

Book of Ezekiel

Chapter 8

*Theme: Vision of the glory; temple destroyed
because of defilement*

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Theme: Vision of the glory; temple destroyed because of defilement

We now come to the second major section of the prophecy of Ezekiel. In this division of the book the complete captivity of Jerusalem and Israel will become a reality, and the glory of the Lord will depart from the temple in Jerusalem.

Now we move into a new section of the book that is really a conclusion of his first prophesy.

Clarke Introduction: In the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month—This, according to Abp. Usher, was the sixth year of Ezekiel's captivity. The sixth day of the fifth month of the ecclesiastical year, which answers to August A.M. 3410.

This chapter and the three following contain but one vision, of which I judge it necessary, with Calmet, to give a general idea, that the attention of the reader may not be too much divided.

The prophet, in the visions of God, is carried to Jerusalem, to the northern gate of the temple, which leads by the north side to the court of the priests. There he sees the glory of the Lord in the same manner as he did by the river Chebar. At one side he sees the image of jealousy. Going thence to the court of the people, he sees through an opening in the wall seventy elders of the people, who were worshipping all sorts of beasts and reptiles, which were painted on the wall. Being brought thence to the gate of the door of the house, he saw women weeping for Tammuz or Adonis. As he returned to the court of the priests, between the porch and the altar, he saw twenty-five men with their backs to the sanctuary and their faces towards the east, worshipping the rising sun. This is the substance of the vision contained in the eighth chapter.

About the same time he saw six men come from the higher gate with swords in their hands; and among them, one with an ink-horn. Then the Divine Presence left the cherubim, and took post at the entrance of the temple, and gave orders to the man with the ink-horn to put a mark on the foreheads of those who sighed and prayed because of the abominations of the land; and then commanded the men with the swords to go forward, and slay every person who had not this mark. The prophet, being left alone among the dead, fell on his face, and made intercession for the people. The Lord gives him the reason of his conduct; and the man with the ink-horn returns, and reports to the Lord what was done. These are the general contents of the ninth chapter.

The Lord commands the same person to go in between the wheels of the cherubim, and take his hand full of live coals, and scatter them over the city. He went as commanded, and one of the cherubim gave him the coals; at the same time the glory of the Lord, that had removed to the threshold of the house, now returned, and stood over the cherubim. The cherubim, wheels, wings, etc., are here described as in the first chapter. This is the substance of the tenth chapter.

The prophet then finds himself transported to the east gate of the temple, where he saw twenty-five men, and among them Jaazaniah the son of Azur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people, against whom the Lord commands him to prophesy, and

to threaten them with the utmost calamities, because of their crimes. Afterwards God himself speaks, and shows that the Jews who should be left in the land should be driven out because of their iniquities, and that those who had been led captive, and who acknowledged their sins and repented of them, should be restored to their own land. Then the glory of the Lord arose out of the city, and rested for a time on one of the mountains on the east of Jerusalem, and the prophet being carried in vision by the Spirit to Chaldea, lost sight of the chariot of the Divine glory, and began to show to the captivity what the Lord had shown to him. This is the substance of the eleventh chapter.

We may see from all this what induced the Lord to abandon his people, his city, and his temple; the abominations of the people in public and in private. But because those carried away captives with Jeconiah acknowledged their sins, and their hearts turned to the Lord, God informs them that they shall be brought back and restored to a happy state both in temporal and spiritual matters, while the others, who had filled up the measure of their iniquities, should be speedily brought into a state of desolation and ruin. This is the sum and intent of the vision in these four chapters.¹

This eighth chapter begins a new stage of Ezekiel's prophecies and continues to the end of the eleventh chapter. The connected visions at Ez 3:12–7:27 comprehended Judah and Israel; but the visions (Ez 8:1–11:25) refer immediately to Jerusalem and the remnant of Judah under Zedekiah, as distinguished from the Babylonian exiles.²

Ezekiel had repeatedly stated that the coming judgment was prompted by the people's sins. But what had the people of Jerusalem done to deserve such punishment? God took Ezekiel back to Jerusalem in a vision to show him the wickedness there (chaps. 8-11).

This vision occurred "in the sixth year" (of Jehoiachin's exile; cf. comments on 1:2) "in the sixth month on the fifth day" (8:1). This date was September 17, 592 B.C. This was exactly 14 months after Ezekiel's first vision (1:1-2). In the interim Ezekiel had received a vision of God (chaps. 1-3), had acted out four signs (chaps. 4-5), and had given two messages on judgment (chaps. 6-7). Now God gave him a new vision.

The vision recorded in chapters 8-11 is a single unit. Yet four specific sections are within it. Ezekiel was first confronted with the wickedness of the people in the temple (chap. 8); then he was shown the slaughter of the people of Jerusalem (chap. 9). Jerusalem was so wicked that God's glory departed from the temple (chap. 10), and as it left the city, judgment was pronounced on her rulers (chap. 11).³

¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 7:27). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

McGee Introduction: In chapter 8 Ezekiel has another vision of the glory of the Lord. The vision transports Ezekiel to Jerusalem, and God's glory appears in the temple at Jerusalem. The question always arises: Was Ezekiel *actually* transported to Jerusalem? I will give you my viewpoint, but this is an issue on which no one can be dogmatic and on which few agree. One answer to the question is that Ezekiel simply saw a vision and he saw it there by the river Chebar. A second explanation is given that Ezekiel literally went to Jerusalem and walked around and saw all that he records here. I do not accept either of these interpretations.

I believe that Ezekiel's experience was very similar to the experiences that the apostles Paul and John had. Paul said that he had been caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-3). It is my feeling that that occurred at the time he was stoned in Lystra in the Galatian country and was left for dead. I believe he actually was dead and that God raised him from the dead, and that at that time he was caught up to the third heaven. John also, as recorded in Revelation 4, was caught up into heaven. In this I feel John is a picture of the rapture of the church, in which all true believers will be caught up to be with the Lord. Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation frequently mention "the church," but after John's experience in chapter 4, the church (the "called-out body") is no longer mentioned. She is now the "bride" of Christ, the church which is no longer on the earth but is with her Lord. Therefore, I see John's being caught up into heaven as a picture of the Rapture.

Ezekiel was actually caught up as Paul and John were, but I do not think that the people at Jerusalem and of the surrounding area were aware that he was there. We are not dealing with the natural, and I cannot offer you a natural explanation. God caught him up, and what happened was supernatural.⁴

Constable: This chapter contrasts the glory of God with the idolatry of Judah's leadership and citizens back in Jerusalem. "The purpose of the visions of chapter 8 was twofold: to show the Jews in Babylon the righteous judgment of God upon His people for their sins and to forewarn that continuance in these outrages would result in a final and complete exile of Israel from the promised land. The present chapter amplifies the reason for the threatenings found in 7:20-22."⁵

⁴ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 7:24). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes on Ezekiel 2010 Edition

Ezekiel 8:1

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.

Dake: [sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month] Time of the Prophecies of Ezekiel:

Those Before Fall of Jerusalem:

1. 5th year of captivity:
 - (1) 4th month—Tammaz (July 5, Ezekiel 1:1-3:9)
 - (2) 4th month—Tammaz (July 12, Ezekiel 3:10-7:27). Seven days later than them above (Ezekiel 8:15-17)
2. 6th year of captivity: 6th month—Elul (Septuagint 5, Ezekiel 8:1-19:14)
3. 7th year of captivity: 5th month—Ab (Aug. 10, Ezekiel 20:1-23:29)
4. 9th year of captivity: 10th month—Tebeth (Jan. 10, Ezekiel 24:1-28:26, except Ezekiel 26)
5. 10th year of captivity: 10th month—Tebeth (Jan. 12, Ezekiel 29:1-16)
6. 11th year of captivity:
 - (1) 1st month—Abib or Nisan (Apr. 1, Ezekiel 26:1-21. Cp. Ezekiel 30:20)
 - (2) 1st month—Abib or Nisan (Apr. 7, Ezekiel 30:1-26. See Ezekiel 8:20)
 - (3) 3rd month—Sivan (June 1, Ezekiel 31:1-18)

Those after the Fall of Jerusalem:

1. 12th year—Adar (Mar., Ezekiel 12,32:1-20)
2. 12th year—Tebeth (Jan. 10, Ezekiel 33:21-39:29)
3. 25th year—Abib or Nisan (Apr. 10, Ezekiel 40:1-48:35)
4. 27th year—Abib or Nisan (Apr. 1, Ezekiel 29:17-21)

Because a Jewish month is different from ours—taking in sections of two of our calendar months—the particular days of months, as given above, are approximate dates. Furthermore, some of Ezekiel's prophecies are undated, but they are listed above—the undated ones between dated ones in proper order so that we can have some idea concerning the time they were given.⁶

Dake: [elders of Judah] The elders of Judah are called the elders of Israel in Ezekiel 14:1; Ezekiel 20:1,3. They were the elders of the Jewish community at Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15).

Sin, Against God—The worship place can become the sinful place. God's people insisted on being like their neighbors and making a visible image of God. God's jealous zeal reacted in wrath against such sin. God makes Himself known in His glory to His people. Making an idol is a failure to trust God to reveal Himself to His people. Such lack

⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

of trust is sin. Worshiping the idol or any part of the natural world is open rebellion against God.⁷

Ezekiel was there sitting in his house, some of the ancient men of Israel, the older men, were gathered there with him and God's Spirit came upon him.

[the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me] This means that the power of God fell upon him again. Ten times the hand of the Lord was upon him, or fell upon him (Ezekiel 1:3; Ezekiel 3:14; Ezekiel 8:1; Ezekiel 14:9; Ezekiel 16:27; Ezekiel 25:7,16; Ezekiel 37:1; Ezekiel 40:1).

LAB: This prophecy's date corresponds to 592 B.C. The message of Ezekiel 8-11 is directed specifically toward Jerusalem and its leaders. Ezekiel 8 records Ezekiel being taken in a vision from Babylon to the temple in Jerusalem to see the great wickedness being practiced there. The people and their religious leaders were thoroughly corrupt. While Ezekiel's first vision (Ezekiel 1-3) showed that judgment was from God, this vision showed that their sin was the reason for judgment.⁸

hand of ... Lord God fell ... upon me—God's mighty operation *fell*, like a thunderbolt, *upon me* (in Ez 1:3, it is less forcible, "was upon him"); whatever, therefore, he is to utter is not his own, for he has put off the mere man, while the power of God reigns in him [CALVIN].⁹

sixth year—namely, of the captivity of Jehoiachin, as in Ez 1:2, the "fifth year" is specified. The lying on his sides three hundred ninety and forty days (Ez 4:5, 6) had by this time been completed, at least *in vision*. That event was naturally a memorable epoch to the exiles; and the computation of years from it was to humble the Jews, as well as to show their perversity in not having repented, though so long and severely chastised.¹⁰

sat before me—to hear the word of God from me, in the absence of the temple and other public places of Sabbath worship, during the exile (Ez 33:30, 31). It was so ordered that they were present at the giving of the prophecy, and so left without excuse.¹¹

Ezekiel mentioned the date (see comments two pars. earlier) to identify when **the hand of the Sovereign LORD came upon him** (cf. 1:3; 3:14, 22). It was when he was in his **house and the elders of Judah were sitting** there with him. Ezekiel's outside ministry was still limited (cf. 3:24), so the elders of the community had to come to his house. They

⁷ Disciple's Study bible

⁸ Life Application Notes

⁹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 8:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁰ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 8:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Eze 8:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

had probably gone to seek his advice, possibly on the fate of Jerusalem. The vision was God's answer which Ezekiel then reported to them (cf. 11:24-25).¹²

ESV: The date formula places this vision in September 592 b.c., just over a year from the inaugural vision. No triggering event can be linked to this date with certainty, but the events leading up to the sinking of the anti-Babylonian scroll related in Jer. 51:59–64 may lurk in the background. Clearly there were “prophets” among the exiles fomenting rebellion (see Jer. 29:20–23). The elders (Ezek. 8:1) seek a word from Ezekiel.

ESV: 1–4 The vision begins with Ezekiel's “physical” transportation from his home in Babylon (v. 1) to the Jerusalem temple (v. 3), a detail without parallel in the canonical OT (but cf. *Bel and Dragon* 14:33–36). Otherwise the setting is reminiscent of the inaugural vision (Ezekiel 1–3).

ESV: 8:1–11:25 Ezekiel's Temple Vision. This is the second of Ezekiel's four dramatic visions, having overt connections with the opening vision (chs. 1–3). It also has strong links to the concluding vision (chs. 40–48), which offers a mirror image to this one. Ezekiel is shown a mounting series of vignettes of idolatrous worship in the temple (ch. 8), the citywide slaughter of idolaters (ch. 9), the destruction of Jerusalem by fire, and the gradual withdrawal of the presence of the Lord from the temple (ch. 10). The vision culminates in the contrast of judgment on wicked officials (11:1–13) with an oracle of hope (11:14–21) before God's glory departs completely (11:22–25). As a whole, the vision emphasizes God's rejection of this generation of Judeans and demonstrates the justice of God's stance.

ESV: 1–18 Transportation and Abominations. Ezekiel is transported in his vision to the temple complex at the heart of Jerusalem (vv. 1–4). In a series of locations, including both the center and the periphery of the temple, various cultic practices, termed **abominations**, are revealed.

Constable: The following prophecy came to Ezekiel on September 17 or 18, 592 B.C. as he was sitting in his house with the elders of Israel.¹⁵⁹ This would have been during the time when he was lying on his right side for part of the day dramatizing God's judgment on Judah for her iniquity (cf. 1:1-3; 3:16; 4:4-8). The elders were the leaders of the Judean exiles in Babylonia who had been deported in 605 and 597 B.C. This verse describes the single vision that Ezekiel wrote about in chapters 8—11.

¹² Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Ezekiel 8:2

Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber.

[I beheld ...] The fourth time he saw the vision of the glory of God (Ezekiel 1:4-28; Ezekiel 3:12-14,22-23; Ezekiel 8:1-4).

Dake: [a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber] Fourfold description of God's glory:

1. A likeness as the appearance of fire
2. The appearance of God from His loins downward was like fire
3. The appearance from His loins upward was brightness, the color of amber
4. The glory of the God of Israel according to the vision I saw in the plain (Ezekiel 8:4; see Ezekiel 1)

ESV: The manifestation of God that Ezekiel sees on this occasion is like that of the inaugural vision in 1:27. In 8:4 this connection is made explicit.

LAB: This person could have been an angel or a manifestation of God himself. In Ezekiel's previous vision, a man with a similar appearance was pictured as God on his throne (Ezekiel 1:26-28).

2-6. As Ezekiel sat before the elders he saw a figure like that of a man. The figure was a manifestation or theophany of God like the one recorded in 1:26. From His waist down He was like fire, and from there up His appearance was as bright as glowing metal (cf. 1:27). As in chapter 1, Ezekiel's description of the vision was deliberately vague. Lest he be accused of picturing God as just a glorified man, Ezekiel carefully phrased his description as he wrote under the Holy Spirit's inspiration. God does not have the body of a man; His appearance was merely "a figure like that of a man." God did not extend an actual human hand down to Ezekiel; He stretched out what looked like a hand.

What Ezekiel described in chapters 8-11 took place in visions, that is, it did not physically transpire. As Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem (cf. 3:14; 11:1, 24; 37:1; 43:5) his physical body remained in Babylon. The elders seated before him did not see the theophany of God. As the vision passed from Ezekiel (11:24b), he described it to the elders.

In the vision Ezekiel was lifted ... up between earth and heaven and transported to Jerusalem. "Flown" from Babylon to Jerusalem, the prophet landed at the entrance to the north gate of the inner court (see the sketch "Plan of Solomon's Temple" near 1 Kings 6). The north gate was one of three gates that opened from the outer court to the inner court. The other two were located on the east and south sides. Since Ezekiel was at the "entrance" to the north gate, he was probably standing in the outer court looking south toward the inner court.

Beside the north entrance to the inner court was the idol that provokes to jealousy. Ezekiel also called it the idol of jealousy (Ezek. 8:5), probably because he viewed it as an

affront to God. This idol violated the second of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:4; cf. Deut. 4:23-24). God was being provoked to jealousy because a foreign god was receiving the homage that should have been His alone. The god or goddess represented by this idol is not named, but it may have been Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility. King Manasseh had placed a carved image of Asherah in the temple during his reign (2 Kings 21:7; cf. Deut. 16:21), but later he removed it (2 Chron. 33:13, 15). After Manasseh's death an Asherah pole found its way back into the temple, and Josiah removed it during his reforms (2 Kings 23:6). He burned it in the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem in the hope of eradicating this idolatrous worship forever. Unfortunately after Josiah's untimely death the people returned to their idolatry. Evidently a new Asherah pole was made to replace the destroyed one.

As Ezekiel stared at this idol, beside him was the glory of the God of Israel (cf. comments on Ezek. 1:28). God's moral outrage was expressed in His rhetorical question to Ezekiel: Do you see what they are doing ... detestable things ... that will drive Me far from My sanctuary? God will not share His glory with an idol (cf. Isa. 42:8). If the idol inhabited the temple, God would leave.

The shock of seeing the idol in the Lord's house must have unnerved Ezekiel. Yet this was not all Israel had done to provoke her Lord. Ezekiel would see things ... even more detestable (cf. Ezek. 8:13, 15).¹³

There is a play on the words for man (□ *ישׁה* Heb.), and fire □ *עשׂה* Heb.). Ezekiel saw a fire and it was a Man.

Chuck Smith: And that is the appearance of fire. Greek Septuagint here translates this as the appearance of man. The word fire in Hebrew is *esh*, and the word *man* is *ish*. So the Greek translators felt that this was the *ish*, so the appearance of a man. And from the context it would seem that perhaps that is correct.¹⁴

Chuck Smith: That was the vision that he described of the cherubims there in chapter 1.

Now here is Ezekiel sitting with the elders and suddenly he sees this form of a fire or of a man, and from the loins upward it looked like fire and from downward this bright color of amber. And a hand came forth, took him by his hair, lifted him up between heaven and earth and then transported him to Jerusalem, to the inner court, the north gate of the inner court, where he saw there the horrible abominations for which God's judgment had come upon the people.

Ezekiel had another vision of God. The description of God is the same as what the prophet wrote that he saw by the river Chebar (1:27). The description of God stresses His holiness.

¹³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:2-6). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁴ Chuck Smith, Pastor Notes, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

Ezekiel 8:3

And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where *was* the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.

Clarke: The image of jealousy (*semel hakkinah*), We do not know certainly of what form this image was, nor what god it represented. Some say it was the image of Baal, which was placed in the temple by Manasses; others, that it was the image of Mars; and others, that it was the image of Tammuz or Adonis. Calmet supports this opinion by the following reasons:—

1. The name agrees perfectly with him. He was represented as a beautiful youth, beloved by Venus; at which Mars, her paramour, being incensed and filled with jealousy, sent a large boar against Adonis, which killed him with his tusks. Hence it was the image of him who fell a victim to jealousy.
2. The prophet being returned towards the northern gate, where he had seen the image of jealousy, verse 14, there saw the women lamenting for Tammuz. Now Tammuz, all agree, signifies Adonis; it was that therefore which was called the image of jealousy.
3. The Scripture often gives to the heathen idols names of degradation; as Baal-zebul, god of flies; Baal-zebul; god of dung.

It is likely that it was Adonis who is called The dead, Leviticus 19:27, 28; Deuteronomy 14:9, because he was worshipped as one dead. And the women represented as worshipping him were probably adulteresses, and had suffered through the jealousy of their husbands. And this worship of the image of jealousy provoked God to jealousy, to destroy this bad people.

LAB: 3-5 This “idol that provokes to jealousy” could be an image of Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility, whose character encouraged sexual immorality and self-gratification. King Manasseh had placed such an idol in the temple (2 Kings 21:7). King Josiah had burned the Asherah pole (2 Kings 23:6), but there were certainly many other idols around.

McGee: “And he put forth the form of an hand.” God is a Spirit; He doesn’t have a hand like I have. But when the Scripture tells me that the *fingerwork* of God is in the heavens then I am able to understand, because I could not understand how God could make the world without a hand. Scripture uses our own finite terms to aid our understanding of the infinite.

“And he took me by a lock of mine head.” You will remember that Ezekiel had shaved himself—his face and his head—but that had been about a year before this, and his hair has had time to grow out. God took him by the hair of his head.

“And the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem.” Ezekiel was actually caught up and removed by the Spirit of God to Jerusalem. Whether or not his body went along with him is a point I will not argue about, but I rather think it did. Ezekiel’s withdrawal to Jerusalem is not something new in Scripture. Elijah also was caught up (2 Kings 2), and in the New Testament we

read of Philip: “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39). Philip was removed bodily, and that is exactly what happened to Elijah and possibly to this man Ezekiel.

“To Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.” I believe this “image of jealousy” may be a reference to the idol which Manasseh put in the temple (see 2 Kings 21; 2 Chron. 33) which was an abomination and a blasphemy. Perhaps that old idol had been pushed into a corner and forgotten for awhile, but now in Ezekiel’s day it has been pulled out, and the people who should have turned to God in repentance are again worshipping that idol.

In chapters 8–10 of Ezekiel we are going to see the gradual withdrawal of the glory of the Lord from the temple and from Israel. I feel that the glory actually departed back during the reign of Manasseh and that Ezekiel is given a vision of that here. I know that most expositors of Scripture feel that the glory left at the time of the Captivity, but I do not feel that is accurate. If the glory did not leave during the exceedingly evil reign of Manasseh, I cannot see any other period in Israel’s history which would cause the glory, the presence of God, to leave.

In this chapter we do not have the complete vision of the departure of the glory. Here we see the glory, and then, because the people did not turn back to God, the glory lifted up from the temple and went out over the city to the east and waited there. It will not be until chapter 10 that we will see the final departure of the glory.

I do not think there is any evidence after the reign of Manasseh that the glory of the Lord was in the temple. This vision was given to Ezekiel to show that God is merciful. He was loath to leave and was ready to save the people of Israel if they would turn to Him. God is merciful, and God is love. But He is also a righteous and just God who cannot permit evil in His universe. He cannot permit that which is contrary to Himself.

Today, God cannot save us by our righteousness or our perfection—we have none to present to Him. He cannot accept anything less than righteousness. He therefore had to provide a redemption for man, and we must come His way through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do not, we have an old nature that is in rebellion against God, and God is not going to permit that in His universe, anymore than a policeman should harbor a criminal in his home.¹⁵

Ezekiel was transported in a vision to Jerusalem. He was taken to the “inner court.” Though the nature of this “image of jealousy” is uncertain, it was a direct violation of the second commandment (Ex 20:4-6). Manasseh had set up such an image, the Syrian mother-goddess Asherah, within the temple area in defiance of God (2 Kin 21:1-7; 2 Chr 33:7). This idol, worshipped as the wife of YAHWEH, was a rival to the Lord, who tolerates no rivals. “Jealousy” (*κίναση*, Heb.) has the connotation of defending one’s rights. God’s jealousy seeks to protect His people from the sin of idolatry and its accompanying immorality.

¹⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Visions The four visions of ch. 8 emphasize the profanation of God in the very Temple set aside to His worship. Idolatry was present and unchecked (vv. 5, 10-11); women were participating in the immoral cult of Tammuz; and sun worshipers brazenly turned their backs to the Temple (v. 16). Although Ezekiel was actually by the Kebar River (1:1, 3; 3:23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3), in vision he was transported back to Jerusalem. These profanations going on in the Temple area were shown to the prophet so that he might justify to the new generation, born and growing up in Assyria and Babylon, the righteousness of God in the present chastening. Because of sins like these, past and present, the captivities were necessitated. This strain continues through the book to 33:21. Interspersed with the various visions are promises of restoration and blessing to be brought about by Israel's repentance.¹⁶

When interpreting chs. 8–11 it must be borne in mind that what Ezekiel sees are dreamlike visions of God. This is spiritual, not “natural” reality. The inner gateway locates Ezekiel within the temple-palace complex, yet not at its center.

Constable: In his vision Ezekiel saw God reach out and pick him up by his hair and transport him to Jerusalem by the Spirit. The Lord placed him down at the north gate of the inner court of the temple where there was an image of an idol (cf. Deut. 4:16). King Jotham (750-732 B.C.) had built this gate, which apparently did not exist when Solomon first constructed the temple (2 Kings 15:35). Other names for it were the upper Benjamin gate (Jer. 20:2), the new gate (Jer. 26:10; 36:10), the altar gate (Ezek. 8:5), and the upper gate (2 Kings 15:35; Ezek. 9:2). This idol provoked the Lord to jealousy.

Ezekiel 8:4

And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

The north gate of the inner court, called the “altar gate” in v. 5, was near the sacrificial altar (Lev. 1:11). There Ezekiel saw the image ... which provokes to jealousy. All idolatry was forbidden, and any idol represented a violation of the loyalty that belonged to Israel's God. the glory of the God of Israel:

The prophet also saw the glory of the Lord manifested there, as he had seen it in his initial vision of God (1:28). The glory of God sets the idolatry of the people, which Ezekiel next saw in more detail, in striking contrast.

¹⁶ New Schfield Study Bible Notes

Ezekiel 8:5

Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.

[Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north]

Then—after I had been brought to Jerusalem, I lifted up my eyes toward the north and saw the image of jealousy at the gate of the altar of the temple.

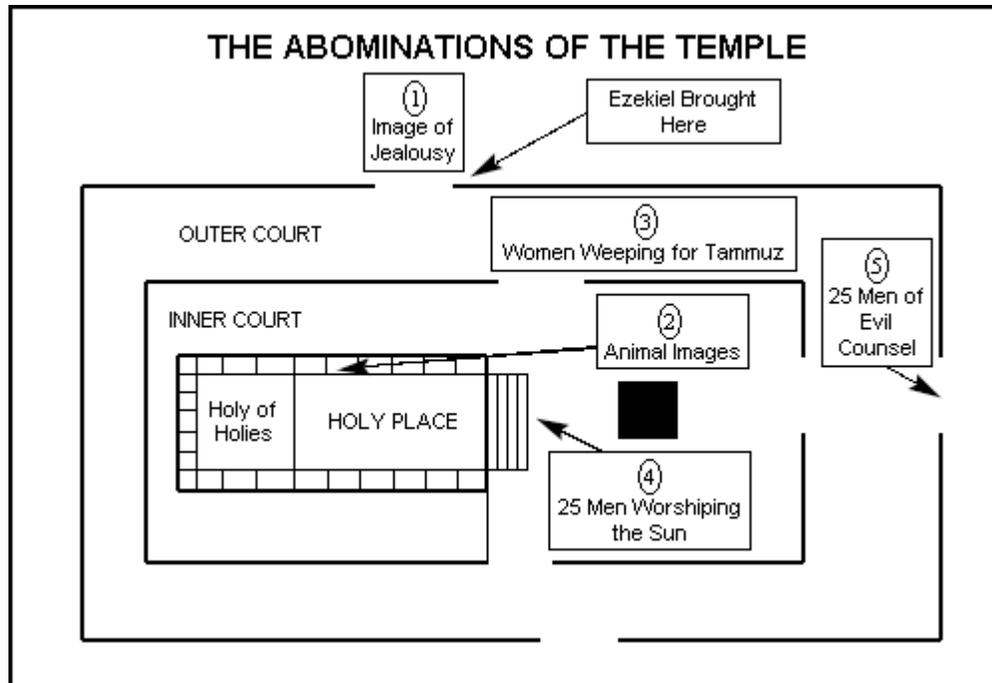
Dake: [image of jealousy in the entry] This image of jealousy was an image of Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14) set up in the temple, which caused Jehovah to be jealous (Ezekiel 8:2,5). It was set up in the door of the inner gate (Ezekiel 8:3). This was the gate to the inner court or holy place. It led from the outer court of the temple to the inner one, the court of the priests or gate of the altar (Ezekiel 8:5). It was from this side that the priests approached the brazen altar. The glory of God was not in the holy of holies as usual; it had left that place and was resting over the place where this image of jealousy was—to bring judgment before the glory left the temple completely (Ezekiel 8:4).

ESV: 5–6 The first of the four vignettes situates Ezekiel with his back to the altar, facing an image of jealousy, which remains unidentified. The vagueness is deliberate: focus remains on the provocation of divine outrage, not on the specifics of the image itself. It will get worse (still greater abominations; cf. vv. 13, 15). These sins are “greater” in the sense of being more hateful to God; this can be because of such factors as bringing him more dishonor, bringing greater harm to others, expressing more and more defiance to God's warnings or indifference to his love, being more boldly done in public,

5-16: At four different locations in and around the Temple Ezekiel witnessed the abominable practices of the leading citizens of Jerusalem. First, God directed his attention to the area north of the altar gate. There he saw a new “image of jealousy” in the entrance. Though the image is not further identified, most likely it was the representation of the fertility goddess Asherah. Those approaching the altar of God passed beside this image. An abomination like this was sufficient to justify Yahweh’s departure from his sanctuary. The Lord assured Ezekiel, however, that he would see yet greater abominations (8:5f.).

Next the Lord brought Ezekiel to the entrance of the inner Temple court. There he saw a hole in the wall of the Temple. He was told in his vision to dig through that hole. When he did so he found inside an entrance to a secret chamber. Entering that door, Ezekiel saw idolatrous carvings on the wall “of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel” (8:7–10). The fact that these carvings consisted of animals suggests some Egyptian animal cult. Perhaps this religion was adopted by the national leaders during the reign of Jehoiakim who was a vassal of Pharaoh Neco (2 Kgs 23:34ff.).¹⁷

¹⁷ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 8:5–16). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.



Ezekiel saw standing before those carvings seventy elders of the house of Israel offering the incense of worship before the representations on the Temple walls. Among the seventy was Jaazaniah, a black sheep from the godly family of Shaphan. The elders not only practiced their religion collectively “in darkness,” i.e., in secret, each also worshiped in his own individual chamber. They justified their actions, to themselves if not to others, by two arguments: (1) “the Lord does not see us,” and (2) “the Lord has forsaken the land.” Their first argument was blasphemous because it questioned the omniscience of God. The second was hypocritical because these same leaders were publicly arguing that God could never abandon Jerusalem and the Temple. Yet in spite of the audacity of Egyptian animal cult worship in the sacred precincts of the Temple, Ezekiel was assured that he would see yet greater abominations (8:11–13).

The Lord then brought Ezekiel to the door of the north gate of the Temple. There the prophet saw the women sitting and weeping over the god Tammuz. The annual death and resurrection of this vegetation god was mourned by his consort Ishtar. The worst kinds of immoralities were employed by this cult in a effort to magically control nature. Yet Ezekiel was assured that he would see yet greater abominations (8:14f.).

Finally the Lord brought Ezekiel to the inner court of the Temple. Between the porch of the Temple and the brazen altar of sacrifice Ezekiel noticed twenty-five men. Because of their location in the inner court these men were most likely priests. The number twenty-five perhaps represents the twenty-four courses of priests plus the high priest. In any case, these men had their backs to the Temple and their faces to the east. They were worshipping the sun god Shamash (8:16).¹⁸

¹⁸ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 8:5–16). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

Chuck Smith: You see the things they are doing here? Right within the house, right within the sanctuary. Things that provoke Me to jealousy because of the false gods that were worshipped right there within the precincts of the temple. But He said, "Hang on, you haven't seen the worst yet."

Constable: At the Lord's command, Ezekiel looked north from where he was in his vision and saw the idol that provoked the Lord to jealousy north of the north entrance into the inner court of the temple near the bronze altar of burnt offerings. Many expositors believe that this may have been an image of Asherah because King Manasseh had erected such an idol and then destroyed it (2 Kings 21:3, 7; 2 Chron. 33:15), and King Josiah had destroyed a later rebuilt version of it (2 Kings 23:6). The people could have raised it up again after Josiah's death. Any idol provoked the Lord to jealousy because He is the only true God (cf. Exod. 20:1-4; Deut. 4:23-24). God is jealous in the sense that He does not want people to pursue idols because idols divert people from the true God and destroy them eventually (cf. Deut. 4:16; 32:16; 1 Kings 14:22; Ps. 78:58).

Ezekiel 8:6

He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? *even* the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, *and* thou shalt see greater abominations.

[seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?] These are questions 1-2 in Ezekiel and the next questions are in Ezekiel 8:12.

Dake: [great abominations] The abominations of Israel were great, so much so that they caused the complete destruction of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and almost the total destruction of all Jews in the kingdom of Israel. These sins are listed many times in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets. God promised to show Ezekiel even greater abominations than what he had heard about or seen in Israel. Such was the purpose of this trip to Jerusalem where he was shown many secret sins of the leaders of the leaders of Israel (Ezekiel 8:6-18).

Dake: [the house of Israel] Here again God, as many times before in the prophets, used the term "the house of Israel" when speaking of the Jews in the kingdom of Judah at Jerusalem. This was about 133 years after the 10 tribes had been destroyed and taken captive, so there could be no reference here to them at all. This applies exclusively to what was going on in Jerusalem at that time and not to the destroyed 10 tribes.

Dake: [that I should go far off from my sanctuary] This gives the reason for God going far off from the temple—even abandoning it to destruction. After these visions of Ezekiel 8-11 the glory of God did depart from the temple, not to return until the millennial temple is built. Compare Ezekiel 11:22-25 with Ezekiel 43:1-6, referring to a time after the building of the future and eternal temple, as described in Ezekiel 40:1-42:20.

Duke: [greater abominations] Four greater sins of Israel:

1. Worship in chambers of images and all kinds of clean and unclean beasts (Ezekiel 8:8-11)
2. Women weeping for Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14)
3. Sun worshipers in the temple (Ezekiel 8:16)
4. Sex orgies to the Asherah (Ezekiel 8:17)

In scene after scene, God revealed to Ezekiel the extent to which the people had embraced idolatry and wickedness. God's Spirit works within us in a similar way, revealing sin that lurks in our lives. How comfortable would you feel if God held an open house in your life today?

to make Me go: The people thought that just because the temple stood among them, whatever wrong they might do could not bring ultimate disaster. They thought the temple guaranteed their security. They did not realize that their evil had actually caused God to leave His temple, which would then no longer be their protection.¹⁹

The Lord asked Ezekiel if he saw the great abominations that the people were practicing in Jerusalem by worshipping this image. It was so bad that the Lord had removed Himself from His temple. Yet He told the prophet that he would see worse abominations than this one.

Ezekiel 8:7

And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.

7-13. Then God led Ezekiel through the gateway to the entrance to the court, probably the inner court. Ezekiel then saw a hole in the wall that surrounded the court. In his visionary state God told him to dig through the wall. When he did so, he saw a doorway there. As Ezekiel entered the chamber and gazed about, he saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel. Some have suggested these were idols of Egypt, or Canaan, or Babylon. Perhaps *all* those countries were represented in this pantheon of idolatry.

Seventy elders ... and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan were standing with incense censers before the portrayals on the wall. These 70 elders were not the Sanhedrin which ruled in Israel after the Babylonian Captivity, but they did represent the leading men of Jerusalem. When Moses appointed assistants to aid in leading the people, the number whom God consecrated was 70 (Num. 11:16-17). Perhaps this tradition continued and the 70 elders Ezekiel saw were men of the city who had some official leadership capacity.

Among the 70 Ezekiel recognized Jaazaniah, a man whose relatives played important parts in the affairs of state during Judah's final years (see the chart "The Line of Shaphan" near Jer. 26:24). Jaazaniah's presence there surprised Ezekiel because everyone else in Jaazaniah's family had remained faithful to the Lord.

¹⁹ The Nelson Study Bible

Sometimes incense was used to protect worshipers from the presence of God (cf. Lev. 16:12-13). In other instances incense represented worshipers' prayers being borne aloft to God (cf. Rev. 5:8). Whatever the exact purpose of the incense, these leaders of Israel had abandoned the true God and were worshiping idols—each at the shrine of his own idol. Evidently each elder had his own favorite god.

God, who knew their hearts, explained to Ezekiel that the elders sought to justify their sin by saying The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land. The elders felt that what they did in their darkened chambers would escape God's notice. They thought He was only a petty god who had abandoned them. So they were courting other gods to protect them. These elders' attitude was soon transmitted to the people (cf. Ezek. 9:9).

The people's progression of idolatry went from open display of idols to secret worship of idols under the very shadow of the Almighty. Yet this was not the full extent of Israel's wickedness, for they were doing things ... even more detestable (cf. 8:6, 15).²⁰

ESV: 7–13 This second scenario demonstrates the impossible possibilities of visions. To look inside the wall for a literal "room" that could hold 70 men is to miss the force of what Ezekiel is being shown: the interior of self-deceived (v. 12) idolaters.

Ezekiel 8:8

Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.

A hole in the wall—This we find was not large enough to see what was doing within; and the prophet is directed to dig, and make it larger, verse 8.

McGee: If Ezekiel is over there just in his spirit, how in the world could he crawl through a hole? How does a spirit dig a hole? If he were a spirit, he wouldn't *need* to dig a hole. I believe he was there bodily, and he dug a hole and was apparently brought down into a basement or a cave. What does he find down there?²¹

Constable: The Lord then brought Ezekiel, in his vision, to some entrance to the temple courtyard. There Ezekiel saw a hole in the wall. At the Lord's command, Ezekiel dug in the wall and discovered an entrance. There are no other references to a solid wall between the outer and inner courtyards of Solomon's temple much less to a room or rooms within that wall. Visionary experiences frequently did not correspond to reality in every particular, and this may be one example of this phenomenon. Perhaps what Ezekiel saw was a wall of the temple proper.

²⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:7–13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel 8:9

And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here.

A view through a hole in the temple wall, this next scene of the vision gives a glimpse of even worse idolatrous acts. The people's abominations (vv. 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, 17) were not limited to a periphery. They extended deeply into the hierarchy of Israel's religious leadership.

Also following the Lord's instructions, Ezekiel went through the entrance and found himself in a chamber full of images carved on the wall that the Judahites were worshipping. There were pictures of many types of insects, animals, and other detestable things (cf. Lev. 11:40-42; Deut. 4:16-19).

Ezekiel 8:10

So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about.

Dake: [every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about] The rooms with painted walls picturing every kind of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and images of idol gods were called chambers of imagery (Ezekiel 8:10,12). The tombs in Egypt were painted thus, as well as ancient temples of the heathen. The apostate Jews painted the abominable things on the walls of the temple of Solomon and offered incense to them. Here 70 elders of Israel offered incense to these pictures and images (Ezekiel 8:10-12).

Clarke: **And saw—every form of creeping things**—It is very likely that these images portrayed on the wall were the objects of Egyptian adoration: the ox, the ape, the dog, the crocodile, the ibis, the scarabaeus or beetle, and various other things. It appears that these were privately worshipped by the sanhedrin or great Jewish council, consisting of seventy or seventy-two persons, six chosen out of every tribe, as representatives of the people. The images were portrayed upon the wall, as we find those ancient idols are on the walls of the tombs of the kings and nobles of Egypt.

McGee: These people are worshiping the creature rather than the Creator—this is as low as they could go. Man will turn to this type of thing when he has absolutely repudiated the living and true God. This is what they were doing in Egypt at the time of the Exodus; they were worshiping every kind of beast. That is the reason the plagues upon Egypt were aimed at the different gods of Egypt. In Romans 1 we read: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God ... Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever ...” (Rom. 1:21, 25). This means that Israel has sunk down to the level of the nations round about her, and she is no longer a witness for the living and true God. For this reason, He will destroy the temple.²²

²² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Ezekiel saw the abominations of Egyptian and Canaanite animal worship, called here the “idols of the house of Israel,” portrayed on a wall.

Chuck Smith: Now, Shaphan was the scribe that when Hilkiah the priest had found the law, when Josiah had initiated these spiritual reforms you remember and they found the book of the law, and they brought it to Josiah and Shaphan read to him out of the law and he realized how far they had turned against God. And he repented even more and ordered this mass repentance of the people. Shaphan was a faithful scribe, but his son, the rat. He's an old man now. He's standing with the ancients, Jaazaniah, the son of Shaphan.

The images **engraved** on the walls contravene not only the second commandment (Ex. 20:4) but also the list enumerated in Deut. 4:15–18.

Ezekiel 8:11

And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.

“Japhan” is from the primitive root word which means “to conceal.”
“Staphan” - led reform under Josiah.

Clarke: Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan—Shaphan was a scribe, or what some call comptroller of the temple, in the days of Josiah; and Jaazaniah his son probably succeeded him in this office. He was at the head of this band of idolaters.

McGee: You see, they have dismissed God. They said He was not watching them. And those today who say that God is dead are really trying to say that God is not looking at us, that we are not responsible to Him, we owe Him nothing and may do as we please. That is what Israel was doing. They were apparently worshiping this idol, and they were doing it in secret. Talk about a secret lodge—they sure had one in the temple there.

My friend, in this day the believer's *body* is God's temple on earth. Is He pleased by what He sees going on in our minds and hearts?²³

Jaazaniah, a member of a prominent family, is “the son of Shaphan,” a leader in the administration of Josiah (cf. 2 Kin 22:3-5). This Jaazaniah is not to be confused with “Jaazaniah the son of Azzur” in 11:1.

Chuck Smith 11-12: Now, here is the wild part about this. This hole in the wall that Ezekiel dug, coming into a room and looking around on the walls of the room, seeing all the pornography and all, God is saying, "Ezekiel, I've allowed you to come into the minds of these people. What you have been seeing is the things that are in their imaginations. The fantasies and those things that are in their minds, the imageries that are in their minds. These are their thoughts; these are what they are thinking. All of this filthy stuff

²³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

that you've seen are the things that are going on in the minds of the ancient. These men who are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of Israel, and yet their minds are polluted."

Now, that is sort of a heavy issue in realizing that God can probe right into our minds and He sees those images, those imaginations of our own minds. That, to me, is rather sobering. To think that nothing is hid from God, even my thoughts God knows. The imaginations that I have, God sees. That is why the scripture says that we are to bring every thought into captivity, unto the obedience of Jesus Christ.

Now they were saying, "The Lord doesn't see us and the Lord has forsaken the earth." They were wrong on both counts. God did see and God has not forsaken.

ESV: The presence of Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan among the 70 elders may have been a shock. He was probably a member of the clan of Shaphan (2 Kings 22:8–10) which had proved so loyal to the cause of Yahweh in Jeremiah's ministry (e.g., Jer. 26:24). This identification is not certain, but would explain why Jaazaniah is singled out for mention here.

Constable: Ezekiel also saw 70 of the elders of Israel (cf. Num. 11:16-17), including Jaazaniah (lit. "Yahweh hears") the son of Shaphan, with censers containing burning incense in their hands worshipping these images (cf. Rom. 1:23). These "laymen" were acting like priests. Jaazaniah appears to have been the son of Josiah's godly Secretary of State, Shaphan (cf. 2 Kings 22:8-14; 2 Chron. 34:15-21; Jer. 26:24; 29:3; 36:10; 40:5, 9, 11; 41:2; 43:6). If so, this would indicate the spiritual deterioration of leadership in Judah. Another of Shaphan's sons, Ahikam, was a defender of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:24).¹⁶⁰ Some commentators believed that the gods they were worshipping were Egyptian in view of what these gods were and since the men were worshipping in secret.¹⁶¹ Some of Judah's leaders advocated reliance on Egypt. If they were Egyptian gods, it was ironic that 70 elders of Israel had earlier confirmed the Mosaic Covenant after God delivered them from bondage to the gods of Egypt (Exod. 24:1, 9). Now Israel's leaders appear to have been appealing to those same gods for help against the Babylonians.

Ezekiel 8:12

Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

Missler: Obviously, this is a climatic form of idolatry, idolatry in the Lord's Temple itself! Here they say that the Lord cannot see them, but not only can He see what they are doing in His Temple, but He shows it to Ezekiel who is not even in Jerusalem! The vision which God gave to Ezekiel cut right through the barrier of distance as well as all stone walls and exposed what was going on in the leadership.²⁴

²⁴ Chuck Missler, Notes on Ezekiel, khouse.org

Dake: [hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?] This is question 3 in Ezekiel and the next question is in Ezekiel 8:15.

Dake: [do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery] Four sins and mistakes of Israel:

1. Offering incense before images and pictures painted on walls (Ezekiel 8:10-12)
2. Honoring and worshipping unclean animals as gods
3. Saying, The Lord does not see, because of worshipping in the darkness (Ezekiel 8:12)
4. Saying that Jehovah has forsaken the earth

Constable: The Lord explained that the elders were secretly worshipping idols believing that the Lord did not see them because He had forsaken the land. The terminology used suggests that they were worshipping idols in their homes as well as in the temple precincts. "What people do when they think no one else can see them reveals their true character." Yet the prophet would see even greater abominations than these.

Ezekiel 8:13

He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do.

McGee: 13-15 "There sat women weeping for Tammuz." This was an awful thing that was going on. Tammuz was the Babylonian Dumuzi, the god of spring vegetation. He died in the fall and winter and went down to the netherworld to be revived again each returning summer. The worship of this god was practiced in Phoenicia and spread to Greece, where Adonis was Tammuz' counterpart. These weeping women were celebrating the death of this god; his worship was actually the worship of nature and connected with it were some vile and immoral ceremonies.²⁵

Ezekiel 8:14

Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.

Missler: According to Babylonian lore, Tammuz was the miraculously born son of Semiramis the queen wife of Nimrod the hunter. Nimrod in Genesis was the first world dictator and, according to the Babylonian folklore at least, his wife had a supernaturally born son by the name of Tammuz who was associated with the sun god.

Alexander Hislop's book, *The Two Babylons*, is one of the places to find more background material on what Babylon was really all about. He goes back and digs into the ancient records to describe what kinds of ideas had their root in Babylon. One of them was the worship of Tammuz.

²⁵ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Dake: [Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz] Then—after he had seen the chambers of imagery, he was shown a still greater sin—women weeping for Tammuz. Tammuz was a Phoenician deity, the Adonis of the Greeks. Originally he was a Sumerian or Babylonian sun-god called Dumuzu, the husband of Ishtar who corresponded with Aphrodite of the Greeks. The worship of these gods was introduced into Syria in very early times under the designation of Tammuz and Ashtarte. They appear in the myths of the Greeks as Adoni and Aphrodite, and as Osiris and Isis of the Egyptians. The Babylonian Dumuzu or Tammuz was represented as a beautiful shepherd slain by a wild boar, the symbol of winter. Ishtar long mourned for him and descended into the underworld to deliver him from the embrace of death. This mourning for Tammuz was celebrated in Babylon by women on the second day of the month which thus acquired the name of Tammuz. In the Jewish calendar it was the fourth month, about the same as our July. The center of this worship was Gebal, Syria, and in the famous temple of Venus or Aphrodite in south Phoenicia. There arose in connection with this worship the immoral rites which rendered it so infamous that it was suppressed by Constantine the Great. The death of Tammuz was supposed to typify the long, dry summer of Syria and Palestine, when vegetation perished; and his return to life symbolized the rainy season when the dry land revived. His death also symbolized the cold, winter season, and his return to life the beautiful and fruitful spring. The greater sin above that of offering incense as in Ezekiel 8:10-12 was the disgraceful and immoral rites practiced in the temple of Solomon by the women.

LAB: Tammuz was the Babylonian god of spring. He was the husband or lover of the goddess Ishtar. The followers of this cult believed that the green vegetation shriveled and died in the hot summer because Tammuz had died and descended into the underworld. Thus, the worshipers wept and mourned his death. In the springtime, when the new vegetation appeared, they rejoiced, believing that Tammuz had come back to life. God was showing Ezekiel that many people were no longer worshiping the *true* God of life and vegetation. We must also be careful not to spend so much time thinking about the benefits of creation that we lose sight of the Creator.

14-15. Ezekiel was taken out to the entrance to the north gate of the temple. This was probably the entrance to the temple's outer court. Beside this gate Ezekiel saw women ... mourning for Tammuz. "Tammuz" is the Hebrew form of the name of the Sumerian god Dumuzi, the deity of spring vegetation. The apparent death of all vegetation in the Middle East during the hot, dry summer months was explained in mythology as caused by Tammuz's death and descent into the underworld. During that time his followers would weep, mourning his death. In the spring Tammuz would emerge victoriously from the underworld and bring with him the life-giving rains. The worship of Tammuz also involved fertility rites.

Worship of the true Giver of rain had been supplanted by the debased adoration of a pagan deity. The worship of the Creator was replaced by the worship of the cycles of

creation He had established. And yet Ezekiel was to see things ... even more detestable than these (cf. vv. 6, 13).²⁶

“**Tammuz,**” the Babylonian god of nature, was depicted as dying in the scorching heat of summer and lying dormant through the cold winter months. In late fall, festivals of mourning were held, and in the spring a celebration of resurrection was held as the nature-god came back to life. Ezekiel saw the Israelite women joining in the rites of mourning for Tammuz. This was more evidence of the extent of the spiritual decay. In the Oriental culture the women were the most conservative, and usually the last to abandon their former loyalties.²⁷

Chuck Smith: Now, Tammuz was a Babylonian god. He was the god of resurrection. He was worshipped in the springtime as the trees would come into blossom. They would mourn for Tammuz in the fall as the leaves were dying on the trees and the trees were going bare and all; they would weep for Tammuz. But then in the springtime when the trees would begin to bud and blossom and all again, they would have great parties and they would decorate eggs and celebrate the resurrection of Tammuz, because now we have new life. The new life of spring is around us and the egg is a symbol of perpetuated life, because it's through the egg that the little birds or chicks or whatever are hatched. And so it's a symbol of the perpetuating of life. And so, they would take the eggs and color them, draw on them, and would have these parties with the colored eggs celebrating the resurrection of Tammuz.

Any similarity is far from coincidental. The church unfortunately adopted the pagan practice of the worship of Tammuz and the resurrection of Tammuz and incorporated it into the church, calling it Easter. And having an Easter Sunday, taking the name of the Greek goddess Astarte who was supposed to be the consort of Adonis, who is the Greek equivalent to Tammuz. And we have incorporated into the church and there are churches that have Easter egg hunts and give baskets of colored eggs to the children and all at Easter time, Astarte.

In the early church we don't read of them celebrating the resurrection of Christ on any particular day, but because the pagans were all celebrating in this pagan worship of Tammuz, and they had this day which they acclaimed the resurrection and all in the springtime, the church didn't want their people to feel left out. And so, they said, "This is the day that Jesus rose, and we'll color the eggs and do the same bit, but we're celebrating now the resurrection of Jesus."

I am not certain what the Lord thinks about that. I wonder. The Lord said to Ezekiel, "Come and I'll show you something that's really disturbing. See those women, they're weeping for Tammuz." Not weeping for the desolation that was coming, not weeping because the sin that was rampant in the land, not weeping because they had come into such a moral decay, but weeping for Tammuz, the Babylonian god of resurrection.

²⁶ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:14–15). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁷ Believer's Study Bible

ESV: 14–15 Moving farther north, Ezekiel sees women weeping for Tammuz (from the Sumerian name, Dumuzi). This ancient Mesopotamian cult celebrated the shepherd-king and god of vegetation, whose association with sacred marriage seems clear, while claims about his status as a dying and rising god remain controversial. (The term “sacred marriage” describes ancient practices of ritual prostitution intended to ensure agricultural fertility.) Mourning rites among women in his cult are well attested outside of the Bible.

Constable: The Lord then brought Ezekiel to the north entrance to the inner temple courtyard, in his vision (cf. vv. 3, 5). There the prophet saw women weeping for Tammuz (cf. Isa. 17:10-11). Tammuz was an ancient Sumerian and then Akkadian fertility deity, the husband and brother of Ishtar. The Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations preceded the Babylonian civilization in Mesopotamia. Tammuz had ties to the Canaanite Baal and the Greek Adonis and Aphrodite gods. Since Ezekiel saw this vision in September (v. 1), these women may have been weeping for Tammuz because he was thought to die at the end of the summer but to rise again each spring.¹⁶⁵ Another view is that "Tammuz" denotes a special genre of lament. "After the exile the Hebrew calendar included a month called Tammuz, the fourth month (June-July). This was the time for grapes to be harvested. The preservation of the name Tammuz in the calendar suggests the impact this form of pagan worship had on Jewish life and worship, both during and after the exile."

Ezekiel 8:15

Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these.

Dake: [**Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man?**] This is question 4 in Ezekiel and the next question is in Ezekiel 8:17.

Dake: [**greater abominations than these**] The greater abomination than the women weeping for Tammuz was the worship of the sun by men who turned their backs on the holy of holies and the ark and faced the east like the fire-worshippers. The image representing the sun was set up and worshiped by the elders of Israel (Ezekiel 8:16; cp. Job 31:26-27; Deut. 17:3; 2 Kings 23:11-12).

The location for the sun worship was in the inner court ... between the porch and the altar. These 25 men must have been Levites if temple regulations were being followed; otherwise, the area was forbidden (see Num. 3:7, 8; 18:1–7; 2 Chr. 4:9; Joel 2:17). Whether priests or not, they were turned in the wrong direction—their backs were to God’s temple and they were worshipping the sun.

The Lord made sure Ezekiel saw the women, but He also assured him that he would see even greater abominations than these things.

Ezekiel 8:16

And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east.

Missler: Sun worship history goes way back. It gives spiritual focus to the creation rather than the creator. Some believe these 25 represented the 24 courses of the priesthood plus the high priest in rebellion. (These were the bad guys.)

At about the time of winter solstice, the Babylonians celebrated the death and resurrection of Tammuz by burning a tree, taking a log of it and the next day replacing the burnt log with a fresh tree. The yule log apparently had its origin in the celebration of the supernatural restoration of Tammuz.

The concepts of wassail bowl, the mistletoe which is a fertility symbol, and the Christmas tree do not have their origins in the Christian era. They go way back to Babylon.

Jer 10:1-5. When Jeremiah makes fun of all those things, he is not referring to a Christmas tree. He is referring to the concept of idol worship, where they took those trees and would cut them down and actually worship them.

There are a whole series of pagan celebrations around Tammuz worship which originally came out of Babylon, then under the Persians moved to Pergamos, and then when Rome conquered that part of the world, that whole system went to Rome. The ceremonial background that makes up pagan Rome actually had its roots in Babylon. As it moved through those different locations, it would adapt whatever local name was relevant for them - Tammuz became Adonis, and so on...

The whole system that makes up the cultural traditions of the Old Roman Empire, came into the era at about 312 A.D. when Constantine professed a conversion to Christianity. Christianity had been an illegal religion, but very wide-spread. This rule pulled a very shrewd political maneuver by making this outlawed religion authorized. He won enormous support from those people who had been all over the place hiding in caves and worshipping in secret.

When Constantine declared Christianity alright, those people exchanged the rags of caves for the silks of court, and suddenly it became okay to be a Christian. In a situation like that one, the culture is not suddenly just dropped and another picked up. They mix and match the two, religion and culture. That is when we find the earliest recorded notion that Christ was born in December. That was the approximate time of winter solstice which was tied to the Babylonian tradition of Tammuz worship.

We know Christ was NOT born in winter time. The roads of Judea were impassable at that time making long travel distances for the taxation unfeasible. Also, the flocks were not in open fields by night at that time of year. [See our briefing package, *The Christmas Story*, for a full discussion.]

We are confronted moment by moment by Babylon, if not by the Christmas tree in our house, we have the Babylonian mathematics of 360 degrees in a circle or 60 minutes in an hour... or the names of the days of the week (named after Roman gods). Every place you turn you can recognize that you are in the world, while hopefully, not of the world.

When God again led Ezekiel into the inner court, he saw at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar ... about 25 men. They were between the portico, or covered entrance, to the temple building (cf. 1 Kings 6:2-3) and the bronze altar in the middle of the courtyard on which the sacrifices were offered. This was where God's priests should have been weeping and crying out to God for mercy because of their sin (cf. Joel 2:17).

Who were these 25 men? Later they were called "elders" (Ezek. 9:6), a term that applied to both civil and religious leaders. Because of their location, these men were probably priests. The people were allowed to approach the altar, but the approach to God from the altar to the holy of holies was through the mediation of the priests.

These priests should have been acting as Israel's mediators, crying to God for mercy. But instead, they were bowing down to the sun in the east. The entrance to God's temple faced the east, so that when a person stood at the altar and faced the entrance he was looking west. But these priests were facing east! They had turned their backs on God and were bowing in submission and worship to the sun. This expressed contempt for the God of Israel and implied that they had disowned Him. This directly violated God's command (Deut. 4:19).²⁸

The greatest of all the abominations was the worship of the sun. This was happening right in the temple between the porch and the altar. They can sink no lower than this.²⁹



Illustration. Commentators suggest the 25 men worshiping the sun in Ezek. 8:16 were priests. They are in a court only priests were allowed to enter (2 Chron. 4:9). The 25 represent the 24 shifts who served the temple plus the high priest.³⁰

Worship of the stars and planets was highly developed in Babylon. Ezekiel saw 25 men (probably priests or Levites) who were worshipping Shamash, the Babylonian sun-god, at the very "door of the temple."

²⁸ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁰ Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible readers companion* (electronic ed.) (490). Wheaton: Victor Books.

Clarke: Five and twenty men—These most probably represented the twenty-four courses of the priests, with the high priest for the twenty-fifth. This was the Persian worship, as their turning their faces to the east plainly shows they were worshipping the rising sun.

Chuck Smith: And so, here they were, backs towards the temple, signifying turning their backs upon God, and worshipping now the sun god, worshipping towards the east. I go over to Jerusalem and as we go up to the temple mount, and as I see there that large Dome of the Rock Mosque that occupies the center of the temple of the mount, and you hear this crazy wailing coming over the loud speakers. This musing and you see all of these people get out their little rugs and kneel and bow and face the east in prayer there on the temple mount today, it always brings to my mind that picture that Ezekiel got when he was taken there by the Lord in this vision and saw these men turning from God and worshipping towards the east.

ESV: The final vignette, also the briefest, states simply and starkly the climax of abominations. The twenty-five men are not further identified, but the location between the porch and the altar would normally be reserved for priests. At this sacred place they venerate the sun. Solar worship is prohibited in Deut. 4:19 (see also 2 Kings 23:11). The outrage of this action contrasts with what priests ought to do here (cf. Ps. 26:6–7; Joel 2:17).

Constable: The Lord next took Ezekiel to the main entrance into the temple, to a place between the altar of burnt offerings and the temple porch. There Ezekiel saw about 25 men bowing down to the ground with their backs to the temple facing east worshipping the sun. The Mosaic Law forbade sun worship (Deut. 4:19), but King Manasseh had promoted it in Judah (2 Kings 21:5).¹⁶⁸ Many interpreters assume that these men were priests, perhaps the high priest and a representative of each of the 24 courses of priests (1 Chron. 23), because of their number and where they were standing. Normally only priests went into the inner court of the temple (2 Chron. 4:9; Joel 2:17). This seems likely. "Worship of the sun was widespread in the ancient Near East and was deeply rooted in Canaan. In Israelite thought the sun was a member of the 'host of heaven,' which was viewed as the Lord's heavenly assembly (compare Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 23:5 with 1 Kings 22:19). This may explain why these men could worship the sun in the Lord's temple."

"The sun would thus have to be considered part of the host of heaven, subordinate to Yahweh. As such one might argue that the worship of the sun in Yahweh's temple would have been seen by those who participated in it as, so to speak, all 'part of the package', just as Catholics would regard veneration (not worship) of Mary as not being incompatible with worship of Christ."

Ezekiel 8:17

Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.

Dake: [Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?] These are questions 5-6 in Ezekiel and the next questions are in Ezekiel 9:8.

[put the branch to their nose] This is thought to mean the Asherah.

Clarke: **They put the branch to their nose**—This is supposed to mean some branch or branches, which they carried in succession in honor of the idol, and with which they covered their faces, or from which they inhaled a pleasant smell, the branches being odoriferous. That the heathens carried branches of trees in their sacred ceremonies is well known to all persons acquainted with classic antiquity; and it is probable that the heathen borrowed those from the use of such branches in the Jewish feast of tabernacles. There are many strange, and some filthy, interpretations given of this clause; but the former are not worth repeating, and I abominate the latter too much to submit to defile my paper with them. Probably the Brahminic Linga is here intended.

It really seems that at this time the Jews had incorporated every species of idolatry in their impure worship,—Phoenician, Egyptian, and Persian. I might add that some imagine the image of jealousy to be a personification of idolatry itself.

The branch to the nose could refer either to a cultic worship practice, or to the fact that Judah's sins had become a stench to God.

17-18. The horrors Ezekiel had seen in the temple of God were disturbing. But the evil was not confined there. The wickedness being practiced in the temple by the priests and the people had spread through the nation. Violence filled the nation, which continually provoked God to anger.

The people were even putting the branch to their nose. Some feel this refers to a ritual act associated with worship of other gods. No such ritual is actually known, though some pictorial designs discovered on Assyrian reliefs could imply its existence. Early Jewish commentators translated “branch” as “stench.” Some scholars feel that “their” was a later scribal change for an original reading of “my.” In this case the phrase would read “putting the stench to My nose,” that is, idolatry is a putrid, offensive smell to God. One cannot be dogmatic on which interpretation is correct, but in either case the general sense is clear: the gesture was a gross insult to God.

God's response was decisive: I will deal with them in anger and not ... with pity. God would not allow such open rebellion to continue. Even a last-minute desperate effort on

their part to get God to hear their cries would do no good. The stage was set for judgment.³¹

McGee: “And, lo, they put the branch to their nose.” There are many ways of interpreting this; Jewish commentators of the past have said that it speaks of shocking, low, and degrading religious rites. Perhaps it could be compared with a man “thumbing his nose” today. This is what they were doing to God!³²

The expression “they put the branch to their nose” is an obscure Hebrew idiom, but it evidently was an insult or obscenity directed to the Lord.

trivial thing: There is similar wording in the Lord’s condemnation of Ahab (see 1 Kin. 16:31). **put the branch to their nose:** This action is not mentioned elsewhere. In the context it appears to be (1) a ritualistic gesture used in idol worship, or (2) an action indicative of the extensive violence which was occurring in Judah as a result of idolatry.

Chuck Smith: Now, this was a symbol that was, and a sign used in some of these pagan rites that are so horribly, unspeakably, vile that we could not even in a mixed congregation describe to you the rites by which they worshipped their gods. But God declared,

ESV: 17–18 The behavior described in vv. 1–16 must be punished by a holy God. The phrase **put the branch to their nose** remains obscure; it was probably a gesture of derision.

Constable: The Lord explained that not only had the Judahites committed all these abominations but they had also filled the land with violence and provoked Him repeatedly. Putting a twig to the nose was evidently part of the ritual practice of sun worship.. Another interpretation views this expression as describing some gross insult against God, something like creating a stench in God's nose. Perhaps both meanings are correct. "The Akkadian expression *appa labana* denotes a gesture of worship involving both hand and nose. Sometimes the hand holds an object to the nose, as in the Bavian sculpture of Sennacherib worshipping the Assyrian gods, in which the object held by the king is perhaps a branch . . ."

Ezekiel 8:18

Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

Ezekiel wrote 2500 years ago. He warned us about idolatry, so I think it is useful to be sensitive to these things.

³¹ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Eze 8:17–18). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³² McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Dake: [Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them] The 9th prophecy in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 8:18, fulfilled). The next prophecy in Ezekiel 9:1.

Four Predictions—Fulfilled:

1. I will deal in My fury (Ezekiel 8:18).
2. My eye will not spare.
3. Neither will I have pity.
4. Though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not hear them.

McGee: Israel has stepped over the line—they can go no lower than this. God will now judge them.

My friend, God loves you and will save you if you will come to Him by faith and trust Christ as your Savior. God also judges, and He is a holy and righteous God, and He makes no apology for it. We can say with Paul, "... Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid" (Rom. 9:14). God is right in everything He does; if He judges, He is right to do so. It will be quite a revelation to this generation when it is shown that it is wrong and God is right. God will judge sin.³³

The inhabitants of Judah were not content to provoke the Lord with their abominations. They had also filled the land with "violence," i.e., social chaos and injustice. They were "putting the twig to their nose." This is obviously an offensive practice, but the precise meaning of it is not known. These people would experience the full wrath of God. No compassion would be shown. God would not hear their loud prayers of desperation.³⁴

Constable: The Lord promised to deal with the Jerusalemites in His wrath and not to pity or spare them even though they would cry to Him loudly for mercy.

He would not listen to them. We must remember that what Ezekiel saw he saw in a vision (v. 3). Therefore it may not be that the abominations he saw were really taking place in Jerusalem just as he saw them in his vision. The practices he saw represented to him the rampant idolatry of all the people, the civic leaders, the women, and the priests. The exclusive worship of Yahweh had broken down completely in the "holy" city. "The principle crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry."

³³ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Eze 8:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³⁴ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Eze 8:17–18). Joplin, Mo.: College Press.