

Review

Ezekiel has been called by God as a prophet, but not always a vocal one. Many of the prophecies he gave were visual. In our study tonight, we are going to see a four-chapter-long vision given to Ezekiel, which he will then describe verbally.

8:1 The Vision In The House

Ezekiel was still supernaturally mute, speaking only when God opened his mouth. The elders of Judah were sitting in Ezekiel's house, waiting for him to speak, when Ezekiel had a vision.

8:2 Like A Man

Ezekiel sees God, just as he had in chapter one (1:27).

8:3a Taken To Jerusalem

God grabs Ezekiel by the hair, suspending him between heaven and earth, and the Spirit transports him to Jerusalem. Keep in mind that this is an "out of body" experience, for he did not physically go to Jerusalem (which was more than 500 miles away), but only "in the visions of God."

The Spirit took Ezekiel to the north gate of the inner court. This gate is referred to in verse five as the "altar gate," because it led to the inner court, where the altar of sacrifice was.

8:3b-6 The Idol Of Jealousy

At this north gate, Ezekiel saw "the idol of jealousy." This is not what the idol's worshippers called it, but what God called it. It was an idol which had been put up in the temple and had provoked God to jealousy.

Any time God is described as jealous, some people have an issue. They say, "How can God be jealous if God is love (1John 4:8) and love is not jealous (1Cor 13:4)? Well, first of all, God has said of Himself that...

Ex. 34:14 ...you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God

Is this a contradiction in Scripture? No, for you see, there are two different types of jealousy. There is a godly jealousy, like Paul had for the Corinthians, when he said,

2Cor. 11:2 ...I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy...

But there is also a sinful, carnal jealousy. Paul also mentioned to the Corinthians,

1Cor. 3:3 ...you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly...?

And so God says that as a result of this idol, His jealousy has been provoked, and He is going to be far from His sanctuary. We will soon see as the vision of these four chapters progress, God's glory will be exiting.

8:7-13 Dig Through The Wall

Ezekiel is taken from the north gate to the entrance of the court. This is the way into the inner court. But he doesn't go in through the public entrance. Instead, he is shown a hole in the wall, leading to an area where no one gets to see.

Ezekiel dug out the hole to make it big enough to fit through, and crawled in. He was in the place where the chambers were, the rooms that had been constructed in Solomon's temple for the priests who were serving. Like small apartments or storage areas.

But what Ezekiel saw in the chambers was despicable and detestable. Idols and unclean beasts were everywhere. And the elders of Israel, including Yah-az-an-YAW the son of Shaw-FAWN, were all aware of this and participating in it. They burned incense to false gods, and believed that God couldn't see what they were doing.

But we can see that God did know. The writer of Hebrews said,

Heb. 4:13 ...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him...

Jesus also reminded us that God sees what is done in secret (Matt. 6:18).

As terrible as these things were, God told Ezekiel, "You're going to see worse than this."

8:14-15 Weeping For Tammuz

It was bad enough that the priests and elders were practicing idolatry in the temple in secret, but now Ezekiel sees idolatry in the temple in public. At the gate of the temple, Ezekiel saw women weeping for Tammuz. Who is Tammuz? The answer to that question requires a bit of historical review.

You recall that Nimrod's kingdom of Babel was the place where mankind first entered into idolatry, with the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4).

Nimrod had a wife named Semiramis. And when Nimrod died, being killed by a wild boar, Semiramis put ashes on her head and mourned for 40 days, giving up all pleasures and food. But then, she discovered that she was pregnant. In an amazing display of political and religious plotting, she declared that her pregnancy was a miraculous conception. She said that her dead husband Nimrod had been conceived inside of her. It was the springtime, and in celebration of this miraculous pregnancy, she had an egg of gold constructed, called it the golden egg of Astarte. The Babylonians began to celebrate this event annually by coloring eggs and even worshipping rabbits, the symbol of fertility.

When the baby boy was born, Semiramis named him Tammuz. She proclaimed that they were both divine, this mother and child. The Babylonian religion became centered around the worship of Semiramis as the queen of heaven and Tammuz as the sun god.

As the years progressed, the religion took on more beliefs. Each winter in late December, the days would grow shorter. We understand today that this is the result of the sun being farther south because of the changing orientation of the Earth's axis. But the Babylonians believed that the sun god had died. And so on the Winter Solstice, they would weep and burn a log called "the log of the son." The Babylonian word for sun is "yule." The day after they burned the Yule log, they would see that the days were getting progressively longer again. The sun god must have resurrected from the dead! And so in celebration, they would decorate a live evergreen tree with silver and gold, representing the log that was burned yesterday is alive again today!

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see how the Babylonian religious

system is still alive today, from the worship of the mother and child to the Christmas and Easter traditions. The weeping over the death of Tam-muz was happening right there in the temple. And it was an abomination to God.

8:16-17 Facing The East

God knew that this idolatry was universal. The priests, the elders, the women, and now the men are exposed as idolaters. This group of 25 men had their backs to the temple and were facing east, bowing down before the sun.

They are a perfect example of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18) and fail to honor God or give thanks to Him (Rom. 1:21), but instead darken their hearts in sin. The apostle Paul described them as having...

Rom. 1:25 ...exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...

Putting The Twig To Their Nose

God describes them as "putting the twig to their nose." What does that mean? Commentators are divided between two ideas. The first is that putting a branch or twig to the nose was part of the ritual of sun worship. The second idea is that this was an obscene gesture, sort of like thumbing their noses at God. Either way, God was offended and provoked to wrath.

8:18 No Pity In Spite Of Crying

God has shown Ezekiel that they have filled up the full measure of their sin. The judgment He brings upon them will be justified, regardless of how they might cry out. It was too late.

This idea of the wrath of God really offends some people. Admittedly, it is difficult when we see men, women, and children destroyed in judgment. But remember, God is completely just, and sees all, while we never see the entire picture.

I am constantly reassured by the Scriptures in the book of Revela-

tion that when we see things from God's perspective, even the harshest of judgments will be completely understandable. Several times, as God's wrath is being poured out upon the earth, those in heaven proclaim,

Rev. 15:3 ..."O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways..."

Rev. 16:7 ..."Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

9:1-2a Executioners Of The City

The judgment that would come upon the city would be the Babylonian army. But in the vision, we see six executioners. Because this is a vision, we could assume that these are representative of the Babylonians, but they also could be demonstrating to Ezekiel that this will be the spiritual realm's perspective on the coming judgment, with angels being the instruments of judgment "behind the scenes."

After all, it is the angels who are...

2Th. 1:8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

9:2b-4 Mark Those Who Sigh

Before the judgment, one of the six was told to mark some of the people in Jerusalem. The ones marked were the ones who were grieved by the sin in their midst. The mark will protect them from the judgment to come.

This sounds very much like what we have read will happen during the Tribulation period. John wrote in Revelation,

Rev. 7:1-3 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,

saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

Even in the church age, those of us who are chosen of God have been sealed with a mark. It is the Holy Spirit Who seals us.

2Cor. 1:22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.

Eph. 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise

In the same way, God is having His mark placed upon these few in Jerusalem who will escape judgment.

9:5-10 Slaying The People

Those that did not have the mark were not protected - they would be slain by the judgment of God. Notice that God says, "Start from My sanctuary." We have read the words of Simon Peter, who wrote,

1Pet. 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

As the judgment began, and the dead were piled up in the temple courts, Ezekiel fell on his face and cried out to God. He wanted to know if the entire remnant of Israel was going to be destroyed.

God explains that the judgment is righteous and deserved. But He will also soon explain that there will be a remnant.

9:11-10:8 Fill Your Hands With Coals Of Fire

In chapter one, we heard Ezekiel explain about something that looked like coals of fire or torches with lightning coming out of them. They were going back and forth between the four cherubim. The man clothed with linen is instructed to gather some of these and scatter them over the city. This symbolizes the destruction of the city after the people are killed.

(10:9-17) Cherubim Described Again

Ezekiel had described these creatures back in chapter one, and he again describes them to us in these verses.

10:18-19 The Glory Departs The Temple

As we read back in chapter eight, the people's actions were demonstrating that they didn't want God around. And so, He is going to remove His glory from the temple. In chapter 9, the glory had gone to the threshold of the temple (9:3). Now, God's glory is leaving the threshold, and moving to the east gate.

(10:20-22) More Cherub Descriptions

The cherubim are described a bit more.

11:1-12 Evil Leaders

God points out the leaders of the people. Among them are Yah-az-an-YAW son of Az-ZOOR and Pel-at-YAW son of Ben-aw-YAW. He says that these leaders are devising iniquity and giving evil advice to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In spite of the fact that God's prophets were telling them that destruction was coming, these men were reassuring the people that they were safe. "Build your house," they said. "We're just like stew, safe within the walls of the pot."

God says, "Right analogy, wrong application." Yes, they are stew in the pot. They'll be boiled, not kept safe. He says through Ezekiel, "When your city is attacked by the Babylonians, only then will you realize that this was the Word of God."

11:13-21 The Remnant Will Be Gathered

As Ezekiel was prophesying, Pel-at-YAW, the son of Ben-aw-YAW died. Once again, Ezekiel falls on his face and cries out to God about the remnant being destroyed.

But God reassures him that even though the Jews have been taken to Babylon, God will preserve their safety in captivity, and will bring

them back to the land of Israel.

Was this prophecy fulfilled at the end of the Babylonian Captivity? Only in the sense that they did come back to the land. But their hearts for God did not go the distance. During the days of the New Testament, Jerusalem was once again destroyed.

No, the fulfillment of this promise will come when Christ returns at the end of the Great Tribulation, and

Mark 13:27 "...He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth..."

It is only then that the glory of the Lord will inhabit the temple again, and the Jews will receive a new spirit and a new heart, and they will walk in His ways.

11:22-25 The Glory Departs The City

The gathering of the elect will happen someday. But in Ezekiel's time, the people were far from God. And so His glory departs from the land of Israel.

It is interesting to me that the glory of the Lord went up from the mountain east of the city. If you know your geography, you know that is the Mount of Olives. And that is the location where the glory of God will one day return. You see, the writer of Hebrews said that Jesus...

Heb. 1:3 ...is the radiance of His glory...

And Zechariah tells us that when Jesus returns to face the nations who have rejected Him and slaughtered His people,

Zech. 14:3-4 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west...

The same location from which the glory of God departed will be the scene of the glory of God returning.