EZEKIEL 23

Two Sisters: Oholah and Oholibah

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

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Like chapter 22, this message has no date of its own.

2. Ezekiel 16 pictured the covenant as a marriage and idolatry as adultery; chapter 23 returns to that picture with two sisters.

Two Sisters

Daughters of one mother, unfaithful from their youth in Egypt — and yet "they became Mine"

EZEKIEL 23:3

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

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik calls the language of this chapter 'admittedly coarse' — meant to shock and to show God's disgust, never for entertainment.

WHAT IT MEANS

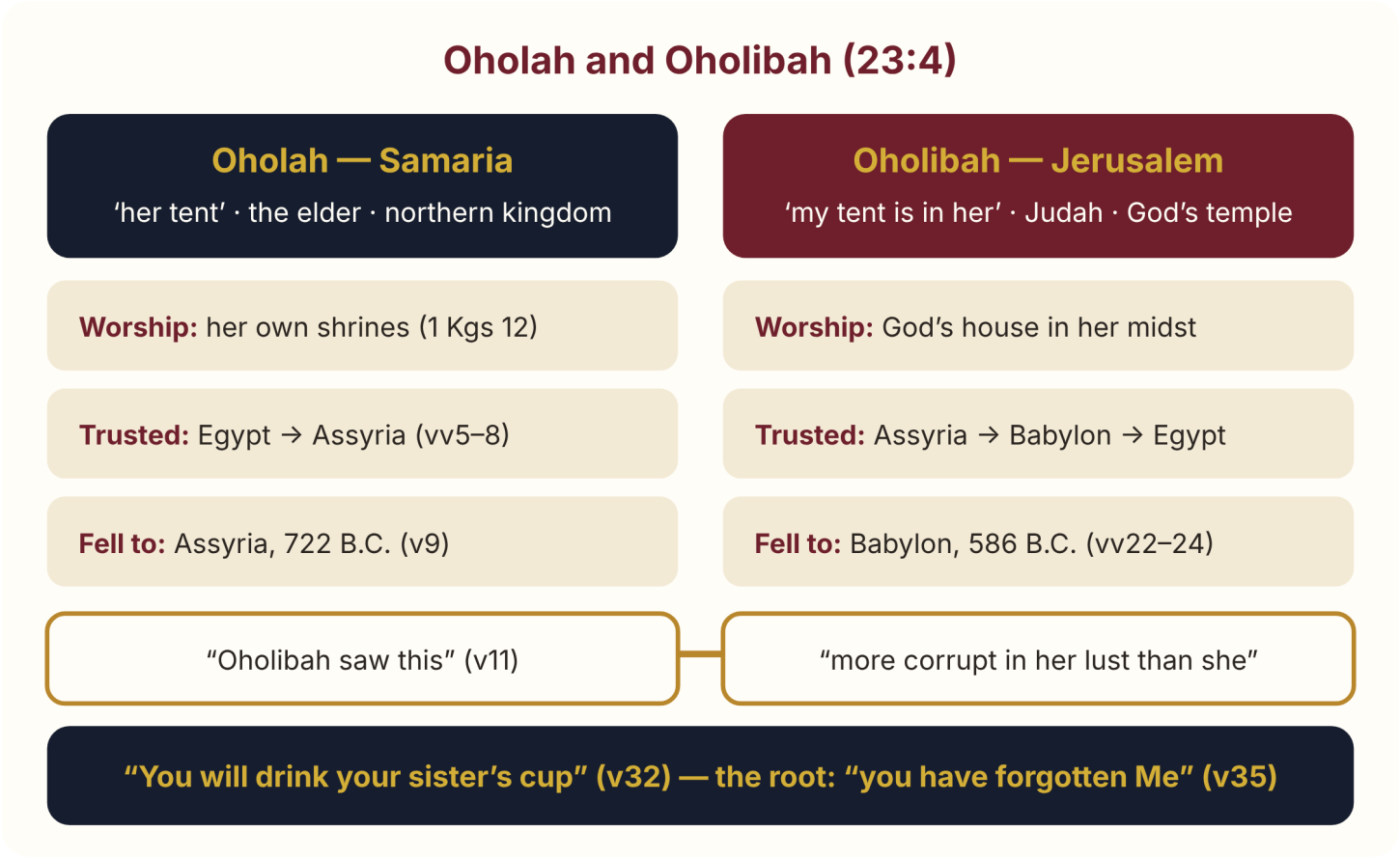
God says there were "two women, the daughters of one mother" (v2). They were unfaithful from the start, back in Egypt (v3; compare 20:7–8; Josh 24:14).

Tent (אֹהֶל)

OHEL · "TENT"

Ohel is a tent or dwelling, and it is used of the tabernacle where God met Israel. Both sisters are named from it.

Two Sisters, One Path (23:1–35)



Samaria and Jerusalem both traded God for foreign powers; Jerusalem saw her sister's ruin and still drank the same cup.

Oholah and Assyria

Samaria chased Assyria's power and gods — and Assyria destroyed her

EZEKIEL 23:9

"Therefore, I gave her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, after whom she lusted.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik passes on Wiersbe: 'Samaria had no true faith in the living God, so she looked to the Assyrians to help her.' Israel's kings paid Assyria for protection (2 Kgs 15:19–20; 17:3–4).

WHAT IT MEANS

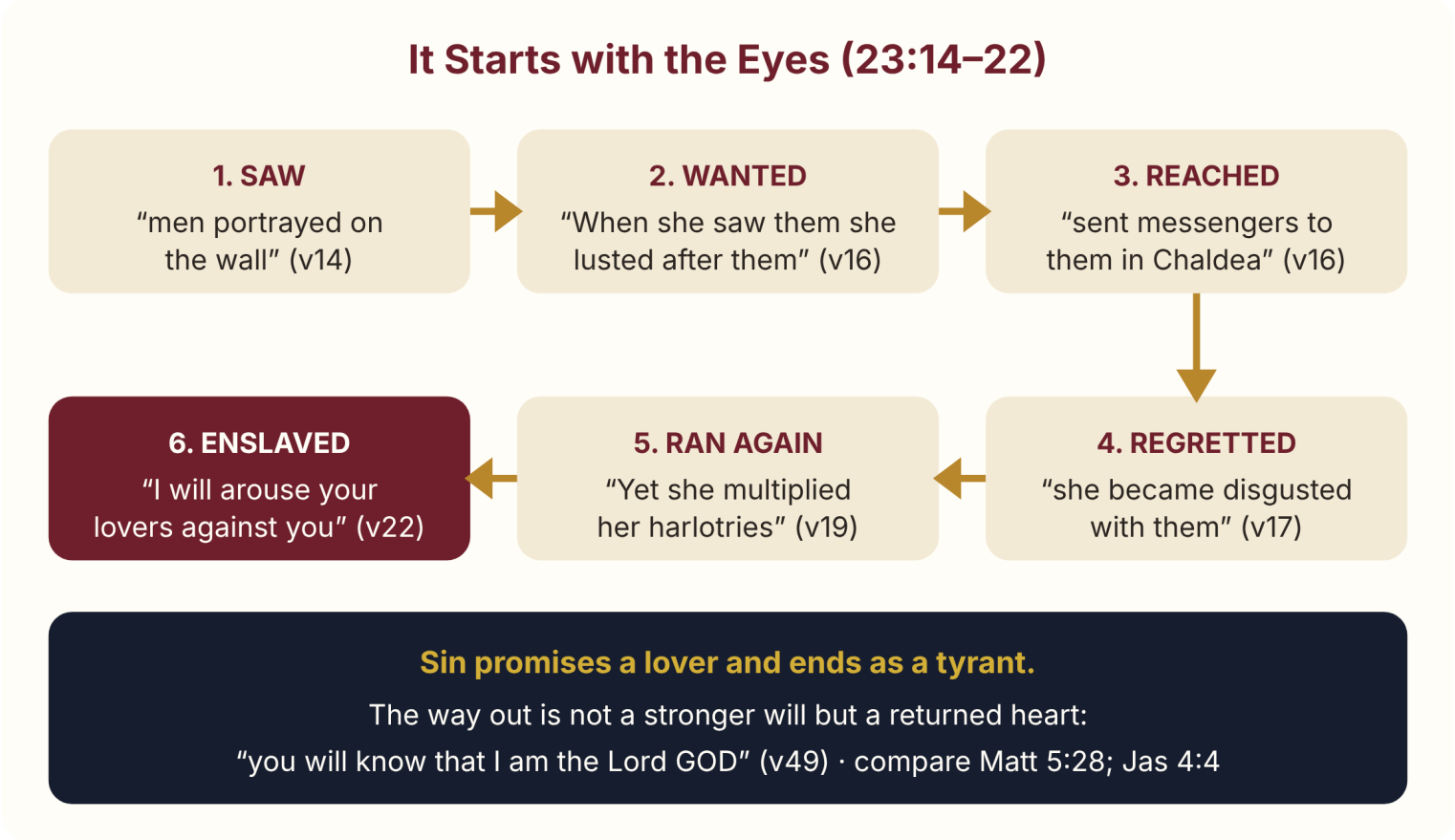
Samaria "played the harlot while she was Mine" (v5). She was impressed by Assyria's rulers, all "desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses" (v6), and with them she took up their idols (v7).

Lusted (עָגַב)

AGAB · "DOTE ON"

Agab means to have inordinate desire, to dote on. It appears in verses 5, 7, 9, 12, 16 and 20.

The Lover Who Becomes a Master (23:14–22)



Jerusalem's pattern: what she looked at, she wanted; what she wanted, she sent for; and the lovers she chased came back as enemies.

Oholibah Does Worse

Jerusalem watched her sister fall and went further — it started with the eyes

EZEKIEL 23:20

"She lusted after their paramours, whose flesh is like the flesh of donkeys and whose issue is like the issue of horses.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that Judah had a front-row seat to Samaria's fall and copied it.

WHAT IT MEANS

"Now her sister Oholibah saw this, yet she was more corrupt in her lust than she" (v11). Jerusalem saw Samaria destroyed and did worse.

Played the harlot (זָנָה)
ZANAH · "BE UNFAITHFUL"

Zanah means to commit fornication, and in the prophets it describes unfaithfulness to God. Its noun form, taznuth (H8457), is the "harlotries" repeated through the chapter.

The Lovers Turn Enemies

Babylon comes from every side, and Jerusalem drinks her sister's cup

EZEKIEL 23:35

"Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Because you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back, bear now the punishment of your lewdness and your harlotries.'"

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik, quoting Block: 'Those who had previously come to her to make love, now come from all sides to make war.' Guzik's point is that these nations never loved Judah; they wanted what they could take.

WHAT IT MEANS

"Behold I will arouse your lovers against you" (v22). Babylon and her allies come "from every side" (vv23–24).

Cup (כּוֹס)
KOS · "CUP"

Kos is a cup, and in the prophets it is often the cup of judgment. In verses 31–33 God tells Jerusalem, "You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand."

The Verdict in Plain Words

Idols, bloodshed and the same-day hypocrisy of worship — so "you will know that I am the Lord GOD"

EZEKIEL 23:36

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

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that here God drops the picture and names the real sins: idolatry, bloodshed, and children passed through the fire to Molech (2 Kgs 21:6; Jer 7:31) — and then, the same day, worship at the temple.

WHAT IT MEANS

God asks Ezekiel, "will you judge Oholah and Oholibah?" (v36), and then He speaks plainly: "they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands" (v37).

Sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ)
MIQDASH · "HOLY PLACE"

Miqdash is the sanctuary, God's holy place, His temple. Verses 38 and 39 say they "defiled My sanctuary on the same day" they had sacrificed their children to idols.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Coarse on purpose.

Guzik says the language is meant to shock and show God's disgust, never to entertain or to excuse coarse talk.

2

Two tents.

Oholah means 'her tent' and Oholibah 'my tent is in her' — Jerusalem had God's house and still strayed.

3

Nothing spiritual about it.

Guzik says Samaria's attraction to Assyria was purely fleshly and materialistic.

4

Pleasure becomes punishment.

God gave Samaria into the hand of the very lovers she chased (v9).

More to carry

5

Here began the mischief.

Trapp, in Guzik, on verse 14: Jerusalem's fall started with what she looked at.

6

Learn from your sister.

Jerusalem watched Samaria fall and did worse (v11); another man's ruin is meant as a warning.

7

A jealous Husband.

Qin'ah (H7068) is God's burning claim on what is His; He will not share us with what destroys us.

8

The root.

Every sin in the chapter traces back to one line: "you have forgotten Me and cast Me behind your back" (v35).

Talk it through

1. Why would God use such blunt language about marriage and unfaithfulness to describe idolatry?

2. What did Samaria and Jerusalem trust in place of God, and what happened to those “lovers”?

3. Trace the steps from verse 14 to verse 17. Where do you see that same pattern in temptation today?

4. How can God’s jealousy be good news for a man who has wandered far?

5. What does it mean to “cast Me behind your back,” and how does a man turn back?

CLOSING

Samaria and Jerusalem chased lovers who became their masters. The same pull works on us through our eyes and our trust. But God's jealous love is the faithful love of a Husband, and in Christ He is keeping a bride, not discarding one.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.