judah's out-of-control appetite for idolatry
 - He says Judah pursued Egypt's idols with as much zeal as a donkey pursues a mate
 - And they lusted after Egypt's idols like following a horse's "issue"
 - The Hebrew word used for "issue" is the feminine word for bodily fluid, referring to her discharge while in heat
 - So the Lord is describing Israel calling the Egyptian gods to come to her the way a mare in heat attracts a stud horse
 - All the while the nation thought back to the good ol' days when they were in bed with Egypt in their youth
- So now the Lord moves to the judgment that was coming for Ohilbah

Ezek. 23:22 “Therefore, O Oholibah, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold I will arouse your lovers against you, from whom you were alienated, and I will bring them against you from every side:

Ezek. 23:23 the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and officials all of them, officers and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.

Ezek. 23:24 ‘They will come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples. They will set themselves against you on every side with buckler and shield and helmet; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they will judge you according to their customs.

Ezek. 23:25 ‘I will set My jealousy against you, that they may deal with you in wrath. They will remove your nose and your ears; and your survivors will fall by the sword. They will take your sons and your daughters; and your survivors will be consumed by the fire.

Ezek. 23:26 ‘They will also strip you of your clothes and take away your beautiful jewels.

Ezek. 23:27 ‘Thus I will make your lewdness and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt to cease from you, so that you will not lift up your eyes to them or remember Egypt anymore.’

Ezek. 23:28 “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I will give you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom you were alienated.

Ezek. 23:29 ‘They will deal with you in hatred, take all your property, and leave you naked and bare. And the nakedness of your harlotries will be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries.

Ezek. 23:30 ‘These things will be done to you because you have played the harlot with the nations, because you have defiled yourself with their idols.

Ezek. 23:31 ‘You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand.’

Ezek. 23:32 “Thus says the Lord GOD,

‘You will drink your sister’s cup,

Which is deep and wide.

You will be laughed at and held in derision;

It contains much.

Ezek. 23:33 ‘You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow,

The cup of horror and desolation,

The cup of your sister Samaria.

Ezek. 23:34 ‘You will drink it and drain it.

Then you will gnaw its fragments

And tear your breasts;

for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord GOD.

Ezek. 23:35 “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.’”

- This section of judgment begins with the Lord explains what Judah's suitor-turned-enemy, Babylon, would do to them
 - It starts with the Babylonian empire coming against Judah in a third and final attack
 - The various names you see listed in v.23 are the tribes who along with the Chaldeans made up the Babylonian empire
 - His point is that the culture that Oholibah found so attractive in the beginning would now be set against Judah
 - And to mock Judah's love for this culture, notice the Lord's description of the army in vs.23-24
 - The Lord describes the appearance of the soldiers and their company of equipment as they march on the land
 - It would like a harlot falling in love with a certain man, admiring his piercing eyes and impressive muscles and strong hands
 - And then that same man turns on the harlot and looks upon her with hatred in his eyes
 - He seizes her with his strong muscles and beats her with those strong hands
 - So the things that Judah admired about Babylon in the beginning will be used by God in judgement against her
 - And the physical harm will be significant
 - Many will lose their lives, but even the survivors will suffer greatly, losing their noses and ears
 - In the ancient Near East, adulteresses were often punished by having their ears and noses cut off
 - Women often worn rings in their noses or ears to attract men
 - So by removing these parts of the body the woman would never again be attractive to a man
 - But apparently, the Babylonians had taken to mutilating prisoners of war in the same way to punish rebellion
- In vs.28-29 the Lord says He will turn Jerusalem over to those Judah has come to hate army

- And like it was with her sister, Oholah, Oholibah's nakedness will be revealed, meaning the Lord will leave her vulnerable too
 - In v.31 the Lord says all of this is the result of Judah's willingness to follow her sister's example of idolatry
 - So she will share in her sister's cup of judgment
- In vs.32-34, the Lord uses the metaphor of a drinking a cup to represent Judah receiving the wrath of the Lord for her sins
 - This cup is the same one that Judah's sister drank
 - When the Assyrians conquered Israel in the north, the southern kingdom of Judah celebrated their defeat
 - Though they were fellow Jews, Judah saw the northern kingdom as adversaries
 - So their disappearance was a relief for the most part
- Now the Lord is saying they celebrated too soon, because they repeated Israel's sins and so must drink the same cup
 - That cup was deep and wide, indicating it was full of so much wrath they could scarcely consume it all
 - Nevertheless, Oholibah would drain that cup
 - And it would cause people to laugh at her as if she was drunk on God's wrath
 - Imagine a child forced to drink medicine, and it tastes terrible
 - Even worse, the dosage is huge, appearing to be more than the child can consume, yet the child will be required to drink it all
 - And after that, Oholibah will gnaw (or break) the cup into fragments and tear at her breasts
 - The consequences of God's judgment will go beyond the moment and bring tragedy upon tragedy for years to come
 - I remember the feeling the first time I had a colonoscopy and had to drink that prep formula the night before
 - My first thought looking at the large beaker of fluid you have to drink was this is a deep and wide cup

- I don't have to drink all this, do I?
- But then the instructions say I needed to drain that cup
- And the consequences of that cup continued on for some time
- But my experience was a walk in the park compared to the cup Judah was made to drink
 - In v.35 the Lord says they will bear this severe punishment because of their lewdness and harlotry
 - He's speaking about idolatry, of course
 - And it's probably worth remember the warning the nation received about idolatry in the beginning

Ex. 20:2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Ex. 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

Ex. 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Ex. 20:5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Ex. 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- The Lord made clear that He would respond in jealousy and now we're seeing just what a jealous God looks like
 - Now if the judgment the Lord is bringing bothers you, then consider the alternative
 - What if God didn't respond in jealousy to our idolatry?
 - What if He acted ambivalent? What if He just let His wandering people go without a fight?
- For example, how would you feel if your spouse reacted to your infidelity with a shrug?
 - Wouldn't true love put up a fight?
 - In a ironic turn of events, even though you wandered first, you would feel as if your spouse was the one without love for you

- That's the situation here between Israel and the Lord
 - The Lord is putting up a fight to keep wandering Israel, His wife
 - And His methods are commensurate with the degree of their wandering
- They've pursued idols like a donkey in heat
 - They are enraptured by the idols they see around them
 - So if the Lord is going to bring Israel back to Himself, He must act in jealousy in the strongest possible way
 - His response must break the hold that idols had on Israel's heart
- So the Lord summarizes the case for that coming judgment, like a prosecutor making his closing argument at trial

Ezek. 23:36 Moreover, the LORD said to me, "Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations.

Ezek. 23:37 "For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to them as food.

Ezek. 23:38 "Again, they have done this to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and have profaned My sabbaths.

Ezek. 23:39 "For when they had slaughtered their children for their idols, they entered My sanctuary on the same day to profane it; and lo, thus they did within My house.

Ezek. 23:40 "Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came – for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments;

Ezek. 23:41 and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it on which you had set My incense and My oil.

Ezek. 23:42 "The sound of a carefree multitude was with her; and drunkards were brought from the wilderness with men of the common sort. And they put bracelets on the hands of the women and beautiful crowns on their heads.

Ezek. 23:43 "Then I said concerning her who was worn out by adulteries, 'Will they now commit adultery with her when she is thus?'

Ezek. 23:44 "But they went in to her as they would go in to a harlot. Thus they went in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women.

Ezek. 23:45 "But they, righteous men, will judge them with the judgment of adulteresses and with the judgment of women who shed blood, because they are adulteresses and blood is on their hands.

Ezek. 23:46 “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Bring up a company against them and give them over to terror and plunder.

Ezek. 23:47 ‘The company will stone them with stones and cut them down with their swords; they will slay their sons and their daughters and burn their houses with fire.

Ezek. 23:48 ‘Thus I will make lewdness cease from the land, that all women may be admonished and not commit lewdness as you have done.

Ezek. 23:49 ‘Your lewdness will be requited upon you, and you will bear the penalty of worshiping your idols; thus you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’”

- The Lord begins asking Ezekiel to judge these women based on their track record of idolatry
 - They have committed idolatry, and in the process they engaged in the worst practices of that abomination
 - Notice the references in vs.37 & 39 to child sacrifice
 - And between those two references, the Lord reiterates they engaged in idol worship in the temple itself
 - In fact, parents would travel from a high place where they had just killed and literally cooked their children on a sacrificial altar
 - And they went directly into the temple to worship a false idol standing there
 - Doing all this on a Sabbath, which was the day of worship in Israel
 - So they equated Yahweh worship with idol worship and did all these unspeakable things in the course of a normal “church” day
- Furthermore, the nation sought strength in relationship with the pagan nations that surrounded them rather than in the covenant they had with the Lord
 - In vs.40-42 the Lord summaries their enticing of these foreign suitors, making themselves as attractive as possible
 - Historically, Israel made itself attractive to other nations by dispensing with the requirements of the Law that were intended to make Israel unique
 - The Law had as one of its central purposes isolating Israel from the rest of the pagan world

- The Law made Israel a peculiar people, and it created a separation between God's people and the other nations
- This made Israel intentionally unattractive to her neighbors
- But when the nation walked away from the Lord and sought to worship the gods of other nations, they need to make themselves attractive to those neighbors
 - So they made compromise after compromise in setting aside observances of the law
 - In time, they had made themselves no different than the pagan nations themselves, which made them an attractive ally
 - But it was a repudiation of the covenant they entered and it
 - It was like a woman dolling herself up in the way the Lord describes
- But given Israel's track record of spurning her suitors, including the Lord Himself, it's surprising that anyone wanted to align with Israel
 - In vs.43-44 the Lord asks that very question
 - Nevertheless, these nations did go after Israel
- Then in vs.45-49 the Lord pronounces the sentence on the adulteress Israel
 - He says righteous men will judge her, which is a reference to Deuteronomy 22
 - In that chapter of the Law, the Lord spells out how an adulteress is to be handled in Israel
 - She is judged by the righteous elders of Israel, and if she is found to be guilty, she is taken out and stoned to death
 - Here the Lord is making a comparison between idolatry and adultery again
 - Israel is to be punished by Babylon is the way an adulteress is punished by elders
 - Notice in vs.46-47 the Lord describes a scene of stoning for a person guilty of adultery
 - He's describing Israel being attacked by Babylon

- Now we move to chapter 24 and the Lord's report from the front lines of the third attack on Jerusalem

Ezek. 24:1 And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying,

Ezek. 24:2 "Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day.

Ezek. 24:3 "Speak a parable to the rebellious house and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,

"Put on the pot, put it on and also pour water in it;

Ezek. 24:4 Put in it the pieces,

Every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder;
Fill it with choice bones.

Ezek. 24:5 "Take the choicest of the flock,

And also pile wood under the pot.
Make it boil vigorously.
Also seethe its bones in it."

Ezek. 24:6 'Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

"Woe to the bloody city,
To the pot in which there is rust
And whose rust has not gone out of it!
Take out of it piece after piece,
Without making a choice.

Ezek. 24:7 "For her blood is in her midst;

She placed it on the bare rock;
She did not pour it on the ground
To cover it with dust.

Ezek. 24:8 "That it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance,

I have put her blood on the bare rock,
That it may not be covered."

Ezek. 24:9 'Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD,

"Woe to the bloody city!
I also will make the pile great.

Ezek. 24:10 "Heap on the wood, kindle the fire,

Boil the flesh well
And mix in the spices,
And let the bones be burned.

Ezek. 24:11 “Then set it empty on its coals
 So that it may be hot
 And its bronze may glow
 And its filthiness may be melted in it,
 Its rust consumed.

Ezek. 24:12 “She has wearied Me with toil,
 Yet her great rust has not gone from her;
 Let her rust be in the fire!

Ezek. 24:13 “In your filthiness is lewdness.
 Because I would have cleansed you,
 Yet you are not clean,
 You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again
 Until I have spent My wrath on you.

- The chapter begins with another of Ezekiel’s precise dates, which tells us this is a new prophecy
 - The date the Lord revealed this to Ezekiel and told him to share it with Israel was January 15, 586 B.C.
 - That date is especially important in this case, because that is the day began his final siege of Jerusalem
 - This was a momentous day in Israel’s history, so devastating that the day is observed to this day in Israel with a special fast
 - An the fact that Ezekiel could declare the day of the siege while it was happening hundreds of miles away further validated his ministry
 - It gave added reason for Israel to believe the rest of his prophecies concerning the future kingdom
 - The song I read is largely self-explanatory
 - It uses the imagery of an earlier chapter to show Israel as meat in a pot being heated up in a judgment fire
 - The pot’s rust represents the decay of the hearts of the people
 - The blood of her false sacrifices and from the violence of brother upon brother in the city convicts the people

- And their bloody judgment was on full display, as blood spilled on a rock, not buried under the sand
 - So that the nations of the world could see God's judgment on display in this event
 - It was a seminal moment in ancient history, something so dramatic that people talked about it for a very long time
 - It was like Israel, the meat in the pot, were being boiled alive
- But then in vs.9-13 the Lord describes turning up the heat even higher
 - The pot gets so hot that even the bones are burned
 - The symbolism is that the devastation of the attack would go beyond what was necessary to capture the city
 - Rather, the army of Nebuchadnezzar has been ordered to show no mercy
 - So when they penetrated the city walls, they took extreme revenge upon the city's inhabitants, showing particular cruelty
 - The effect of this high heat was to consume the rust of the pot
 - Imagine how hot you must heat metal to remove the rust from its surface
 - It has to become almost molten
 - That's the image God uses for how His wrath would hit Israel
 - But the effect of that high heat would be a cleansing of her filthiness, He says in v.13
 - It will be the spending of all of God's wrath against His people
 - How much wrath do we think Israel had stored up for itself after doing so much for so long?
- As a final point, the Lord assures the people that this prophecy is coming true as the prophet speaks

Ezek. 24:14 "I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I will act. I will not relent, and I will not pity and I will not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I will judge you," declares the Lord GOD."

- And then to show Israel a sign that Ezekiel's words are true, the Lord does something extraordinary

Ezek. 24:15 And the word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 24:16 “Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come.

Ezek. 24:17 “Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache and do not eat the bread of men.”

Ezek. 24:18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.

Ezek. 24:19 The people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?”

Ezek. 24:20 Then I said to them, “The word of the LORD came to me saying,

Ezek. 24:21 ‘Speak to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword.

Ezek. 24:22 ‘You will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache and you will not eat the bread of men.

Ezek. 24:23 ‘Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another.

Ezek. 24:24 ‘Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord GOD.’”

- The word of the Lord comes to the prophet again, and this time the Lord says He is about to take from Ezekiel the desire of his eyes
 - That is a Hebrew phrase referring to a man's wife, so the Lord is saying to Ezekiel that he must be prepared for the sudden death of his wife
 - The Lord is about to take her life
 - But as He does, the prophet is to to mourn or weep nor shed tears over her death
 - Few men in scripture have been asked to do more difficult things than was asked of Ezekiel
 - In Hebrew and in the East generally, people who lose loved ones were expected to mourn loudly and publicly for a time
 - Mourning publicly was not only a natural thing to do but it was also expected as a way of honoring the departed family member

- So refraining from mourning was a burden on Ezekiel's heart, and it was an assault on his reputation among the people
- They would have interpreted his silence as an affront to his wife's honor
- So in v.18 Ezekiel says he told the people what the Lord had told him, and by evening his wife was gone
 - Can you imagine what was going through the man's mind during that day?
 - He knew he had but one day with his wife...he couldn't hide the news from her...he told everyone
 - What was that final day like we wonder? We can only assume his wife was a woman of faith too and knew that she was destined for glory
 - Still, nothing can take away the feeling of loss we instinctively know when we lose someone we love
 - Truly, this was a great burden for Ezekiel to bear
- When the morning comes, Ezekiel does as he is told
 - So in v.19 the people ask the obvious question: why aren't you mourning your wife's death? Tell us what all this means?
 - If he never got their attention before, he certainly has it now
 - And Ezekiel replies Israel is about to lose something they loved as much as a man could love his wife
 - They were about to lose the temple in Jerusalem, something they never thought they would ever lose
 - But in that tragedy, the people in exile respond exactly as Ezekiel did for his wife
 - The people will be in such shock, stupefied by the news, that they won't know how to respond
 - Moreover, in their captivity they won't have the freedom to mourn as they might prefer
 - Their captors will not tolerate it

- The bottom line is in v.24...Ezekiel is a sign to the people, and what he has experienced will be what they experience
 - Just as God took something dear to Ezekiel, so is the Lord about to take something dear from all Israel
 - And just as Ezekiel couldn't express his remorse adequately, so the people of Israel will not have adequate means to mourn their loss
- To end the first half of Ezekiel, the Lord gives Ezekiel another burden...

Ezek. 24:25 'As for you, son of man, will it not be on the day when I take from them their stronghold, the joy of their pride, the desire of their eyes and their heart's delight, their sons and their daughters,

Ezek. 24:26 that on that day he who escapes will come to you with information for your ears?

Ezek. 24:27 'On that day your mouth will be opened to him who escaped, and you will speak and be mute no longer. Thus you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD.'"

- Remember, the prophecy that started this chapter came to Ezekiel on the day the final siege of Jerusalem began
 - That siege lasted about 3 years before the city was captured for the final time
 - Ezekiel has prophesied the start of that siege
 - And now the Lord has told Ezekiel that he must remain entirely mute on this subject until the survivors arrive following the battle
- Ezekiel was not to speak another word concerning the siege of the city until the siege was over
 - He had said all that needed to be said and the people would soon see the truth of it come to pass
 - Once the news reports came to the exiles confirming Ezekiel's prophecies, then the prophet could begin to speak again about Jerusalem
 - The ending of judgment would open the door for Ezekiel to being speaking about Israel's coming glory

- Now that doesn't mean Ezekiel said nothing at all during those three years
 - He was not allowed to speak about Jerusalem and God's judgment against Israel
 - But he could speak about other matters, and so the Lord uses the three years of the siege to tie up loose ends
- Specifically, the Lord gives Ezekiel prophecies about how He will judge her enemies
 - That section serves as a transition between the first half of the book where Israel's judgment was the topic
 - And it bridges us into the second half where Israel's glory will be the focus