

The Two Sisters—Oholah and Oholibah

Ezekiel 23

23:1 And YHWH's word was / came to me saying: 23:2 Son of Adam / Humanity, two women, sisters, had one mother. 23:3 And they were prostitutes in Egypt—in their youth they were prostitutes. There, their breasts were squeezed, and there their virgin bosoms were handled / squeezed [synonym]. 23:4 And their names—Oholah, the oldest, and Oholybhah her sister. And they belonged to Me. And they gave birth (to) sons and daughters. And their names: Samaria (is) Oholah; and Jerusalem (is) Oholybhah. 23:5 And Oholah prostituted while under Me / My authority. And she lusted after / upon her lovers to / for Assyria, near ones / neighbors--23:6 dressed in purple, governors and rulers, young men of delight, all of them, horsemen, riding horses. 23:7 And she gave her prostitutions to them choice sons of Assyria, all of them. And with all for whom she lusted, with all their idols she became unclean. 23:8 And her prostitutions from Egypt she did not leave / give up, because they slept with her in her youth. And they squeezed her virgin breasts. And they poured out their prostitutions upon her. 23:9 Therefore I placed her in (the) hand of her lovers, in (the) hand of Assyria's sons, upon whom she lusted. 23:10 These uncovered her nakedness; her sons and her daughters they took, and her, they killed with the sword. And she became a name to / for the women, and they made judgments on her. 23:11 And her sister Oholybhah saw and she corrupted her lusts more than hers (her sister's), and her prostitutions more than her sister's prostitutions. 23:12 She lusted to / for Assyria's sons--governors and rulers, near ones, dressed to perfection--horsemen riding horses, desirable young men, all of them. 23:13 And I saw that she had become unclean--(there was) one way to the two of them. 23:14 And she added to her prostitutions. And she saw men engraved / portrayed upon the wall--images of Chaldeans, engraved / portrayed in the (color) vermilion, 23:15 girded (with) waistcloth / belts on their hips, pendant turbans on their heads--(with the) appearance of officers--all of them, (the) likeness of sons of Babylon, Chaldeans (from the) land of their birth. 23:16 And she lusted upon / after them, to / by (the) sight of her eyes; and she sent messengers to them, to Chaldea. 23:17 And they came to her, Babylon's sons, to a bed of loves. And they made her unclean by their prostitutions. And she was made unclean by them, and her innermost-being was torn away from them. 23:18 And she uncovered her prostitutions, and she uncovered her nakedness. And My innermost-being was torn away from her, just as My innermost being was torn away from her sister. 23:19 And she multiplied her prostitutions, to remember (the) days of her youth, when she prostituted in (the) land of Egypt. 23:20 And she lusted after their concubines, whose flesh / penis (was) flesh / penis of donkeys, and their issue / orgasm, an issue / orgasm of horses! 23:21 And you visited (the) wickedness of your youth, in the making your (breast-) nipples from Egypt, in order that (they would be) breasts of your youth! 23:22 Therefore, Oholibah, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Look at Me, stirring up your lovers against you, those from whom your innermost-being was alienated; and I will bring them against you from all around! 23:23 Sons of Babylon and all Chaldeans--Peqodh and Shoa and Qoa, all sons of Assyria with them--desirable young men, governors and rulers, all of them, officers and men of renown, riders of horses, all of them! 23:24 And they will come against you (feminine singular)--weapon, chariotry, and wheel / whirlwind; and with an assembly of peoples--large

shield(s) and (small) shield(s) and helmet(s). They will set (themselves) upon / against you (all) around. And I will give / place judgment / justice before them--and they will judge you with their judgments. 23:25 And I will place My jealousy against you, and they will do to you / treat you with rage! Your nose and your ears they will take away / cut off; and your survivors will fall by the sword! These, your sons and your daughters, they will take; and your survivors will be devoured by the fire! 23:26 And they will strip off your clothes; and they will take (the) ornaments of your beauty. 23:27 And I will cause your wickedness to cease from you, and your prostitution from Egypt-land. And you will not lift up your eyes to them, and (the) Egyptians, you will not remember again. 23:28 Because in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Look at Me--giving you into (the) hand which you hated, into (the) hand from which your innermost-being was alienated. 23:29 And they will treat you with hatred; and they will take away everything you have produced. And they will leave / forsake you naked and bare (synonym); and (the) nakedness of your prostitution will be uncovered, and your wickedness and your prostitute-immorality--23:30 (which) are doing these things to you by your prostituting yourself after nations, by which you became unclean / defiled, by their idols. 23:31 In (the) way of your sister you walked; and I will give her cup into your hand. 23:32 In this way my Lord YHWH spoke: You will drink your sister's cup, the deep and the wide one--you / it (singular) will be for laughter and for mockery / derision, (because of its) containing so much! 23:33 You will be filled (with) drunkenness and sorrow / grief! (It is) a cup of waste and desolation, your sister's cup, Samaria. 23:34 And you will drink it; and you will drain (it). And its broken pieces you will break and your breasts you will tear apart. Because I, I have spoken--(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH! 23:35 Therefore in this way my lord YHWH spoke to me: Because you (feminine singular) forgot Me, and you have thrown Me behind your back--and also you, bear your wickedness and your prostitution-immorality! 23:36 And YHWH said to me, Son of Adam / Humanity, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? And (will you) declare to them their abominations? 23:37 Because they were sexually immoral, and blood (is) on their hands, and with their idol-Gods they were sexually immoral. And also their children whom they bore for Me, they caused to pass through (the fire) to them for food / devouring! 23:38 Still this they did to Me--they defiled My sanctuary on that (same) day, and My days-of-rest they profaned! 23:39 And when they slaughtered their children for their idols, and they came into My sanctuary on that (same) day to profane it! And look--in this way they did in the midst of My house / temple! 23:40 And also, when they send for the men coming from afar, whose messenger was sent to them--and look, they came to the one who--you bathed, you painted your eyes, and you adorned (yourself with) ornaments. 23:41 And you sat upon a glorious bed, and a prepared / spread table before it; and you set My incense and My fat / oil upon it. 23:42 And a voice / sound of a crowd at ease (was) in her. And to men from a multitude of humanity being brought in--drunkards from (the) wilderness. And they gave / placed bracelets to / upon their hands, and a crown of beauty upon their heads. 23:43 And I said to the woman worn out by sexual immoralities, Now they will prostitute her prostitutions, even her! 23:44 And he came to her like one coming to a woman, a prostitute--in this way they came to Oholah, and to Oholiybhah--women of the wickedness! 23:45 And men--righteous ones--they will judge them--a judgment of female sexual immoralities, and a judgment of female shedding of blood! Because they are sexually immoral, and blood (is) on their hands! 23:46 Because in this way my Lord YHWH spoke: Raise up against

them an assembly! And give / make them into an object of terror, and for plunder! 23:47 And an assembly will stone them with stone(s); and will cut them down with their swords. Their sons and their daughters they will kill, and their houses they will burn with the fire. 23:48 And I will cause wickedness to cease from the earth / land; And all the women will be disciplined, and they will not do like your wickedness. 23:49 And they will give / place your wickedness upon you; and the sins of your idols you will bear. And you will know that I (am) my Lord YHWH!

23:1¹¹³⁷

1137

Darr entitles **chapter 23** “The (Tragic) Tale of Two Sisters.” In her “Overview,” she states that “True to Ezekiel’s oracles thus far, **chapter 23** seeks to (more than) justify Yahweh’s impending destruction of Jerusalem. Here, as in **chapter 16**, the prophet takes up, sustains, and elaborates upon a literary convention: the personification of cities as women...**Ezekiel 16** focused especially upon Jerusalem’s idolatry, depicted metaphorically as adultery. This chapter emphasizes the faithless and fickle international alliances pursued by both Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom of Israel) and Jerusalem (capital of Judah). For Ezekiel, a political isolationist, such (d)alliances constituted flagrant disloyalty to Yahweh, Who alone should be the object of their trust.

“In **verses 2-21**, Ezekiel casts God in the role of a storyteller. What follows is no objective, historical account, but an extended metaphorical narrative about two sisters whose content frequently derives from the prophet’s take on events in the ‘lives’ of both kingdoms. Already in Egypt, Oholah (Samaria), the elder, and Oholibah (Jerusalem), the younger, engaged in sexual activity unbecoming maidens, whose sexual and reproductive capacities should have been reserved for their future husbands. In time, Yahweh marries both women, and each gives birth to sons and daughters. Neither is true to her Mate, however. Oholah ‘plays the prostitute’ with Assyria’s choicest males and defiles herself with their idols. Consequently, God gives her into the hands of her ‘lovers,’ who strip her naked in public, seize her children, and slay her with the sword (**verses 5-10**). Oholibah witnesses Oholah’s brutal demise but draws no lesson from it. Instead, she outdoes her elder sister, lusting after not only the Assyrians, but also the Babylonians and her earliest paramours, the Egyptians (**verses 11-21**). Hence, Yahweh threatens her with multiple punishments, including mutilation, public stripping, despoilation, the deportation of her children, and burning at the hands of her former lovers, God’s agents of her destruction (**verses 22-35**).

“**Verses 36-45** ‘resurrect’ Oholah in order that she, Oholibah’s cohort in harlotry, be present when an expanded list of charges is lodged against them. **Verses 46-49** anticipate the punishment for these crimes. Yahweh is summoning an army to carry out the sentence. The sisters’ deaths will bring an end to their lewdness in the land and serve as a warning to all ‘women’ not to follow their example. In a manner characteristic of Ezekiel’s oracles, this metaphorical narrative ends with the recognition formula, ‘and you shall know that I am the Lord God.’ Ultimately, Yahweh acts in order that the people of Israel might be forced to acknowledge the unparalleled power and sovereignty of their God.” (Pp. 192-193)
(continued...)

¹¹³⁷(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 1-4** “Oholah and Oholibah.” Darr entitles these verses “Setting the Scene.”

Darr comments that “Unlike many other of Ezekiel’s oracles, however, Ezekiel is not ordered to address an audience. Instead, the Lord immediately launches into the story of two women, daughters of a single mother. Nothing more is said of this mother (does she represent the Israelites in Egypt?), and not a word is devoted to their father(s). In **chapter 16**, Ezekiel attached a poisonous pedigree to the helpless foundling whom Yahweh discovered lying in her birth blood in an open field. Jerusalem’s father was an Amorite, her mother a Hittite (**16:3, 45**). Here, by contrast, his point seems simply to be that these women are (at least) maternal siblings. Hard on the heels of this brief introduction comes an accusation. In their youth, they played the prostitute in Egypt. Their breasts were squeezed, their virgin nipples fondled. Such activity does not constitute adultery, for neither woman is married as yet. In a world where maidens were expected to reserve their sexuality (and reproductive capacity) for their future husbands, however, Ezekiel’s charge is clearly negative. Moreover, he intensifies its effect by his choice of terms: to ‘play the prostitute’ is to engage in sexual activity habitually; harlotry accusations ascribe to those implicated a range of culture-specific, pejorative associations with common prostitutes...

“While **chapter 16** described in considerable detail the tender care and physical abundance bestowed by Yahweh upon ‘His’ bride (**16:9-14**), here Ezekiel permits only the briefest reference to God’s marriage to both women (‘They became Mine,’ **verse 4**; see **16:8**). The notice that each bore sons and daughters confirms that these unions were consummated...

“Here, as in **chapter 16**, we must ask whether the text is, properly speaking, an allegory. Clearly, it displays allegorical tendencies—that is, elements of Ezekiel’s ‘biographies’ can be correlated with actual historical events. Perhaps, if our knowledge of Israel’s history and traditions were fuller, we might detect even more correspondences between narrative and reality than we are presently able to do. Nonetheless, if we search the text seeking only point for point correlations, as if its primary import lay in what it says about something else, we rob Ezekiel’s metaphorical oracle of much of its richness, complexity, and power to invoke a range of associations. His creation is more than an indictment of Israel’s political misalliances and cultic abominations. It is an invitation to his audience (and readers) to perceive one complex, mysterious, and intimate reality (the relationship between Yahweh and this people) in terms suggest of another (marriage) that, although no less complex, mysterious, or intimate, is nonetheless better known.

“Ezekiel’s scenario in **verses 2-4** is, in some respects, surreal. In **chapter 16**, he acknowledged Jerusalem’s Canaanite origins. David did not build that city. He captured a Jebusite stronghold...and established it as the capital of Israel. Here, however, the prophet places both Samaria and Jerusalem in Egypt. This rhetorical strategy makes sense only when one realizes that the two cities actually represent all of Israel from the earliest days of its existence. Ezekiel’s decision to employ personified city imag-

(continued...)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:

And YHWH's Word was / came to me saying:

23:2 בֶּן־אָדָם שְׁתֵּים נָשִׁים בָּנוֹת

Son of Adam / Humanity, two women, sisters,

אִם־אַחַת הָיוּ:

had one mother.¹¹³⁸

¹¹³⁷(...continued)

ery, in conjunction with marriage and adultery metaphors, in the ensuing sweep of Israel's past, present, and impending future shapes the plot from the outset." (Pp. 195-196)

1138

Rabbi Fisch comments that "Samaria and Jerusalem both had their origin in the nation of Israel." (P. 149) Compare **Ezekiel 16:46a**, where it is said to Jerusalem,

16:46 וַאֲחֹתְךָ הַגְּדוֹלָה

And your big sister--

שָׁמְרוֹן הִיא וּבָנוֹתֶיהָ

she is Samaria and her daughters--

הַיּוֹשֶׁבֶת עַל־שְׂמֹאלְךָ

she who lives upon your left (north)...

Also see **Jeremiah 3:7-8**,

7 וָאָמַר אַחֲרַי עָשׂוֹתָהּ אֶת־כָּל־אַלֶּהָ

And I said, after her doing all these things,

אֵלַי תָּשׁוּב וְלֹא־שָׁבָה

she will return to Me--but she did not turn back.

(וַתֵּרְאֶה) [וַתֵּרְאֵן] בְּגוֹדָה אֲחֹתָהּ יְהוּדָה:

And she saw her treacherous sister Judah.

8 וָאֵרָא כִּי עַל־כָּל־אֲדוֹת אֲשֶׁר נָאֲפָה מִשְׁבָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

And I saw that for all (these) causes which back-turning Israel was sexually immoral,

שָׁלַחְתִּיהָ

I sent her away;

וָאֶתַּן אֶת־סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֹתֶיהָ אֵלֶיהָ

and I gave a writing of cutting-off / divorce to her.

(continued...)

23:3 וַתִּזְנֶינָה בְּמִצְרַיִם

And they were prostitutes in Egypt—¹¹³⁹

בְּנַעֲוֵי רֵיחָן זָנוּ

in their youth they were prostitutes.¹¹⁴⁰

שָׁמָּה מִזְעָבוֹ שְׁדֵיחָן

There, their breasts were squeezed,¹¹⁴¹

וְשָׁם עָשׂוּ רַדְי בְּתוֹלֵיחָן:

and there their virgin bosoms were handled / squeezed [synonym].

¹¹³⁸(...continued)

וְלֹא יִרְאַהּ בְּגֵרָה יְהוּדָה אֶחָוִתָּהּ

And faithless Judah her sister was not afraid;

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּזְנֶן גַּם־הִיא:

and she went and prostituted herself—even she!

1139

Reimer comments that “Tracing depravity back to Egypt corresponds to the historical recital of **Ezekiel 20:5-8**.” (P. 1532)

1140

Rabbi Fisch quotes Davidson as stating “The two kingdoms are represented ideally as already existing in Egypt. This is not so far from the truth. The great tribes of Judah and Ephraim from the first stood apart, and in their attitude there lay already the germs of the two kingdoms as appears in the song of Deborah.” (P. 150) We say, Perhaps...but we see no “germs of the two kingdoms” in the song of Deborah. See **Genesis 5**.

1141

Rabbi Fisch comments on the phrase *there were their breasts pressed / squeezed* that “The prophets commonly refer to idolatry under the image of sexual licence. The ‘sisters’ lost their chastity during their maidenhood in Egypt, i.e. corrupted themselves with the cults of the Egyptians.” (P. 150) Again we say, Perhaps...it seems clear to us that Ezekiel is depicting two young sisters becoming prostitutes, enjoying having their clients play with their breasts, without any indications of intending a reference to idolatry or the cults of the Egyptians.

23:4 וּשְׁמוֹתָן

And their names—

אוֹהֶלָה הַגְּדוֹלָה

Oholah, the oldest,

וְאוֹהֶלִיבָה אֲחֹתָהּ

and Oholiybah her sister.¹¹⁴²

וַתְּהֵינָה לִי

1142

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The Jewish commentators explain the name given to Samaria as ‘her tent,’ i.e. her ‘tent’ for worship (see on **16:16** [which mentions Israel’s ‘high-places,’ but says nothing about a ‘tent’]) is her own and not [YHWH’s], since in Samaria they worshiped the calves introduced by Jeroboam...The name given to Jerusalem denotes ‘My tent is in her,’ i.e. in her midst is [YHWH’s] sanctuary. Modern exegetes do not accept this sharp distinction and question whether the ‘i’ in Oholibah denotes ‘my,’ comparing the name Oholibamah, the wife of Esau (**Genesis 36:2**). They prefer the meanings ‘she who has a tent’ and ‘a tent in in her.’ The two sisters are alike in possessing a shrine (tent).” (P. 150)

Darr states that “A traditional view holds that in the present context ‘tent’ refers to sanctuaries... Oholah means ‘her (own) tent,’ while Oholibah means ‘my tent (is) in her.’ Oholoah’s name is judgmental, in that ‘tent’ refers to the (from a Judean perspective, illicit) sanctuaries of the northern kingdom of Israel, while Oholibah’s is positive, pointing to the presence of Yahweh’s (legitimate) temple in Jerusalem, capital of Judah...

“But there are problems with this interpretation. On the one hand, the final ‘h’ of both epithets is written without a *mappiq*, a dot placed within the letter ‘h’ to indicate its function as a consonant. If these final letters were part of the third-person feminine singular suffix (‘her’), we would expect both to be written with a *mappiq*. [But the placing of the *mappiq* was a function of the Masoretes, long after the time of Ezekiel!] On the other hand, Ezekiel does not refer to sanctuaries as ‘tents’ elsewhere in his scroll (but see **41:1**). That fact alone does not constitute a compelling argument for dismissing ‘sanctuary’ as the referent of ‘tent,’ especially for the audience (and reader) familiar with Israel’s traditions about the (post-exodus) desert ‘tent of meeting’...a structure outside the Israelite camp where Moses was said to meet with Yahweh...the wilderness tabernacle...and the tent pitched by David to house the ark in Jerusalem.” (P. 195)

And they belonged to Me.¹¹⁴³

וַתֵּלְדֵנָה בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת

And they gave birth (to) sons and daughters.

וַשְׁמוֹתֵינָם

And their names:

שְׁמֵרוֹן אֹהֶלָה

Samaria (is) Oholah;

וִירוּשָׁלַם אֹהֶל־יִבְהָ:

and Jerusalem (is) Oholiybhah.¹¹⁴⁴

1143

What do you think this line means, וַתֵּלְדֵנָה לִּי, “and they were / became to me / mine”? Does it mean they were / became YHWH’s daughters, or does it mean YHWH took them as His wives? Rabbi Fisch comments that “The covenant relationship between God and Israel is often symbolized as marriage (compare **Hosea 2:21-22**).” (P. 150)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has καὶ ἐγένοντό μοι, “and they became to Me,” very similar to the Hebrew. Do you think the text is depicting YHWH as a polygamist, like many of the **Hebrew Bible’s** male characters such as Jacob?

The next verse which immediately states “and they gave birth to sons and daughters” inclines us to think this earlier phrase means they became YHWH’s wives. What do you think? Ezekiel’s allegory is not very careful to maintain the stellar character of YHWH, but depicts Him as a polygamist! Matties states that “The prohibition against marriage to two sisters (**Leviticus 18:18**) does not pose a problem.” (P. 1189) Perhaps not to Matties, but it certainly poses a problem to many readers. Simply because it is an allegory, does not mean that the allegorist is free to belittle YHWH’s character, does it? Should the allegorist depict YHWH disobeying His Own law? Again, what do you think?

1144

Reimer notes that “The names Oholah (‘her tent’) and Oholibah (‘my tent in in her’) are given and quickly identified as Samaria and Jerusalem. The significance of the symbolism of these names has been largely lost, and the translations suggested here are approximate.” (P. 1532)

23:5¹¹⁴⁵ וַתִּזְנֶה אֹהֶלָה תַּחְתֵּי

And Oholah prostituted while under Me / My authority.¹¹⁴⁶

1145

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 5-10** “The Association of Samaria with Assyria.” Darr entitles these same verses “Oholah’s Adultery and Punishment.”

Darr comments that “The story of Oholah’s illicit fornications (**verses 5-8** and eventual punishment (**verses 9-10**) begins with a general accusation: She betrayed her husband, Yahweh, by ‘playing the harlot’ (**verse 5a**). Ezekiel has already accused both sisters of prostituting themselves in Egypt (**verse 3**). Such behavior was degrading, but it did not entail adultery, since neither was married at the time. By **verse 5**, however, Oholah’s marital status has changed. **Leviticus 20:10** and **Deuteronomy 22:22** state that the legal penalty for adultery is death of *both* parties. We can question whether that penalty was routinely enforced. Moreover, we should not simply assume that biblical portrayals of other punishments inflicted on unfaithful wives reflect actual social practices. Nonetheless, the text reveals the negative views of adulterous women and the concomitant impulse not only to inflict upon them physical and psychological pain but also to return upon them the shame and dishonor they have brought upon their husbands and families.” (P. 196)

Matties comments on **verses 5-35** that “The historical overview names the charges against Oholah (**verses 5-8**), along with her sentence (**verses 9-10**), which are followed by the charges against Oholibah (**verses 11-21**) and her sentence (**verses 22-35**)...”

“The charge against Oholah is that she became a prostitute. The descriptions of her Assyrian lovers imply political leaders and military personnel. Israel succumbed to Assyrian political domination by the mid-9th century B.C.E. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III depicts king Jehu submitting to him (841 B.C.E.). Menahem allied with Tiglath-Pileser III in 738 B.C.E. (see also **2 Kings 15:19-20**).” (P. 1189)

1146

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “when she was Mine,” and he comments that it is literally “under Me,” which he says means “under My control as he ‘Husband.’” (P. 150)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has καὶ ἐξέπόμευσεν ἡ Οολα ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ, “And the Oola prostituted from Me,” with nothing being said about her being “under” YHWH.

Hilmer comments that “Prostitution here represents political alliances with pagan powers—not idolatry as in **chapter 16**...The graphic language of the chapter underscores [YHWH’s] and Ezekiel’s disgust with Israel for playing the worldly game of international politics rather than relying on [YHWH] for her security—as clear a case of religious prostitution as idolatry.” (P. 1257)

וַתַּעֲגֹב עַל־מְאַהֲבֶיהָ

And she lusted after / upon her lovers

אֶל־אַשּׁוּר קְרוֹבִים:

to / for Assyria, near ones / neighbors--¹¹⁴⁷

23:6 לְבָשִׁי תְּכֵלֶת

dressed in purple,

פְּחֹת וּסְגָנִים

governors and rulers,

1147

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "the Assyrians, warriors." He comments that "The Hebrew word קְרוֹבִים, **qerobhiym** is variously explained. American Jewish translation connects it with *kerab*, 'war' (compare **2 Samuel 17:11**; **Psalm 144:1**). Ehrlich cites **Esther 1:14**, *and the next (qarobh) unto him*, referring to one who had ready access to the king, and understands the word here as indicating that the court of Samaria entered into close relations with the Assyrians. Rashi, Kimchi and others render: 'the Assyrians, her neighbors' ...i.e. they became on friendly terms with the Assyrians and made them their 'neighbors,' or regarded them as 'relatives.' The first approach of Israel to Assyria was by king Menahem (**2 Kings 15:19-20**; compare **Hosea 5:13**; **12:2**)." (Pp. 150-51)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has τὸς Ἀσσυρίους τοὺς ἐγγίζοντας αὐτῇ, "the Assyrians, the ones drawing near to her." The English translations we are consulting vary between "neighbors," "warriors," and "lovers."

Darr comments that "The objects of Oholah's lusting...are her Assyrian 'lovers'; guardsmen attired in expensive blue fabric, governors, and commanders, all handsome and sitting astride horses. In **chapter 16**, Ezekiel praised the physical beauty and rich attire of Yahweh's young bride (**16:9-14**). Here, by contrast, he says nothing of Oholah's appearance, emphasizing instead the attractiveness of Assyria's military and administrative officials, all 'decked out,' one imagines, in their finest 'dress' uniforms. Bedazzled by their beauty, Oholah gives her self (as a prostitute) to *all* of them. Moreover, she defiles herself with all their idols (literally 'dung-pellets,' Ezekiel's characteristic and crass label for the images of other Deities). Like the proverbial dog that returns to its vomit, Oholah reverts to the lewd behavior of her youth when, according to Ezekiel, she willingly played the prostitute with Egyptian men." (P. 196)

בַּחֲוָרֵי חֶמֶד כָּלָם

young men of delight, all of them,

פָּרָשִׁים רֹכְבֵי סוּסִים:

horsemen, riding horses.¹¹⁴⁸

23:7 וַתִּתֵּן תַּזְנוּתֶיהָ עֲלֵיהֶם

And she gave her prostitutions to them

מִבְּחַר בְּנֵי-אַשּׁוּר כָּלָם

choice sons of Assyria, all of them.

וּבְכָל אֲשֶׁר-עִנְבָהּ

And with all for whom she lusted,

בְּכָל-גִּלּוּלֵיהֶם נִטְמָאָה:

With all their idols she became unclean.¹¹⁴⁹

23:8 וְאֶת-תַּזְנוּתֶיהָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא עָזָבָה

And her prostitutions from Egypt she did not leave / give up,¹¹⁵⁰

1148

Rabbi Fisch's translation has with "clothed with blue [our 'purple']...riding upon horses," and he comments that "The inhabitants of Samaria were attracted by the beautiful uniforms of the Assyrian warriors, by their high-ranking officers and elegant appearance, and by their martial bearing." (P. 151)

1149

Here the allegory begins to betray itself—it is not so much the sexual attraction of the Assyrians as it is their idols to which the Jerusalemites and Judeans were drawn. As Rabbi Fisch states, "Their eagerness for an alliance with Assyria was carried into effect, and the consequence was the introduction of Assyrian forms of idolatry." (P. 151)

1150

Immediately Ezekiel returns to the sexual allegory. As Rabbi Fisch notes, "They super-imposed Assyrian idolatry upon the cults which they learned in Egypt." (P. 151)

(continued...)

כִּי אֹתָהּ שָׁכְבוּ בְנֵעוּרֶיהָ

because they slept with her in her youth.

וְהִמָּזָה עָשׂוּ דְדָי בְּתוּלֶיהָ

And they squeezed her virgin breasts.

וַיִּשְׁפְּכוּ תִזְנוּתָם עָלֶיהָ:

And they poured out their prostitutions upon her.

לְכֹן נִתְּתִיהָ בְיַד־מְאַהֲבֶיהָ¹¹⁵¹ 23:9

Therefore I placed her in (the) hand of her lovers,

בְּיַד בְּנֵי אַשּׁוּר אֲשֶׁר עָגְבָה עֲלֶיהֶם:

in (the) hand of Assyria's sons, upon whom she lusted.¹¹⁵²

¹¹⁵⁰(...continued)

Hilmer says to compare **Ezekiel 20:5-8**. Israel's entire history was marked by unfaithfulness. For her attachment to Egypt see **Exodus 17:3; Numbers 11:5, 18, 20; 14:2-4; 21:5.**" (P. 1257)

1151

Matties comments on **verses 9-10** that "The sentence depicts Assyria's conquest of Israel in 722-721 B.C.E. Israel was destroyed and the population was deported (**2 Kings 17:6**)." (P. 1189)

1152

Rabbi Fisch notes that "Because they abandoned their devotion to God in their infatuation with Assyria, God made the Assyrians the force which destroyed their kingdom." (P. 151)

Darr comments that "Oholah's punishment, introduced by לְכֹן, 'therefore, begins when her husband delivers her into the hands of her Assyrian 'lovers' (**verse 9**; see **verse 5**). Ezekiel ignores the question of how or why, Samaria's partners in adultery should not only escape punishment, but also serve as Yahweh's instruments of her demise. Public stripping, whether preliminary to sexual assault or a signal of the loss of support of her husband and his family, or both, appears in **Hosea 2:3; Jeremiah 13:26-27** and **Ezekiel 16:36-39**. In each of these texts, the victim is not a human woman but an entity personified as a female. Seizing her sons and daughters is an apparent reference to Assyria's harsh deportation policy, or to their deaths in the course of the capital's downfall...In **16:42**, Jerusalem's brutal death had a cathartic [relieving] effect upon her Divine Husband: 'So I will satisfy My fury on you, and My jealousy shall turn away from you; I will be calm, and will be angry no longer.' But while the verses are filled with expressions of (misspent) erotic passion, Ezekiel's God remains aloof, admitting no
(continued...)

23:10 הַמָּה גְלוּ עֲרוֹתָהּ

These¹¹⁵³ uncovered her nakedness,¹¹⁵⁴

בְּנֵיהָ וּבְנוֹתֶיהָ לְקָחוּ

her sons and her daughters they took,¹¹⁵⁵

וְאוֹתָהּ בַּחֶרֶב הָרְגוּ

and her, they killed with the sword.

וַתְּהִי־שֵׁם לְנָשִׁים

And she became a name¹¹⁵⁶ to / for the women,¹¹⁵⁷

¹¹⁵²(...continued)

emotions and recounting both ‘His’ wife’s sins and her punishment in a detached manner. The juxtaposition of ‘she became a byword (literally, ‘a name’) among women’ and ‘judgment was executed upon her’ suggests that the former was a consequence of the latter. As word of Oholah’s punishment circulates, her name comes to represent the worst fate that can befall a city, just as the name of Zimri, the king-killer, is applied by Jezebel to Jehu (2 Kings 9:31; see 1 Kings 16:9-10), who overthrew northern Israel’s Omride dynasty.” (P. 197)

1153

Rabbi Fisch explains that “these” refers to “The Assyrians whom Samaria had courted.” (P. 151)

1154

Rabbi Fisch states that “uncovering her nakedness” is “symbolic of the ravishing of the kingdom and the captivity of its inhabitants.” (P. 151)

Hilmer’s translation has “stripped her naked,” and he comments that this is “a refer-ence to the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722-732 B.C.E.” (P. 1257)

1155

By “they took,” Rabbi Fisch explains, means “they took into captivity.” (P. 151)

1156

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has *λάλημα*, “prattle,” “idle talk.” English translations vary from “famous,” to “a byword,” to “notorious.”

1157

(continued...)

וְשֹׁפְטִים עָשׂוּ בָּהּ:

and they made judgments on her.

23:11¹¹⁵⁸

¹¹⁵⁷(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch states that “the fate of this harlot at the hand of her lover should serve as a warning example to other women. In plain language, what happened to Samaria should have been a deterrent to Jerusalem.” (P. 151)

Darr comments that “Clearly, **verses 9-10** refer to Assyria’s destruction of Samaria in 722 / 21 B.C.E. Critics have sought also to identify the historical referents underlying **verses 5b-8**. So, for example, Samaria’s initial liaison with Assyria might refer to king Jehu’s payment of tribute to Shalmaneser III in 841 B.C.E. (in hopes of securing support for his regime?) Cogan has shown that the vassal states of Assyria (i.e., allied foreign nations that paid tribute but retained their independence) were bound by loyalty oaths sworn in the names of Assyrian Deities (and likely their own as well). Ezekiel’s charge that Oholah defiled herself with the ‘dung-idols’ of her Assyrian ‘lovers’ reflects that religio-political reality. Despite such an oath, however, Israel’s last king, Hoshea, conspired with the Egyptians and withheld tribute from Shalmaneser, bringing on Assyrian troops and the fall of Samaria under Sargon II (**2 Kings 17:3-4**; see also **Hosea 7:11; 12:1**). Has memory of this incident motivated Ezekiel’s evocation of Egypt in **verse 8**? Given the prophet’s antipathy toward Israel’s repeated resorts to Egyptian aid down to his own day, we should not be surprised to find such a reference here. Yet the intent of this verse appears, rather, to assert that Oholah’s whorings with the Assyrians are but a resumption of the sexual activity practiced since her youth in Egypt. Despite her union with Yahweh, her behavior has never changed; she has simply switched human partners.” (P. 197)

1158

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 11-21** “The Relations of Oholibah with Assyria and Babylon.” (P. 151) Darr entitles **verses 11-35** “The Indictment and Punishment of Oholibah.”

Matties comments that “Oholibah, acting more despicably than her sister, took three lovers...Like Samaria, Jerusalem consorted with the Assyrians (see also **2 Kings 16:7-8**)... Aroused by painted images of Babylonian men, Jerusalem consorts with them only to turn away in disgust. Judah’s history with Babylon involves both making and breaking political alliances (see also **2 Kings 20:12-21; 24:1-25:21; Isaiah 39**)...Although [YHWH] had turned from her, she resorted to her earlier Egyptian lovers (see also **Jeremiah 37:5**).” (Pp. 1189-90)

Darr comments that “While Ezekiel dispatched Oholah in only six verses, he devotes twenty-five verses to Oholibah’s indictment (**verses 11-21**) and punishments (**verses 22-35**). Obviously, the already-defunct capital of northern Israel is not his central concern. Rather, Samaria’s ‘biography’ has illustrated the enormous price Yahweh exacts for illicit unions with foreign nations and their Gods.

(continued...)

וַתֵּרֶא אֲחוּתָהּ אֹהֶלִיבָה

And her sister Oholiybhah saw

וַתְּשַׁחַת עֲגֻבְתָּהּ מִמִּנָּהּ

and she corrupted her lusts more than hers (her sister's),

וְאֶת־תְּזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ מִזְנוֹנֵי אֲחוּתָהּ:

and her prostitutions more than her sister's prostitutions.¹¹⁵⁹

¹¹⁵⁸(...continued)

Jerusalem, whose youthful whorings in Egypt paralleled her sister's, can only be expected to follow in her path. Though she should have learned from Oholah's tragic 'morality tale,' she has instead outdone her 'in her lusting and in her whorings' (**verse 11**).” (Pp. 197-198)

1159

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Though Judea saw what happened to Samaria on account of her reliance on foreign powers and disloyalty to God, she adopted the same policy and even intensified it.” (P. 152) Compare **Jeremiah 3:8, 11**

8 וַאֲרָא כִּי עַל-כָּל-אֲדוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִאֲפָה מִשְׁבַּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

And I saw that for all (these) causes which back-turning Israel was sexually immoral,

שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ

I sent her away;

וְאָתָן אֶת־סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֹתֶיהָ אֵלֶיהָ

and I gave a writing of cutting-off / divorce to her.

וְלֹא יִרְאֶה בְּגֵרָה יְהוּדָה אֲחוּתָהּ

And faithless Judah her sister was not afraid;

וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתִּזְנֶן גַּם־הִיא:

and she went and prostituted herself—even she!

11 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי

And YHWH said to me,

צְדָקָה נִפְשָׁה מִשְׁבַּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

Back-turning Israel's innermost-being is more righteous

מִבְּגֵרָה יְהוּדָה:

than treacherous Judah!

23:12 אֶל-בְּנֵי אַשּׁוּר עָגְבָהּ

She lusted to / for Assyria's sons--

פְּחוֹת וּסְגָנִים קְרָבִים

governors and rulers,¹¹⁶⁰ near ones,¹¹⁶¹

לְבִשֵׁי מְכָלֹל

dressed to perfection--

פָּרָשִׁים רֹכְבֵי סוּסִים

horsemen riding horses,

בְּחֹרֵי חָמֵד כָּלָם:

desirable young men, all of them.

1160

Rabbi Fisch notes that “rulers” in the Hebrew is **סְגָנִים**, **seghaniym**. “Only the plural occurs in the **Bible**. The singular is common in Rabbinic literature as the title of the deputy high priest.” (P. 152)

1161

Rabbi Fisch's translation has “warriors” for our “near ones.” See our footnote on **verse 5**. Rabbi Fisch notes that “This verse may allude to king Ahaz's appeal to Tiglath-pileser for help.” (P. 152)

Compare **2 Kings 16:7**,

וַיִּשְׁלַח אָחָז מְלָאכִים אֶל-תְּגַלְת־פִּלְסֵר מֶלֶךְ-אַשּׁוּר

And Ahaz sent forth his messengers to Tiglathpileser, king of Assyria,

לֵאמֹר עַבְדְּךָ וּבִנְךָ אֲנִי

saying, Your servant and your son (am) I;

עֲלֵה וְהוֹשַׁעַנִי

come up and save / deliver me,

מִכַּף מֶלֶךְ-אַרָם וּמִכַּף מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל

from (the) hand / power of Aram's king and from (the) hand of Israel's king,

הַקּוֹמִים עָלַי:

who are standing against me!

23:13 וַאֲרָא כִּי נִטְמָאָה

And I saw that she had become unclean--¹¹⁶²

גִּדְרָךְ אֶחָד לְשֵׁתֵיהֶן:

(there was) one way to the two of them.¹¹⁶³

23:14¹¹⁶⁴ וַתּוֹסֶף אֶל־תּוֹנוֹתֶיהָ

And she added to her prostitutions.

וַתֵּרֶא אֲנָשִׁי מְחֻקָּה עַל־הַקִּיר

And she saw men engraved / portrayed upon the wall--¹¹⁶⁵

1162

Rabbi Fisch comments that “God looked on the corrupting effect which followed on the alliance, but bided His time.” (P. 152)

1163

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “they both took one way.” He comments that “Both kingdoms followed the same road of national corruption and decay.” (P. 152)

1164

Reimer comments on **verses 14-17** that “The empire of the Babylonians succeeded that of the Assyrians (**verse 12**).” (P. 1532)

Darr comments that “Unlike her sister, Oholibah lives long enough to add the Chaldeans to her roster of lovers. The Chaldeans were an Aramean people originally situated along the Persian Gulf. In 625 B.C.E. they gained control of Babylon. Ezekiel’s use of the term in **verse 14** appears to reflect his awareness that the Chaldeans were not part of Babylonia’s native population. Jerusalem’s whorings with her new lovers are said to have begun when she saw engravings of male Chaldean nobles in full regalia (including belts...and flowing turbans), outlined with red paint. Ezekiel may himself have seen such engravings on the buildings and monuments of Babylon, but how, one wonders, might Oholibah have witnessed them? Greenberg suggests that the scenario is a product of the prophet’s escalating rhetoric. Previously, her passion was aroused by flesh-and-blood Assyrians; now her longing is unleashed by mere pictures.” (P. 198) This is an example of ancient “pornography,” and its powerful influence.

1165

(continued...)

צְלָמֵי (כְּשָׂדִיִּים) [כְּשָׂדִיִּים] חֲקָקִים בַּשָּׁשֶׁר:

images of Chaldeans, engraved / portrayed in the (color) vermillion,

23:15 חֲגוּרֵי אֲזוּר בְּמַתְנֵיהֶם

girded (with) waistcloth / belts on their hips,¹¹⁶⁶

סְרוּחֵי טְבוּלִים בְּרֵאשֵׁיהֶם

pendant turbans on their heads--¹¹⁶⁷

מֵרֵאָה שְׁלֵשִׁים כָּלָם

(with the) appearance of officers¹¹⁶⁸—all of them,

¹¹⁶⁵(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch quotes Lofthouse as writing, “At present, an Oriental woman of good position would never see strange men save in pictures; and though Hebrew women had more freedom, Ezekiel compares Judah’s desire for closer acquaintance with Babylon to a wanton girl’s desire for a world from which she would naturally be secluded.” Rabbi Fisch adds, “Not satisfied with Assyrians as a ‘lover,’ Judea also lusted after Babylon.” (P. 152)

Hilmer comments that “Arousal through pictures was even more perverted.” (P. 1257)

1166

Rabbi Fisch notes that “Waist-belts were a feature of the Babylonian attire unknown in the land of Israel, as stated in [the **Babylonian Talmud**] **Shabbath 9b**. The Judeans preferred Babylonian garb to their own, a mark of the tendency to assimilation.” (P. 152)

Compare **Isaiah 5:27-28** for depiction of the Assyrian soldiers and their being well equipped for marching and battle.

1167

Rabbi Fisch explains that pendant turbans were “turbans wound around the head with fillets [bands or ribbons] hanging down behind.” (P. 152)

1168

Rabbi Fisch observes that the word translated “captains” [our “officers”] is שְׁלֵשִׁים, **shalishiym**, “the noun used in **Exodus 14:7**. It is now explained as ‘third man’ who occupied the chariot with the king and driver, an officer of high rank.” (Pp. 152-53)

דְּמוּת בְּנֵי-בָבֶל

(the) likeness of sons of Babylon,

כְּשָׂדִים אֶרֶץ מוֹלְדָתָם:

Chaldeans (from the) land of their birth.¹¹⁶⁹

23:16 [וַתַּעֲגֹב] [וַתַּעֲגֹבָה] עָלֵיהֶם לְמִרְאֵה עֵינֶיהָ

And she lusted upon / after them, to / by (the) sight of her eyes,¹¹⁷⁰

וַתִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים אֲלֵיהֶם כְּשָׂדִימָה:

and she sent messengers to them, to Chaldea.¹¹⁷¹

23:17 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי-בָבֶל

And they came to her, Babylon's sons,

1169

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Unlike Israel who was attracted by foreign customs, the Babylonians strictly conformed to their own national dress.” (P. 153)

1170

Rabbi Fisch's translation has “as soon as she saw them.” He comments that “The sight of the martial Chaldeans at once aroused an ardent desire to be allied with them. Another rendering is: ‘and she doted upon them after the sight of her eyes.’” (P. 153)

1171

Darr comments that “Oholibah sends messengers to Chaldea (**verse 16**). Though the sexual metaphor is prominent (their portraits have stirred her lust), the language of sending messengers derives from the sphere of diplomacy (see **17:5**, where Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar by sending ambassadors to Egypt in hopes of securing horses and a large army). The text suggests that the Babylonian officials waste no time coming to and bedding with her, so that she is defiled. In the light of her history of illicit fornications, the reader might be surprised to read that ‘her soul recoiled from them’...Is her reaction illumined by that of Ammon, David's son, who desired his sister, Tamar, but having raped her, hated her with a hatred greater than the love with which he had loved her (**2 Samuel 13:15**)? There is little doubt that behind this, Ezekiel's first acknowledgment that either sister might actually pay an emotional price for her self-derogating behavior, lies the reality of Jerusalem's vacillating foreign policies...Still, the comment should not be overlooked in a chapter that elsewhere narrows the emotional range of both sisters to nymphomaniacal lust.” (P. 198)

לְמִשְׁכַּב דְּרוֹיִם

to a bed of loves.

וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ בְּתִזְנוּנוֹתֵיהֶם

And they made her unclean by their prostitutions.¹¹⁷²

וַתִּטְמַא אֶבְרָתָהּ

And she was made unclean by them,

וַתִּקַּע נַפְשָׁהּ מֵהֵם:

and her innermost-being was torn away from them.¹¹⁷³

23:18 וַתְּגַלֵּן תִּזְנוּתֶיהָ

And she uncovered her prostitutions,

וַתְּגַלֵּן אֶת־עֲרוּתָהּ

and she uncovered her nakedness.¹¹⁷⁴

וַתִּקַּע נַפְשִׁי מֵעָלֶיהָ

And My innermost-being was torn away from her,¹¹⁷⁵

1172

Rabbi Fisch comments taht “The Babylonians took full advantage of Judea’s infatuation, with the result that the land was defiled by them.” (P. 153)

1173

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “her soul was alienated from them,” literally “dislocated.” He comments that “Sated passion had its reaction in a revulsion of feeling. The allusion is to the rebellions of Yehoyaqim and Zedekiah against Babylon’s domination.” (P. 153)

1174

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Tired of Babylon and lost to all shame, Judea looked for other ‘lovers.’” (P. 153)

1175

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Such degrading national behavior had the same consequence as with Samaria. God dcided to withdraw His protection and leave her to her fate, as a husband does with a
(continued...)

כַּאֲשֶׁר נִקְעָה נַפְשִׁי מֵעַל אֲחוֹתָהּ:

just as My innermost being was torn away from her sister.¹¹⁷⁶

23:19 וַתְּרַבֶּה אֶת־תְּזוֹנוֹתֶיהָ

And she multiplied her prostitutions,

¹¹⁷⁵(...continued)

faithless wife. Jeremiah uses the same phrase in **Jeremiah 6:8**,

הוֹסְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

Be corrected, Jerusalem!

פֶּן־תִּקַּע נַפְשִׁי מִמֶּךָ

Lest My innermost-being is dislocated / alienated from you;

פֶּן־אֲשִׁימְךָ שְׂמֹמָה

lest I place / make you into a devastation / waste,

אֶרֶץ לֹא נֹשְׁבָה:

a land not inhabited!

Rabbi Fisch states that this is “a striking metaphor expressing [YHWH’s] love on the one hand, and the powerful effect of sin on the other.” (P. 153)

1176

Darr comments that “In the face of Oholibah’s unabashed whorings, Yahweh’s ‘soul recoils from her...just as it had from her sister (**verse 18**). Yet she only increases her fornications, remembering her youthful days when she played the prostitute in Egypt and yearning for her earliest paramours (literally ‘concubines’). Ezekiel, whose anti-Egyptian sentiments are well-established by this point in the scroll, does not deign to speak of these lovers as ‘handsome young men.’ Their attributes consist of oversized penises (‘like those of donkeys’)...and abundant ejaculations (‘like that of stallions’). Ezekiel’s comment, obviously a slur, runs afoul of contemporary American culture, where size is prized, but moderns also know that sexual organs and practices can play a role in insults, especially ethnic insults. Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes remarks that by depicting Oholibah’s desire in terms of penis size, Ezekiel has betrayed a male obsession. **Verses 19-21** do not state explicitly that Oholibah resumed sexual relations with the Egyptians: She remembers the days of her youth when she played the harlot; she ‘lusts after her former paramours’ (but dispatches no messengers to them; compare **verse 16**); she ‘longs for the lewdness’ of her youth. Nonetheless most critics discern in these verses references to Jerusalem’s recurring hopes of securing military assistance from Egypt.” (P. 199)

לְזַכֵּר אֶת־יְמֵי נְעוּרֶיהָ

to remember (the) days of her youth,¹¹⁷⁷

אֲשֶׁר זָנְתָה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

when she prostituted in (the) land of Egypt.¹¹⁷⁸

23:20 וַתַּעֲנֹבָה עַל פְּלִגְשֵׁיהֶם

And she lusted after their concubines,

אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׂר־חֲמוֹרִים בְּשָׂרָם

whose flesh / penis (was) flesh / penis of donkeys,¹¹⁷⁹

1177

Reimer comments that “Usually ‘youthful memory’ implies coming to one’s senses (e.g., **Ezekiel 16:22**). Here, remembering the days of her youth inspires Oholibah to greater depths of depravity. Egypt again proves a temptation to Jerusalem; see **Ezekiel 16:23-29; 17:11-18.**” (P. 1533)

1178

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Judea even renewed her old association with Egypt. Zedekiah made overtures to Egypt for help against Babylon.” (P. 153) Compare **Ezekiel 17:15**,

וַיִּמְרֹד־בּוֹ

And he [Zedekiah] rebelled against him,

לְשַׁלַּח מַלְאָכָיו מִצְרַיִם

to / by sending his messengers (to) Egypt,

לְתַתֵּן־לוֹ סוּסִים

to give to him horses,

וְעַם־רַב

and a large people / army.

הֲיִצְלַח

Will he prosper / thrive?

הֲיִמְלֹט הָעֹשֶׂה אֵלֶּה

Will the one doing these things escape?

וַהֲפַר בְּרִית וְנִמְלֹט:

And he broke a covenant—and will he escape?

1179

(continued...)

וְזָרְמַת סוּסִים זָרְמָתָם:

and their issue / orgasm, an issue / orgasm of horses!¹¹⁸⁰

¹¹⁷⁹(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments quotes Lofthouse as writing, “Ezekiel here uses proverbial phrases to express his contemptuous loathing.” Rabbi Fisch adds that “As a harlot is attracted by sexual potency, so Judea was allured by the military power of Egypt.” (P. 154)

Compare **Ezekiel 16:26** for similar explicit sexual imagery.

1180

This verse, with its crude sexual language, is given varying translations:

King James, “For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh *is as* the flesh of asses, and whose issue *is like* the issue of horses.”

Tanakh, “she lusted for concubinage with them, whose members were like those of asses and whose organs were like those of stallions.”

New Revised Standard, “and lusted after her paramours there, whose members were like those of donkeys, and whose emission was like that of stallions.”

New International, “There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.”

New Jerusalem, “when she had been in love with their profligates, big-membered as donkeys, ejaculating as violently as stallions.”

Rahlfs, καὶ ἐπέθου ἐπὶ τοὺς Χαλδαίους ὧν ἦσαν ὡς ὄνων αἰ σάρκες αὐτῶν καὶ αἰδοῖα ἵππων τὰ αἰδοῖα αὐτῶν, “and you laid upon the Chaldeans, of whom their flesh was like donkeys, and private parts of horses, their private parts.” (What do you think? Is it the Chaldeans who are being described as having such large genitalia, or the Egyptians? Rahlfs obviously thinks the Chaldeans are meant.)

The most difficult part of the verse is its phrase פְּלִנְשֵׁיהֶם, which means “their concubines,” obviously a feminine plural noun—but the verse goes on to describe those concubines as having male genitalia—like horses and donkeys. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests that here, the meaning may be “concubinage,” i.e., the prostitute Jerusalem lusted after become a concubine servicing the Egyptians. Does the passage mean that Jerusalem was jealous of Egyptian concubines, and wanted to become one of them, making love to the Egyptians with such large genitalia?

Rabbi Fisch notes that “Rashi and Kimchi render: ‘upon (becoming one of) their concubines.’ Judea was ready to become one of the many vassal states of Egypt to be under that country’s protection.” (Pp. 153-54)

23:21 וַתִּפְקְדִי אֶת זִמְתֹּנְךָ נְעוּרֶיךָ

And you visited (the) wickedness of your youth,¹¹⁸¹

בַּעֲשׂוֹת מִמְצָרַיִם דְּדִיךָ

in the making your (breast-) nipples from Egypt,

לְמַעַן שְׂרֵי נְעוּרֶיךָ:

in order that (they would be) breasts of your youth!¹¹⁸²

23:22¹¹⁸³ ḥ

1181

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Forgetful of the lessons taught by their national history, they renewed the errors of their past in Egypt (compare **verse 3**).” (P. 154)

1182

Translations vary:

King James, “Thus thou calledst to remembrance the lewdness of thy youth, in bruising thy teats by the Egyptians for the paps of thy youth.”

Tanakh, “Thus you reverted to the wantonness of your youth, remembering your youthful breasts, when the men of Egypt handled your nipples.”

New Revised Standard, “Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians fondled your bosom and caressed your young breasts.”

New International, “So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.”

New Jerusalem, “You were hankering for the debauchery of your girlhood, when they used to handle your nipples in Egypt and fondle your young breasts.”

Rahlfs, καὶ ἐπεσκέψω τὴν ἀνομίαν νεότητός σου ἃ ἐποίεις ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἐν τῷ καταλύματί σου οὗ οἱ μαστοὶ νεότητός σου, “and you (feminine singular) visited [NETS translates ‘you reflected upon’; we see no justification for this] the lawlessness of your youth, which things you were doing in Egypt in the lodging of yours, where the breasts of your young (were?).”

1183

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 22-35** “Punishment of the Unfaithful Oholibah.”

Reimer comments on **verses 22-31** that “As in **chapter 16**, the paramours become the punishers. Twice here the formula [in this way YHWH spoke] (**23:22, 28**) introduces announcements of judgment

(continued...)

לִכְּן אֶהְלִיבָהּ פֶּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה

Therefore,¹¹⁸⁴ Oholibah, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

הִנְנִי מְעִיר אֶת־מְאַהֲבֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ

Look at Me, stirring up your lovers¹¹⁸⁵ against you,

אֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִקְעָה נַפְשְׁךָ מֵהֶם

those from whom your innermost-being was alienated;

¹¹⁸³(...continued)

(verses 22-27; 28-31). The longer first section details the political agents of destruction, leaving the second to provide a summary.” (P. 1533)

Matties comments that “Oholibah’s sentence divides into two parts. First, 23:22-27, which depicts [YHWH] as the Agent Who brings the lovers against Jerusalem...Second, 23:28-35 which depicts in ironic reversal from love to hate, those whom Oholibah hates now hate and shame her publicly. The sentence includes drinking the cup of her sister, a symbol of Divine judgment (**Jeremiah 25:15-19; Isaiah 51:17-22**). This judgment reflects the consequences of Jerusalem’s deliberate rejection of (YHWH) (verse 35).” (Pp. 1190-91)

Darr comments that “With verse 22, Ezekiel addresses Oholibah directly and announces her sentence. As a consequence of her whorings, God will rouse against her the lovers from whom she turned in disgust—the Babylonians, all the Chaldeans, as well as three Aramaean tribes: Pekod (called Puqudu in Akkadian texts; Shoa (often identified with Sutu, the name of a nomadic tribe), and Koa (perhaps Quti / Guti a tribe living east of the Tigris). These names are ominous, since they are similar to the Hebrew words for ‘punish,’ ‘cry for help,’ and ‘shriek,’ respectively. The last two may also have been chosen for their rhyming sounds. The following reference to Assyrians probably reflects the historical reality that after the empire collapsed, its soldiers were conscripted into Babylonia’s fighting forces. Just as Ezekiel emphasized the good looks and attractive clothing of the sisters’ sexual partners, so also here he details their approach against Jerusalem, with special attention to their military machinery and battle attire.” (Pp. 199-200)

1184

Rabbi Fisch comments on the first word of verse 22, לִכְּן, **lakhen**, ‘therefore,’ that the punishment which Ezekiel announces as coming is “because of their monstrous infidelities.” (P. 154)

1185

Rabbi Fisch comments that these “lovers” are “enumerated in the next verse. These peoples to whom the Judeans had surrendered themselves will be the agents of [YHWH’s] punishment.” (P. 154)

וְהִבֵּאתִים עָלַי מִסָּבִיב:

and I will bring them against you from all around!

23:23 בְּנֵי בָבֶל וְכָל-פְּשָׁיִים

Sons of Babylon and all Chaldeans—¹¹⁸⁶

פֶּקֹד וְשׁוֹעַ וְקוֹעַ

Peqodh¹ and Shoa and Qoa,¹¹⁸⁷

כָּל-בְּנֵי אַשּׁוּר אִתָּם

all sons of Assyria with them—

בְּחֹרֵי חָמֵר פְּחֹת וְסִגְנִים כְּלָם

desirable young men, governors and rulers, all of them,

1186

Rabbi Fisch comments that the Chaldeans, “together with the Babylonians, comprised the empire.” The names, Pekod and Shoa and Qoa “are now identified with Pukudu, Sutu and Kutu, races inhabiting the land east of the Tigris and bordering on Elam or Persia.” (P. 154)

From StudyLight.org on the Internet, “Pekod signifying the muster or review of armies; Shoa, the magnificence of their uniform and arms; and Qoa, the marks or embroidery of the clothes of the captains and generals. Grotius thought that they might be names of contiguous nations: Pekod, the Bactrians; Shoa, a people of Armenia; and Qoa, the Medes.” (7/23/2020)

From the Institute for Creation Research, “These three regions were apparently prominent regions of Syria or Assyria at the time, all under the control of the Chaldeans. Shoa and Koa are mentioned only here, and Pekod is mentioned elsewhere only in **Jeremiah 50:21**.” (7/23/2020) See end-note 9 for an article on Pekod from **Wikipedia**.

1187

Hilmer comments that “Pekod (was an) Aramaic people located east of Babylon. Shoa and Koa [were] Babylonian allies of uncertain origin and location.” (P. 1258)

שְׁלֵשִׁים וְקְרוּאִים

officers and men of renown,¹¹⁸⁸

רֹכְבֵי סוּסִים כְּלָם:

riders of horses, all of them!

23:24¹¹⁸⁹ וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ

And they will come against you (feminine singular)--

הַצֵּן רֶכֶב וְגִלְגָּל

weapon,¹¹⁹⁰ chariotry, and wheel / whirlwind;

1188

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "councillors," and he comments that the Hebrew noun קְרוּאִים, **qeru**)iym means literally "'called' to give counsel; distinguished (compare **Numbers 1:16; 16:2**)."

 (P. 154)

1189

Darr comments that "In **Hosea 2**, Yahweh threatened personally to carry out the punishment of Israel / her land. In **verses 24-27**, by contrast, Yahweh commits Jerusalem's judgment to the throng of officials and military officers marshaled against her who, Ezekiel adds ominously, will judge her according to their own ordinances (**verse 24**). God's jealous wrath is unleashed in their furious dealings with her. They will cut off her nose and ears. Facial mutilation was among the atrocities practiced in Israel's ancient Near Eastern world. In the domestic sphere, Middle Assyrian law permitted the husband of an adulterous wife to cut off her nose. If a male or female slave received stolen property from a man's wife, both nose and ears could be cut off, while the wife lost her ears only. Apparently the Israelites did not practice this mode of punishment. Does its presence here explain Ezekiel's reference to the troops judging Israel according to their own practices?...Moreover, her former lovers will strip her and take her jewelry (see **16:39**). By these punishments, Yahweh will put an end to the lewdness and whoring she has practiced since her time in Egypt. Finally, she will forget her Egyptian paramours." (P. 200)

1190

The noun הַצֵּן, **hotsen**, occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, and therefore its meaning is difficult to determine. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has in its place ἀπὸ βορρᾶ, "from (the) north." Rabbi Fisch notes that "the word does not occur elsewhere and its meaning is uncertain." (P. 154) We agree.

וּבְקָהֶל עַמִּים

and with an assembly of peoples--

צָנָה וּמָגֵן וְקֹבֶעַ

large shield(s) and (small) shield(s) and helmet(s).

יִשְׂמוּ עָלֶיךָ סָבִיב

They will set (themselves) upon / against you (all) around.

וְנָתַתִּי לְפָנֵיהֶם מִשְׁפָּט

And I will give / place judgment / justice before them--

וְשִׁפְטוּךָ בְּמִשְׁפָּטֵיהֶם:

and they will judge you with their judgments.¹¹⁹¹

1191

Hilmer's translation has "they will punish you according to their standards." He comments that "their standards were cruel and gruesome (see **verse 25**).” (P. 1258)

The last two lines of **verse 24** are given varying translations:

King James, "and I will set judgment before them, and they shall judge thee according to their judgments."

Tanakh, "And I will entrust your punishment to them, and they shall inflict their punishments on you."

New Revised Standard, "and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their ordinances."

New International, "I will turn you over to them for punishment, and they will punish you according to their standards."

New Jerusalem, "I shall charge them to pass sentence on you and they will pass sentence on you as they think fit."

Rahlfs, καὶ δώσω πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν κρίμα καὶ ἐκδικήσουσίν σε ἐν τοῖς κρίμασιν αὐτῶν, "And I will give / place judgment before their face; and they will inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done on you in / with their judgments."

Rabbi Fisch comments that "God will inform them of the sentence which He has pronounced upon guilty Judea and they are to execute." (P. 155)

What do you think? Does this verse say the Chaldeans and their allies will inflict YHWH's judgment on Jerusalem / Judea? Or does it say instead that they will inflict their own judgments on the Jews, "according to their standards"?

(continued...)

23:25 וְנִתְתִּי קִנְאָתִי בְּךָ

And I will place My jealousy against you,¹¹⁹²

וְעָשׂוּ אֹתְךָ בְּחֵמָה

and they will do to you / treat you with rage!

אֶפְךָ וְאָזְנֶיךָ יִסְרוּ

Your nose and your ears they will take away / cut off;¹¹⁹³

וְאַחֲרֵיכֶם בַּחֶרֶב תִּפּוּל

and your survivors¹¹⁹⁴ will fall by the sword!

¹¹⁹¹(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch's translation has "according to their judgments," and he comments that those judgments "were notoriously ruthless, as the next verse describes." (P. 155)

1192

Rabbi Fisch comments that "The description of God as 'jealous' in such a connection means that He metes out retribution for the offences against Him... Ehrlich interprets that God will set upon the face of the nation the mark of His jealousy as does a wronged husband upon his wife's face." (P. 155)

Note the following sentences, which include "cutting off your nose and your ears"—presumably the punishment inflicted by a Jewish husband on his adulterous wife. What do you think? See on the Internet articles such as "Defacing Women: The Gendering of Disfigurement."

1193

Rabbi Fisch comments that "In ancient times this disfigurement was perpetrated on an adulteress. Here the words are figurative of the nation's deprivation of its leading men who will be led away as captives." (P. 155)

1194

Translations of the phrase אַחֲרֵי־יְתֵרְךָ, **achariythek** vary, from "thy residue," to "thy remnant," to "the last of you," to "your survivors," to "those of you who are left," to "what is left of your family," to τὸς καταλοίπους σου, "the remnants of yours."

Rabbi Fisch's translation is "thy residue shall fall by the sword," and he comments that "The mass of the people will also suffer in addition to the leaders, many of them being slain." (P. 155)

הָפָּחָה בְּנֵיךָ וּבָנוֹתֶיךָ יִקְחוּ

These, your sons and your daughters, they will take;

וְאַחֲרֵיכֶם תֹּאכַל בָּאֵשׁ:

and your survivors will be devoured by the fire!¹¹⁹⁵

23:26 וְהִפְשִׁיטוּךָ אֶת־בְּגָדֶיךָ

And they will strip off your clothes;¹¹⁹⁶

וְלָקְחוּ כָּל־יְפְאוֹרְתֶיךָ:

and they will take (the) ornaments of your beauty.

1195

Rabbi Fisch comments “The houses and property will be destroyed or plundered.” (P. 155) But neither houses nor property are mentioned—it is the same language as in the previous phrase, “your survivors.”

1196

Compare **Ezekiel 16:39**,

וְנָתַתִּי אוֹתָךְ בְּיָדָם

And I will place you in their hand;

וְהָרְסוּ גִבְךָ

and they will tear down your mound(s);

וְנִתְצָו רָמְתֶיךָ

and they will break down your high places;

וְהִפְשִׁיטוּ אוֹתָךְ בְּגָדֶיךָ

and they will strip off your clothes;

וְלָקְחוּ כָּל־יְפְאוֹרְתֶיךָ

and they will take your beautiful ornaments;

וְהִנִּיחֶךָ עֵירָם וְעָרְיָה:

and they will leave you silent, naked and bare.

23:27 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי זְמַתְךָ מִמֶּךָ

And I will cause your wickedness to cease from you,¹¹⁹⁷

וְאֶת־זְנוּתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

and your prostitution from Egypt-land.

וְלֹא־תִשְׂאִי עֵינֶיךָ אֲלֵיהֶם

And you will not lift up your eyes to them,

וּמִצְרַיִם לֹא תִזְכְּרִי־עוֹד:

and (the) Egyptians, you will not remember again.

23:28¹¹⁹⁸

1197

Rabbi Fisch comments that “With the fall of the state and in the Babylonian exile the lust after idolatry among the Judeans vanished entirely.” (P. 155) See **Ezekiel 22:15**,

וְהִפִּיצוּתִי אוֹתְךָ בְּגוֹיִם

And I will scatter you (singular) in the nations;

וְזָרִיתִיךָ בְּאֶרְצוֹת

and I will scatter (synonym) in the lands;

וְהִתְמַחְתִּי טְמֵאתְךָ מִמֶּךָ:

and I will complete / destroy your uncleanness from you.

But is it in fact what happened? There are a number of indications in **Isaiah 40-66** that a number of the returnees from Babylonian captivity continued to practice the idolatrous religious practices which had led to their captivity in the first place. See **Isaiah 57, 59, 65** and **66**. Yes, we wish that the people of YHWH could be done with sin, once and for all—but such is not the case. Even after marvelous grace and forgiveness, still the people of YHWH have to struggle against resorting to their old habits.

1198

Darr comments that “**Verse 28-30** consists of a second doom pronouncement against Oholibah... Verse 28 reiterates the thought of **verse 22**, but with greater intensity. Yahweh will deliver her into the hands of those she *hates*, into the hands of those from whom she turned in *disgust*, and they will deal with her with *hatred*, stealing everything she has labored for...and publicly stripping her naked, so that her shame is exposed for all to see. Ezekiel defends this punishment as the consequence of her lewdness

(continued...)

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱדַנִּי יְהוָה

Because in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

הִנְנִי נֹתֵן בְּיַד אֲשֶׁר שָׂנֵאת

Look at Me—giving you into (the) hand which you hated,¹¹⁹⁹

בְּיַד אֲשֶׁר־נִקְעָה נַפְשְׁךָ מֵהֵם:

into (the) hand from which your innermost-being was alienated.

23:29 וְעָשׂוּ אוֹתְךָ בְּשִׂנְאָה

And they will treat you with hatred;

וְלָקְחוּ כָּל־יְגִיעֶךָ

and they will take away everything you have produced.¹²⁰⁰

¹¹⁹⁸(...continued)

and whorings, because she has played the prostitute with the nations and polluted herself with their idols –a fresh charge earlier levied against Oholah alone (verse 7).” (P. 200)

1199

Rabbi Fisch notes that this means the Babylonians. See **verse 17**,

וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלֶיהָ בְּנֵי־בָבֶל

And they came to her, Babylon’s sons,

לְמִשְׁכַּב הַדִּים

to a bed of loves.

וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ בַּתְּזִנוּתָם

And they made her unclean by their prostitutions.

וַתִּטְמַאֲכֶם

And she was made unclean by them,

וַתִּקַּע נַפְשָׁהּ מֵהֵם:

and her innermost-being was torn away from them.

1200

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “all your labor,” and he notes that this means “the fruits of their toil. Compare the use of the noun יְגִיעַ, *yeghiya* (in **Psalm 128:2**,

(continued...)

וְעִזְבוּךָ עֵירָם וְעָרִיָּה

And they will leave / forsake you naked and bare (synonym);

וְנִגְלָה עֲרוֹת זְנוּנֶיךָ

and (the) nakedness of your prostitution will be uncovered,¹²⁰¹

וּזְמַתְךָ וְתִזְנוּתֶיךָ:

and your wickedness and your prostitute-immorality--

23:30 עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹה לָךְ

(which) are doing these things to you

בְּזִנוּתְךָ אַחֲרֵי גוֹיִם

by your prostituting yourself after nations,¹²⁰²

עַל אֲשֶׁר־נִטְמָאת בְּגִלּוּלֵיהֶם:

by which you became unclean / defiled, by their idols.¹²⁰³

¹²⁰⁰(...continued)

יִנְיַע כַּפֶּיךָ כִּי תֹאכֵל

(It is the) toil of your hands that you shall eat,

אֲשֶׁר־יָד וְטוֹב לָךְ:

your blessedness and good for you! (P. 156)

¹²⁰¹

Rabbi Fisch states that this means “The magnitude of the national guilt will become evident from the drastic nature of the punishment.” (P. 156)

¹²⁰²

Rabbi Fisch comments that Jerusalem / Judea has “gone astray after the nations by seeking alliances with them instead of relying upon the protection of God.” (P. 156)

¹²⁰³

Rabbi Fisch states that “These alliances with foreign powers resulted in the debasement of their religion.” (P. 156)

23:31¹²⁰⁴ בַּדֶּרֶךְ אַחֹתְךָ הֵלַכְתָּ

In (the) way of your sister¹²⁰⁵ you walked;

וְנָתַתִּי כּוֹסָהּ בְּיָדְךָ:

and I will give her cup into your hand.¹²⁰⁶

23:32¹²⁰⁷ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יְהוּדָה

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

1204

Darr comments that “Like **verse 13**, **verse 31a** explicitly states that Oholibah has followed her sister’s path. Hence Yahweh will place Oholah’s ‘cup’ in her hand (**verse 31b**). This second half-verse provides a felicitous transition to the following poem about ‘the cup of horror and desolation.’ The reader is alerted that Oholah also has drunk from this cup. But Ezekiel has reserved his description of the dreadful ordeal for Oholibah, the primary focus of his extended oracle. Ezekiel’s poem begins with the messenger formula (**verse 32**) and ends with a concluding formula (‘says the Lord God’).” (P. 200)

1205

Rabbi S. Fisch states that by “your sister” Ezekiel means “Oholah–Samaria.” (P. 156)

1206

Rabbi Fisch comments that this means “The cup of bitterness which the northern kingdom had drunk in the time of the Assyrian invasion will pass into the hands of the southern kingdom when attacked by the Babylonians.” (P. 156)

Hilmer notes that the “cup” is “filled with the anger of [YHWH]. To drink it was to die. For a development of the imagery compare **Psalm 75:8**; **Isaiah 51:17, 22**; **Jeremiah 25:15-29**; **49:12**; **Lamentations 4:21**; **Obadiah 16**; **Habakkuk 2:16**; **Matthew 20:22**; **26:39** and **Revelation 14:10**.

1207

Reimer observes that “Two further [‘in this way spoke’] introductions frame the final outcomes. The mention of the cup in **verse 31** triggers a different development here. The cup is well known in **Jeremiah** as an image of punishment (see **Jeremiah 25:15-29**; compare **Isaiah 51:17-23**), although here the metaphor of the sisters is not abandoned (**Ezekiel 23:33**). **Verse 35** concludes the entire oracle [vision-story].” P. 1533)

כּוֹס אַחֻתְךָ תִּשְׁתֵּי

You will drink your sister's cup,

הַעֲמֻקָּה וְהָרְחֹבָה

the deep and the wide one--¹²⁰⁸

תִּהְיֶה לְצַחֵק וּלְלַעַג

you / it (singular) will be for laughter and for mockery / derision,¹²⁰⁹

מְרַבָּה לְהַכִּיל:

(because of its) containing so much!¹²¹⁰

23:33 שְׁכָרוֹן וַיִּגּוֹן תִּמְלֵאִי

You will be filled (with) drunkenness and sorrow / grief!

1208

Darr comments that “The cup motif was familiar one, appearing in **Habakkuk 2:15-16** and **Jeremiah 25:15-29** (‘For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from My hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them,’ **Jeremiah 25:15**; see also **Jeremiah 49:12-13**; **51:7**; **Isaiah 51:1, 22**). This image derives from the hospitality of the host, who fills his guests’ ample drinking vessels to the brim. Here as in other contexts where the motif is used negatively, however, its contents are so intoxicating that they poison the one who is forced to quaff them. Drinking from her sister’s ample cup, Jerusalem will become an object of scorn and derision, drunk and filled with sorrow, utterly appalled.” (P. 200)

1209

Rabbi Fisch notes that “Kimchi construes: ‘it (the cup) shall be for scorn,’ etc. The cup of [YHWH’s] fury will bring scorn upon Judea from the surrounding nations. This interpretation is more correct grammatically, since ‘you shall be’ requires *tiheyi* [you will be, feminine singular] for *tiheyeh* [it will be, feminine singular].” (P. 156)

1210

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “it is full to the uttermost.” He comments that “The cup is filled to the brim, indicating the large draught of bitterness which the people will have to drink. [Other translations] render: ‘it contains much,’ making the phrase a description of the size of the cup.” (P. 156)

כּוֹס שְׁמָה וְשִׁמְמָה

(It is) a cup of waste and desolation,

כּוֹס אַחֹתֶךָ שְׁמָרוֹן:

your sister's cup, Samaria.

23:34¹²¹¹ וְשָׁתִית אֹתָהּ

And you will drink it;

וּמְצִית

and you will drain (it).

וְאֶת־חֲרָשֶׁיהָ תִּגְרַמִּי

And its broken pieces you will break¹²¹²

1211

Darr comments that “**Verse 34** is grotesque. Having drained every drop, a deranged Oholibah will smash the cup and gnaw its sherds, in order to chew and suck out any liquid absorbed by the clay. Then, in an act of self-mutilation, she will tear out her breasts, the body parts whose role in her earliest and ongoing fornications was noted in **verses 3, 8** and **21** (all in conjunction with Egypt). Despite its initial ‘therefore,’ **verse 35** is actually a concluding, summarizing threat. Because Oholibah has ‘forgotten’ Yahweh, casting her Husband behind her back...she must bear the consequences of her grossly immoral actions.” (Pp. 200-201)

1212

The meaning of the 2nd person feminine singular imperfect verb **תִּגְרַמִּי**, **tegharemiy** is uncertain, due to its occurrence only twice in the **Hebrew Bible**, here (**Ezekiel 23:34**) and at **Numbers 24:8**, where Balaam predicts concerning Israel, **וְעִצְמוֹתֵיהֶם יִגְרַם**, “and their bones he (Israel) will break.” But does the verb here mean Jerusalem will break Samaria’s cup into pieces?

Translations of the verb here in **Ezekiel** differ, from “thou shalt break the sherds thereof” to “and gnaw its shards,” to “and chew on its parts,” to “you will break it in pieces,” to the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) **καὶ τὰς ἑορτὰς καὶ τὰς νεομηνίας αὐτῆς ἀποστρέψω**, “and the feasts and its new moons I will overturn” (which is obviously translating some other Hebrew text).

Rabbi Fisch’s translation is “crunch the sherds thereof,” and he comments that such crunching is done “in order to suck the liquid which is soaked in the material of the vessel.” (P. 157)

(continued...)

וּשְׂרִידֶיךָ תִּנְתְּקִי

and your breasts you will tear apart--¹²¹³

כִּי אֲנִי דִבַּרְתִּי

Because I, I have spoken--

נֶאֱמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!

23:35 לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

Therefore in this way my lord YHWH spoke to me:

יָעַן שָׁכַחְתָּ אוֹתִי

Because you (feminine singular) forgot Me,

וַתִּשְׁלִיכִי אוֹתִי אַחֲרֵי גִידְךָ

and you have thrown Me behind your back--¹²¹⁴

וְגַם־אַתָּה שְׂאֵי זִמְתְּךָ וְאֶת־תִּזְנוּתֶיךָ:

and also you, bear your wickedness and your prostitution-immorality!¹²¹⁵

23:36¹²¹⁶

¹²¹²(...continued)

¹²¹³

Rabbi Fisch comments, “In a fit of madness through drinking the cup of bitterness.” (P. 157)

¹²¹⁴

Rabbi Fisch comments that this means “You have completely forgotten Me like an object which is deliberately flung behind one’s back as something worthless.” (P. 157)

¹²¹⁵

Rabbi Fisch comments that this means they will “suffer the consequences of it.” (P. 157)

¹²¹⁶

(continued...)

¹²¹⁶(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch entitles **verses 36-49** “Further Indictment of Oholah and Oholibah.” He comments that “Some commentators regard this section as a recapitulation of the preceding; it is better understood as an additional charge.” (P. 157)

Reimer entitles the section “The Sisters and Religion.” He comments that “Having reached one stopping point, the oracle [vision-story] restarts, once again naming Oholah and Oholibah (**verse 36**; see **verse 4**). The familiar narrative pattern of accusation and analysis (**verses 36-45**) leading to judgment (**verses 46-49**) is again followed.” (P. 1533)

Darr entitles **verses 46-49** “Oholah and Oholibah: Together Again in Sin and Judgment.” She comments that “These verses challenge the best efforts of every reader and critic. The Hebrew text (especially **verses 40-44** is, in Greenberg’s opinion, incoherent, odd, and disconcerting...

“A ‘resurrected’ Oholah joins her sister as Yahweh commands Ezekiel, in a manner similar to **16:2**; **20:4** and **22:2**, to arraign both women, informing them of the abominations with which they are charged...The scene is unreal (Samaria was destroyed over a century earlier), but no more so than Ezekiel’s initial decision to place both siblings (capital cities) in Egypt. Here, it seems, is another means by which the prophet speaks of God’s judgment upon the whole house of Israel.

“The following accusations, which include a number of quotations and allusions from previous chapters, are more diverse than those of earlier verses, where fornication (foreign alliances) was the name of both siblings’ game and idolatry ran a distant second (**verses 7, 30**). First comes the ubiquitous charge of adultery, here expressed by **זָנָה**, ‘to commit adultery’ rather than by **הָיָה**, ‘to be or act like a prostitute,’ and bloodshed (a new allegation, but one reminiscent of **chapter 22**). These accusations are illuminated by **verse 37b**. They have committed adultery with their idols (an idea at home in **chapter 16**), and the blood on their hands is that of Yahweh’s children, sacrificed as food for those images (see also **16:20-21**). God further accuses them of ‘defiling’ My temple and profaning ‘My’ sabbaths (see **22:8**; **Leviticus 19:30**). The latter allegation has appeared in earlier chapters (e.g., **20, 22**). The former is explained in **verse 39**. Having shed the blood of their offspring, the blood-stained sisters come to Yahweh’s sanctuary to profane’ it. Note the phrases ‘this they have done to Me’ (**verse 38a**) and ‘this is what they did in My house’ (**verse 29a**), and the intervening ‘My sanctuary,’ ‘My sabbaths,’ ‘My sanctuary.’ The sisters’ sins have direct implications for God, Whose holy space and times they recklessly desecrate.” (P. 201)

Reimer comments on **verses 36-45** that “The actions listed in **verses 37-39** provide a more prosaic list of offenses than the consistently metaphorical language in the earlier part of the chapter. They echo other such lists seen previously, especially **22:6-12**. The intensifying of interest in the

(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי

And YHWH said to me,

בֶּן-אָדָם הַתְּשׁוּט אֶת-אֱהֻלָּה וְאֶת-אֱהֻלֵיבָה

Son of Adam / Humanity, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah?¹²¹⁷

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לָהֶן אֶת תּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיהֶן:

And (will you) declare to them their abominations?

23:37 כִּי נֹאֲפוּ וְדָם בְּיַדֵּיהֶן

Because they were sexually immoral, and blood (is) on their hands,

וְאֶת-גִּלּוּלֵיהֶן נֹאֲפוּ

and with their idol-Gods they were sexually immoral.¹²¹⁸

וְגַם אֶת-בְּנֵיהֶן אֲשֶׁר יִלְדוּ-לִי

And also their children whom they bore for Me,

הָעֵבִירוּ לָהֶם לְאֹכְלָה:

they caused to pass through (the fire) to them for food / devouring!¹²¹⁹

¹²¹⁶(...continued)

worship life of the cities (for the most part, this list applies to both sisters) supplements the political infidelity identified in **23:5-21**.” (P. 1533)

Matties states that “The last unit of the chapter brings renewed charges and sentencing against both sisters.” (P. 1190)

¹²¹⁷

Rabbi Fisch quotes Lofthouse as stating, “The coupling of the still standing Jerusalem with the fallen Samaria has great dramatic and rhetorical force.” (P. 157)

¹²¹⁸

Rabbi Fisch comments that “*adultery...blood...idols*. These are the heinous crimes of which they are accused. They are specified in detail in what follows.” (P. 157)

¹²¹⁹

(continued...)

23:38 עֹדֵר זֹאת עָשׂוּ לִי

Still this they did to Me–

טִמְאוּ אֶת־מִקְדָּשִׁי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא

they defiled My sanctuary on that (same) day,¹²²⁰

וְאֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי חָלְלוּ:

and My days-of-rest they profaned!¹²²¹

23:39 וַבִּשְׁחָטֵם אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם לְגִלּוּלֵיהֶם

And when they slaughtered their children for their idols,

וַיָּבֵאוּ אֶל־מִקְדָּשִׁי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא לְחַלְלוֹ

and they came into My sanctuary on that (same) day to profane it!

¹²¹⁹(...continued)

Rabbi Fisch comments that the children of the Judeans “should have been reared to serve Me [YHWH]. At birth they were entered into the covenant of God by circumcision; later they were sacrificed by their parents to the hideous cult of Molech (Kimchi).” (P. 157) See **Ezekiel 16:20a, b**,

וַתִּקְחִי אֶת־בְּנֶיךָ וְאֶת־בְּנוֹתֶיךָ

And you took your sons and your daughters,

אֲשֶׁר יָלַדְתָּ לִּי

whom you bore for me,

וַתִּזְבְּחִים לָהֶם לְאֹכֹל

and you sacrificed them to them to eat / devour!

¹²²⁰

For this matter of defiling YHWH’s sanctuary, see **chapter 8**.

¹²²¹

Rabbi Fisch notes that “They deliberately chose a Sabbath for the sacrificing of their children to Molech (Rashi).” (P. 158)

וְהִנֵּה-כֹה עָשׂוּ בְּתוֹךְ בֵּיתִי:

And look—in this way they did in the midst of My house / temple!¹²²²

23:40¹²²³ וְאֵף כִּי תִשְׁלַחְנָה לְאֲנָשִׁים בָּאִים מִמְּרָחֵק

And also, when they send for the men coming from afar,¹²²⁴

אֲשֶׁר מִלְּאָדָּךְ שְׁלוּחַ אֲלֵיהֶם

whose messenger was sent to them--

וְהִנֵּה-בָאוּ לְאִשָּׁר

and look, they came to the one who—

1222

Rabbi Fisch comments that “They did not consider human sacrifice inconsistent with worship in [YHWH’s] sanctuary. Their presence in the temple was a grave affront to God.” (P. 158)

1223

Darr comments that “**Verses 40-42** depict a new scenario in the lurid career of Yahweh’s wives (especially Oholibah / Jerusalem). As noted, these verses are especially problematic, but they are also intriguing. In **verse 16**, Oholibah sent messengers (a diplomatic envoy) to the Chaldeans. In **verse 40**, the sisters dispatch a messenger to unidentified men ‘from far away’; and straightaway they come to them. **Verses 40b-41** describe the elaborate toilette by which Oholibah (the likely referent of the second and third-person feminine singular forms) prepares for these guests: she bathes, paints her eyes, and bedecks herself with ornaments. In **16:11-12**, Husband Yahweh adorned Jerusalem, His young bride, with ornaments bracelets, a chain, a nose ring, earrings, and a beautiful crown. The reader can well imagine that these are the very items with which she now bejewels herself in preparation for the arrival of men who are not her husband. She positions herself on a [‘stately couch] (literally, a ‘seat of glory’), before which stands a table spread with Yahweh’s incense and oil. Ezekiel creates a scene of a high-priced courtesan awaiting her upper-crust client(s), then deflates it in the following verse. Her love feast is, it seems, a bawdy public event. Her clients are [rabble,] drunken habitués of the desert whose gifts (bracelets, beautiful crowns; recall **16:11-12**) are nothing but harlot’s hire.” (Pp. 201-202)

1224

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Using the imagery of harlots luring men into their houses, Ezekiel accuses the Judeans of taking the initiative by inviting idolaters to visit them for the purpose of being taught pagan rites.” (P. 158)

Hilmer states that this may “possibly be a reference to the Jerusalem summit meeting in Zedekiah’s time (**Jeremiah 27**).” (P. 1259)

רְחַצְתָּ כְּחֹלֶת עֵינֶיךָ

you bathed, you painted your eyes,¹²²⁵

1225

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The verb כְּחֹלֶת, *kachal* occurs only here. The powdered antimony (*puch* in Hebrew) which was employed for the purpose is called *kohl* by the Arabs and the word appears in the English noun ‘alcohol.’ The effect was to enlarge the eye and add lustre to it.” (P. 158) Compare **2 Kings 9:30**,

וַיָּבֹא יְהוּא יֶזְרְעֵאלָהּ

And Jehu came to Jezreel.

וַאִיזְבֵּל שָׁמְעָה

And Jezebel heard.

וַתִּשֶׂם בְּפוּךְ עֵינֶיהָ

And she put / painted her eyes with stibium / kohl / black eye cosmetic;

וַתִּיטֵב אֶת־רֹאשָׁהּ

and she arranged her head / hair;

וַתִּשְׁקֹף בְּעַד הַחַלּוֹן:

and she looked down from behind the window.

Jeremiah 4:30,

(וְאַתָּה) [וְאַתָּה] שָׂדוּר מִה־תַּעֲשִׂי

And you, devastated one, what are you doing,

כִּי־תִלְבָּשִׂי שָׁנִי

that you are dressing in scarlet,

כִּי־תַעֲדִי עֲרִיזָהּ

that you are adorning (yourself with) ornaments of gold,

כִּי־תַקְרְעִי בְּפוּךְ עֵינֶיךָ

that you make your eyes wide with eye-shadow / kohl?

לְשׂוֹא תַחֲיִפִּי

(It is) for nothing you are beautifying yourself!

מֵאֲסוּבֵךְ עֲגָבִים

Those lusting (for you) hated you!

נַפְשְׁךָ יִבְקָשׁוּ:

Your life they are seeking!

וְעָרִית עָרִי:

and you adorned (yourself with) ornaments.

23:41 וַיִּשְׁבֹּתָ עַל־מִטָּה כְּבוֹדָהּ

And you sat upon a glorious bed,

וְשִׁלַּחַן עָרוּךְ לְפָנֶיהָ

and a prepared / spread table before it;¹²²⁶

וַקְטַרְתִּי וְשִׁמְנֵי שִׁמְתָהּ עָלֶיהָ:

and you set My incense and My fat / oil upon it.¹²²⁷

1226

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The practice in ancient times was to recline in couches during a meal.” (P. 158)

Hilmer notes that “a couch, with a table spread before it,” means everything was “ready for a banquet (see **Isaiah 21:5**; also **Proverbs 9:2** [Wisdom’s table]).” (P. 1258)

1227

Rabbi Fisch states that “It was also the custom to strew spices on burning coals in order to spread an aromatic fragrance and rub oneself with scented oil after the meal. The luxuries which God had bestowed upon them were used for advancing idolatrous worship.” (P. 158) Compare **Ezekiel 16:18**, which describes the whore Jerusalem’s actions:

וַתִּקְחִי אֶת־בְּגָדֶיךָ וַתִּכְסֵם

And you took your embroidered clothes and covered them,

וְשִׁמְנֵי וַקְטַרְתִּי (נְתַתִּי) לְפָנֶיהֶם:

and My oil and My sweet-smelling smoke you gave / offered before them!

Darr comments that “The references to Oholibah’s ‘seat of glory’ and to Yahweh’s incense and oil suggest that behind this raunchy vignette might be some sort of cultic ritual. ‘The well-spread table before Oholibah’s couch is reminiscent of Mesopotamian table altars, ‘set with the prepared rations of the Divine repast.’ Alternatively, the referent might be a political dalliance of some sort, the occasion marked by a state dinner. Galambush proposes that these verses portray Jerusalem’s reception of both Egyptian diplomats (the ‘men from far away’) and representatives from Judah’s smaller, neighboring states (the drunken desert rabble), who come to Jerusalem to plot a rebellion against Babylon. Her further suggestion that the ensuring ‘orgy’ transpires *within* the Jerusalem temple begs the question of the
(continued...)

23:42 וְקוֹל הַמִּזְוֵן שָׁלוֹ בָּהּ

And a voice / sound of a crowd at ease (was) in her.¹²²⁸

וְאֶל-אֲנָשִׁים מֵרַב אָדָם מִזְבָּאִים

And to men from a multitude of humanity being brought in--

מִמְדַּבְּרֵי (סִבְאִים) [סִבְאִים]

drunkards¹²²⁹ from (the) wilderness.¹²³⁰

¹²²⁷(...continued)

location(s) where official treaty ceremonies were held. What evidence we have, textual and iconographic, points to the palace as the most likely setting for such events. If Galambush is correct, then this final fornication scene is climactic (worst of all) precisely because foreigners have entered Yahweh's temple. But Ezekiel does not explicitly state that the scene transpires there." (P. 202)

¹²²⁸

Rabbi Fisch comments that "Sounds of careless revelry were heard in Jerusalem, an indication of the recklessness with which the inhabitants indulged in their abominable orgies." (P. 158)

¹²²⁹

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, "what is written," סִבְאִים; and second, the *qere*, "to be read," סִבְאִים; a question of correct spelling.

New International pays no attention to the Masoretic note, and translates by "Sabeans," i.e., "men from Sheba, located at the southwest corner of the Arabian peninsula (modern Yemen), known for trading." (P. 1259)

¹²³⁰

Translations of the first half of **verse 42** vary somewhat:

King James, "And a voice of a multitude being at ease *was* with her: and with the men of the common sort were brought Sabeans from the wilderness..."

Tanakh, "And the noise of a carefree multitude was there, of numerous men brought drunk from the desert..."

New Revised Standard, "The sound of a raucous multitude was around her, with many of the rabble brought in drunken from the wilderness..."

New International, "The noise of a carefree crowd was around her; drunkards were brought from the desert along with men from the rabble..."

(continued...)

וַיִּתְּנוּ צְמִידִים אֶל-יְדֵיהֶן

And they gave / placed bracelets to / upon their hands,

וְעִטֶּרֶת תְּפָאֶרֶת עַל-רֹאשֵׁיהֶן:

and a crown of beauty upon their heads.

23:43¹²³¹ וְאָמַר לְבִלָּה נְאוּפִים

And I said to the woman worn out by sexual immoralities,

(עַתָּה) [עַתָּה] (יִזְנֶה) [יִזְנֶה] תִּזְנֶה וְהִיא:

Now¹²³² they will prostitute¹²³³ her prostitutions, even her!¹²³⁴

¹²³⁰(...continued)

New Jerusalem, “The noise of the carefree company resounded, made by the crowd of men brought in from the desert...”

Rahfs, καὶ φωνὴν ἁρμονίας ἀνεκρούοντο καὶ πρὸς ἄνδρας ἐκ πλήθους ἀνθρώπων ἤκουσας ἐκ τῆς ἐρήμου, “And a voice / sound of harmony was struck up; and to / towards men out of a multitude of people, coming out of the desert...”

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The meaning...is that Judea has sunk so low that he enters into alliances with the most degraded types. Even to attract such as these they try to make themselves enticing.” (P. 159)

¹²³¹

Darr comments that “**Verse 43** presents considerable problems. The speaker (presumably Yahweh, Who has witnessed the preceding ‘festivities’) seems first to say that Oholibah is ‘worn out’ by her adulteries. The verb בִּלָּה refers to worn out sacks, wineskins, sandals, and clothing in **Joshua 9:4-5, 13**. Sarah employs it to describe her old (post-menopausal) age. Ezekiel may be suggesting that Oholibah is well-past her prime) hence the necessity of a more elaborate toilette and the reality of a less-desirable clientele). One thinks, for example, of Tyre, the ‘forgotten’ prostitute who, after seventy years, takes her harp and takes to the streets in hopes of strumming up a little business (**Isaiah 23:15-18**). More likely, she is ‘worn out’ in a sexual sense, the result of her endless acts of intercourse. **Verse 43b**, literally, ‘now he (or ‘they’) will fornicate her fornications, and she,’ is notoriously difficult. Zimmerli suggests that we should supply the remainder of the thought, something like ‘(she)’ll enjoy it!’ **Verse 44** shifts from metaphor to simile: He (they?) Have entered her as one enters a prostitute; thus they have entered Oholah and Oholibah, depraved women.” (P. 202)

¹²³²

(continued...)

23:44 וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלֶיהָ כְּבֹא אֶל-אִשָּׁה זֹנָה

And he came to her like one coming to a woman, a prostitute--

כֵּן בָּאוּ אֶל-אֹהֶלָה

in this way they came to Oholah,

¹²³²(...continued)

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” עָתָה; and second, the *qere*, “to be read, עֲתָה; simply a matter of correct spelling.

1233

The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” יִזְנֶה, “he will prostitute”; and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” יִזְנֶוּ, “they will prostitute.”

1234

Translations of **verse 43** vary:

King James, “Then said I unto *her that was old* in adulteries, Will they now commit whoredoms with her, and she *with them*?”

Tanakh, “Then I said, ‘To destruction with adultery! Look, they are still going on with those same fornications of hers.’”

New Revised Standard, “Then I said, Ah, she is worn out with adulteries, but they carry on their sexual acts with her.”

New International, “Then I said about the one worn out by adultery, ‘Now let them use her as a prostitute, for that is all she is.’”

New Jerusalem, “I thought, ‘That woman, worn out with adultery! Are they going to fornicate with her too?’”

Rahlfs, καὶ εἶπα οὐκ ἐν τούτοις μοιχεύουσιν καὶ ἔργα πόρνῆς καὶ αὐτὴ ἐξεπόρνευσεν, “And I said, They will not be sexually immoral with these (women). And works of a prostitute—even she indulged in gross sexual immorality!”

Rabbi Fisch comments that “Rashi interprets: I thought that now that she is worn out by her harlotry, her immoralities would come to an end, but she has remained the same. The general sense is that the people were not sated with their imported idolatries but persisted with them.” (P. 159)

וְאֵל-אֹהֲלֵיבָהּ אִשָּׁת הַזִּמָּה:

and to Oholiybah--women of the wickedness!¹²³⁵

23:45 וְאֲנָשִׁים צְדִיקִים הִמָּה יִשְׁפֹּט אוֹתָהֶם

And men--righteous ones--they will judge them--¹²³⁶

מִשְׁפָּט נְאֻפּוֹת

a judgment of female sexual immoralities,¹²³⁷

וּמִשְׁפָּט שִׁפְכוֹת דָּם

and a judgment of female shedding of blood!

כִּי נְאֻפֹת הֵנָּה וְדָם בְּיַדֵּיהֶן:

Because they are sexually immoral, and blood (is) on their hands!

23:46 כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה

Because in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

1235

Rabbi Fisch notes that the plural noun, אִשָּׁת, **ishshoth**, “women,” “does not occur again [in the **Hebrew Bible**]. Kimchi suggests that it is used here to express a sense of abhorrence; they are unlike normal women.” (P. 159) The normal plural for women is נְשִׁים, **nashiym**.

1236

Rabbi Fisch notes that “The Targum and Jewish commentators understand the reference to be to the Babylonian and Assyrian ‘judges’ who, compared with Oholah and Oholibah, are righteous.” (P. 159)

Darr mentions that “Wevers plausibly conjectures that the men are called ‘righteous’ because their sentence befits the women’s crimes.” (P. 202)

1237

Rabbi Fisch’s translation has “as adulteresses are judged,” and he comments that it means “inflicting upon them penalties reserved for women guilty of adultery and murder. By the latter the sacrifice of children is meant.” (P. 159)

הַעֲלֵה עֲלֵיהֶם קָהָל

Raise up against them an assembly!

וְנָתַן אֶתְהֶן לְזַעֲמוֹ וּלְבִזָּה:

And give / make them into an object of terror, and for plunder!¹²³⁸

23:47 וְרָגְמוּ עֲלֵיהֶן אֲבָן קָהָל

And an assembly will stone them with stone(s);¹²³⁹

וּבְרָא אֹתָהֶן בְּחַרְבוֹתָם

and will cut them down with their swords.

בְּנֵיהֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיהֶם יַהַרְגוּ

Their sons and their daughter they will kill,

וּבְתֵיהֶן בְּאֵשׁ יִשְׂרְפוּ:

and their houses they will burn with the fire.¹²⁴⁰

1238

Rabbi Fisch comments that “The text has both verbs in the infinitive [הַעֲלֵה and נָתַן]. The prophet is commanded to impress upon the people that God will bring against them a group of peoples who will make them the object of horror and spoilation.” (P. 159)

Reimer comments on **verses 46-49** that “Again, punishment is visited on the cities and the countryside surrounding them (sons and...daughters, **verse 47**; compare **verses 4, 10, 25**).” (P. 1534)

1239

Compare **Ezekiel 16:40**,

וְהָעָלוּ עָלֶיךָ קָהָל

And they will raise up an assembly against you;

וְרָגְמוּ אוֹתְךָ בְּאֲבָן

and they will stone you with the stone(s)...

1240

Darr comments that “As in **16:40-41**, the mob’s brutality consists of stoning, hacking with swords, and burning houses (again, the referent surfaces), but Ezekiel adds that these executioners will
(continued...) ”

23:48 וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי זִמָּה מִן־הָאָרֶץ׃

And I will cause wickedness to cease from the earth / land;¹²⁴¹

וְנִגְסְרוּ כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים׃

And all the women will be disciplined,¹²⁴²

וְלֹא תַעֲשֶׂינָה כְּזִמְתְּכֶנָּה׃

and they will not do like your wickedness.¹²⁴³

¹²⁴⁰(...continued)

slay their sons and daughters as well (**verse 47**). Thus Yahweh will bring an end to the sisters' sexual depravity...in the land." (P. 202)

1241

See **verse 27**,

וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי זִמְתְּךָ מִמֶּךָ׃

And I will cause your wickedness to cease from you,

וְאֶת־זְנוּתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם׃

and your prostitution from Egypt-land.

וְלֹא־תִשְׂאֵי עֵינֶיךָ אֲלֵיהֶם׃

And you will not lift up your eyes to them,

וּמִצְרַיִם לֹא תִזְכְּרֵי־עוֹד׃

and (the) Egyptians, you will not remember again.

1242

Rabbi Fisch holds that this means "the surrounding nations will take warning." (P. 160)

1243

Darr states that **verse 48b** suggests that their fates can serve a didactic purpose—that is, that 'all women' take warning and not engage in acts of sexual depravity. Oholibah learned nothing from Oholah's experience (**verse 11**), though **verse 10** claims that the latter's demise became 'a byword among women.' Has the force of Ezekiel's imagery, by which the sins of an entire people were personified in the biographies of the two females representing Samaria and Jerusalem, collapsed into a caution intended for women's ears alone? Or does the metaphor remain intact, such that 'all women' refers to other cities (see **16:27**, where 'the daughters of the Philistines' are Philistine cities)? The notice can be interpreted along either line. In fact, the reader need not choose one to the exclusion of the other. The object lesson will find its 'teachable moments.'" (P. 203)

23:49 וְנָתַנוּ זִמְתְּכֶנָּה עֲלֵיכֶם

And they will give / place your wickedness upon you;¹²⁴⁴

וְחַטָּאֵי גִלּוּלֵיכֶם תִּשְׂאִינָה

and the sins of your idols you will bear.¹²⁴⁵

1244

Darr states that “**Verse 49a** rounds off Yahweh’s threat to the women: their punishment is (just) repayment for their sexual depravity and idolatry. The concluding recognition formula, ‘and you (masculine plural) shall know that I am Lord Yahweh,’ lends to the whole the tone of a prophetic proof saying. Characteristic of Ezekiel’s oracles, it yokes God’s punishment to the ultimate goal that Israel might acknowledge the sovereign and absolute power of its Lord.” (P. 203)

1245

Rabbi Fisch states that this means “you shall suffer the penalty for the sins incurred in connection with your idols.” (P. 160)

Darr reflects on **chapter 23** that “No less than **Ezekiel 16**, the present chapter both thwarts and invites serious reflection. Its exhaustive (and ultimately exhausting) use of sexual language and tropes (e.g., metaphors, similes) to depict political and cultic activities the prophet deplors makes it an unlikely candidate for sermons and other religious education forums. Ezekiel intends to shock his audience, and modern readers remain susceptible to the aftershocks. Why spend much time on a text so filled with offensive imagery and brutality?

“...It behooves us...to remember that ancient Near Eastern marriages were not partnerships between legal and social ‘equals,’ that wives were in principle (if not always in practice!) subject to their husband’s control, and that adultery was regarded as a capital offense, in at least some circles. Like certain of his predecessors, Ezekiel discerned in the marriage bond a suitable metaphor for describing the covenant relationship between God, the ‘Superior’ Party (Husband) and Israel, the subordinate party (His wife)—a union that should have been characterized by deeply mutual commitment and female faithfulness. Within the world of that metaphor, Israel’s violations of its covenant obligations (here, political alliances, idolatry) become acts of sexual infidelity. Ezekiel’s reference to Yahweh’s (consummated) marriages to Oholah and Oholibah is restricted to a single verse (**verse 4**), but their union (covenant) is the basis for everything that follows. As ancient Near Eastern wives, these women were, or should have been, subject to their Husband’s control, their sexuality and reproductive capacities His alone.

“Ezekiel never questions why Yahweh was unwilling or unable to control His wives’ behavior. Ezekiel’s purpose lies in a different direction—namely, to justify the destruction of both women (cities and, by extension, the whole house of Israel) by depicting their [abominations] in the worst possible terms. Block raises an important point, I think, when he observes that Ezekiel’s depictions of these two
(continued...)

וידעתם כי אני אדני יהוה:

and you will know that I (am) my Lord YHWH!

¹²⁴⁵(...continued)

women cannot and should not be construed as representative of his views of women in general. As we will see in the commentary on **chapter 24**, Ezekiel's own wife was 'the delight of (his) eyes.' Nonetheless, his resort to female imagery, especially degrading female sexual imagery, to describe human sin, coupled with his recourse to physical atrocities, even murder, as God's just means of punishing [His] wanton wives, can have deadly consequences when abusive persons determine to model their behavior after 'God's Own'—to become, in effect, the 'righteous judges' of **23:45**. The courts are filled with cases of domestic violence, of women battered and murdered by men who regard 'their' women—girl friends, wives, daughters—as personal possessions and legitimate targets of their rage. For many such men, though not all, of course, biblical passages such as **Ezekiel 23** sanction both their attitudes and their actions.

“The chapter raises another issue as well. Each party (both genders) in the fornications Ezekiel describes is guilty of objectifying the other. Ogling stirs lust; lust demands personal gratification. But genuine concern for the other is absent. Ezekiel's metaphors point with some profundity to the price both parties pay when intimate relations (including sexual relations) are motivated solely by selfish desires: eroded self-esteem, feelings of betrayal (of oneself and by the other); loathing directed inward and outward. But the truth of his observations is reserved for neither the most private of personal relations nor the most public of political exchanges. Our world cries out for persons and communities across the social spheres whose moral actions are not motivated by greed, who do not regard the other as an object of exploitation. As children of the living God, in Whose image we all are created, we deserve to be treated with respect, even as we are obligated to deal respectfully with others.” (P. 204)

1.

Pekod

“The term Puqudu or Piqudu (or in the **Bible**, Pekod) refers to a prominent Aramean tribe and its associated region in southern or eastern Babylonia. They lived along the eastern edge of Elam and in the area near Uruk and the Tigris. Their tribal name is sometimes spelled with an accent mark as Puqūdu, and the members of the tribe are sometimes referred to as Puqūdian, Puqūdians, or Puqudaeans. Some older publications use Pukud.

“The Puqudu, known from governmental archives of Assyria, were ‘prominent between the mid-8th century and 626 B.C.,’ although their presence is documented in Babylonia at least as early as the ninth century. It is not certain when they migrated into the area.

“They appear to have been a loosely associated set of clans, forming alliances for war but not governed under any form of permanent centralized government. In common with other Aramean tribes of the area, including the Gambūlu, Ru’a, and Gurasimmu, the Puqudu had multiple leaders at the same time. There is not enough surviving evidence to speak more specifically about their political organization. Their way of life appears to have been largely rural, with many caring for herds. The surviving records concerning Puqudu and other groups point to an ongoing tension between the largely rural Aramean tribes, including the Puqudu, and the rural elite of Assyria.

“Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria (745–722 B.C.E.), conquered the Puqudu, and destroyed Hilimmu and Pillutu, two of their cities. He relocated many of the defeated Puqudu into other parts of his empire. Although incorporated into the Assyrian Empire, the Puqudu repeatedly rebelled against Assyria and engaged in warfare against Assyrian provincial governors and Assyrian allies in the late eighth century and well into the seventh.

“From 721 to 710 B.C.E, Babylonia was ruled by Marduk-apla-iddina II, who successfully fought a war at the beginning of his reign to make it independent of Assyria and its ruler Sargon II (king of Assyria 721-705 B.C.E.). In 710 B.C.E., Sargon defeated Marduk-apla-iddina and his coalition, which included the Puqudu.

“Sargon integrated the Puqudu land into the Gambulu province in 710 B.C.E., but still found it necessary to carry out military expeditions, which were ultimately successful, against Bit-Yakin (a Chaldean tribe) and the Puqudu between 709 and 707 B.C.E. After the death of Sargon and the accession of his son Sennacherib (ruled 705–681 B.C.E.), the Puqudu again participated in rebellions in 704 and 691 B.C.E.

From 652–648 B.C.E., a war broke out between Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, and his rebellious brother Shamash-shum-ukin, governor of Babylon, who claimed the right to rule the entire empire. The Puqudu, along with other Aramean groups, sided with Shamas-shum-ukin, who was defeated and died in 648 B.C.E. Preserved letters indicate that during the war Puqudians managed to enter Uruk and take prisoners. However, as Ashurbanipal began to gain the upper hand, Puqudians were deported several times to other parts of the empire.

“Two biblical references, both concerned with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. by Babylon, make passing reference to the Puqudu. Spelled in Hebrew (which largely lacks vowels) as pqd, the Hebrew version of the name is now traditionally pronounced as Pekod. Ezekiel, interpreting the destruction of Jerusalem as judgment by [YHWH], says, ‘Assuredly, Oholibah, thus said [YHWH]: I am going to rouse against you the lovers from whom you turned in disgust, and I will bring them upon you from all around– the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, [the people of] Pekod, Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, all of them handsome fellows, governors and prefects, officers and warriors, all of them riding on horseback.’ Jeremiah mentions Pekod briefly as a region of Babylon in an oracle of judgment against Babylonia: ‘Advance against her–the land of Merathaim–And against the inhabitants of Pekod; Ruin and destroy after them to the last– says the Lord–Do just as I have commanded you.’

“The Babylonian emperor Neriglissar (reigned 560-556 B.C.E.), was a member of the Puqudu tribe, and the son of the governor of the Puqudu district within the Babylonian Empire.” **Wikipedia**, 7/23/2020