

## Ezekiel's Vision of Abominations in the Temple

### Ezekiel 8

Ezekiel 8: *"And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. <sup>2</sup> Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire—from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber. <sup>3</sup> He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy. <sup>4</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain.*

*<sup>5</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, lift your eyes now toward the north." So I lifted my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, was this image of jealousy in the entrance. <sup>6</sup> Furthermore He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations." <sup>7</sup> So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. <sup>8</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall"; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door.*

*<sup>9</sup> And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there." <sup>10</sup> So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. <sup>11</sup> And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. <sup>12</sup> Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'"*

*<sup>13</sup> And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing." <sup>14</sup> So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.*

*<sup>15</sup> Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these." <sup>16</sup> So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.*

*<sup>17</sup> And He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. <sup>18</sup> Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."*

## Background Notes

At the time of his call and commissioning to be a prophet of God, Ezekiel had a great vision of the glory of God (chapter 1). Fourteen months after that first vision, Ezekiel had another vision - in fact, chapter 8 is the first of four visions recorded in chapters 8-11. It's best to consider Ezekiel 8-11 as a single vision consisting of four parts.

The first part of this extensive vision is recorded in Ezekiel 8. On the occasion of the vision, Ezekiel was sitting in his house in Babylon, where he lived among the captives from Judah. The elders of the captives came to his home and sat down with him. They probably wanted to know the latest communication from God to Ezekiel, especially about Jerusalem and the Temple. Remember, this was in 592 BC. Jerusalem and the Temple were not destroyed until 586BC.

The "elders" sitting with Ezekiel in his home in Babylon in verse 1 were not the same elders that we read about in verses 11-12. The elders in verses 11-12 were the unfaithful Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. In this vision, Ezekiel saw that those wicked elders were involved in idolatry right in the area of God's Temple!

In the vision, the Lord had the appearance of a man: *"Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire - from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber"* (v2). Notice the similarity in this description to the appearance of the Lord in Ezekiel's first vision.

In the vision, Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem and given a close up view of the idolatry and wickedness that was going on in the Temple area. He was not transported bodily to Jerusalem – the vision gave him a close up view of the situation.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God sees the wickedness of His people.

The Jewish people were God's covenant people. The Lord's dwelling place in their midst was His holy Temple. At this time, the glory of the Lord was still present in His Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel 10 recorded the reluctant departure of the glory of the Lord from the Temple.

God cannot let wickedness go unjudged, and that's the reason why God was going to allow Jerusalem and the Temple to be destroyed by the pagan Babylonians. The sinful nation of Judah would be spared no longer. Verse 18: *"My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."*

Notice what God said to Ezekiel in verse 12: *"Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us. The Lord has forsaken the land.'"*

Those unfaithful elders thought that God didn't see their idolatry - as if they could hide their sin from God by operating in the dark! How stupid could they be?

And yet many people today (including many Christians!) think that God doesn't see them if they sin behind closed doors or in the dark. Do you know that your true character is revealed by what you choose to do behind closed doors, or in the dark? God sees **all**. God sees the wickedness of His people.

## **2. God exposes the wickedness of His people.**

God not only saw their wickedness, but He exposed it as well. God gave Ezekiel a close-up view of all the areas of idolatry and wickedness. In turn, Ezekiel told the elders and other captives what he had seen. At the end of the vision, in Ezekiel 11:25, he says, *"So I spoke to those in captivity of all the things the Lord had shown me."* When Ezekiel finished telling the people the message of his visions, they would have had no questions as to why God was judging Israel with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

In chapter 8, four different areas of idolatry and wickedness were shown to Ezekiel.

1. *First, the "idol of jealousy" standing by the north entrance to the inner court of the Temple.* What a contrast this dead idol was, compared to the glory of the living God of Israel (v4)! Ezekiel called this idol the "idol of jealous" because it provoked God to jealousy. God is a jealous God when His people turn away from Him and worship idols. Is it possible that you're making God jealous by harboring idols in your life? Remember - an "idol" is anything that has a higher place on our priority list than God, and God's plan for our lives.

2. *Second, the idolatry of the seventy elders of Israel.* They were offering incense to the images of beasts and creeping things that were carved on the walls of chambers in the Temple complex. What a direct and deliberate departure from the one true God and His Law! *"Thou shall not make for yourself a carved image, any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under earth, and you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am a jealous God"* (Exodus 20:4-5).

God exposed the name of the individual who was leading this idolatry – *Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan*. Remember - God has ways of exposing individuals who are leading God's people astray today, just as He did then.

3. *Third, the "weeping for Tammuz" by the women.* Verse 14: *"So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz."* Tammuz was a pagan deity who was thought to die each year. He was then mourned until he came to life again in the spring of the year, when he brought the life-giving rains. Associated with this idolatry were the wicked, immoral "fertility rites" – that was actually religious prostitution and adultery. Today, Tammuz is the name of a month in the Hebrew calendar. This goes all the way back to the Tammuz idolatry that Israel wrongly brought into her culture.

4. *Fourth, a group of twenty-five men, probably priests, worshipping the sun in the east.* These men were worshipping the sun between the altar and the Temple, with their backs to the Temple. They were deliberately turning their backs on the work that the Lord had given them to do. The expression *“they put the branch to their nose”* (v17) may be a reference to an obscene gesture, but most likely it was an expression of contempt or scorn for God. Their contempt for God was obvious in their idolatry and the violence and abominations with which they had filled the land (v17).

God exposed all this wickedness to Ezekiel, and He inspired Ezekiel to record it in Scripture as a warning to others. In the same way God exposes the wickedness of His people today.

The verse, *“Be sure your sin will find you out”* (Numbers 32:23) certainly has an application here. If you claim to be a Christian, and yet you’re deliberately involved in sinful practice or lifestyle, and you’re unwilling to repent and get right with the Lord, you can be sure that God will either remove you, or expose you and use you as a warning to others. I hope you will opt for being “removed” before you bring shame on yourself and on the Lord and His people. God exposes the wickedness of His people.

## **Practical Application**

### **Would you let God hold an Open House in your life today?**

Here’s a practical application that I found in the notes of the Life Application Bible: One definition of an Open House is when your realtor allows anyone who is a potential purchaser to walk through your house. They can check out all your rooms, and even look in the closets.

If God held an Open House in our lives today, what would be exposed? Would He find things that we’re trying to hide – things in our lives that we don’t want anyone to see? Good question, isn’t it?

Would you let God hold an Open House in your life today?