

God's Glory Leaves Jerusalem  
Ezekiel 8-11

Turn to Ezekiel 8. Ezk 8-11 tells a sad story, a hard story. It tells *why* God left his temple and the city of Jerusalem, and *how* he left. Why and how, in that order. There is also good news in these chapters, and we'll talk about that on the way. This is a story about God. God invites us to tell him our story. Today, though, we invite God to tell us a story about him.

In the first paragraph of Ezk 8, the Spirit picks up Ezekiel in Babylon, and in a vision takes Ezekiel to Jerusalem to see things at the temple. In the last paragraph of Ezk 11, the Spirit, in the vision, took Ezekiel back to Babylon, and then the vision ended. So these four chapters are a single vision. God showed Ezekiel why he left, and how it happened.

Remember Ezekiel 1, when Ezekiel saw the glory of God come to him in Babylon. Remember one thing in particular about this picture of God: the chariot-throne.

The Israelites always pictured God on a throne. He was their King, so he had a throne. What Ezekiel sees is that God's throne is actually a 4 wheeled chariot, which they used in those days. These four living things, the four cherubim, who have wings and wheels, the four together are actually a divine chariot-throne. God's throne rides on this chariot.

The four cherubim with wings and wheels are fast. They go anywhere, and quickly, like lightening. God rode his chariot-throne to Babylon in Ezk 1, to the exiles there, to call Ezekiel.

That's Ezek 1. Now to 8-11, the vision of God's Glory leaving Jerusalem. We will look at these chapters in four parts: the tour, the judgment, the leaving, and the promise. These go roughly by chapter: the tour (ch 8), the judgement (ch 9), the leaving (ch 10), and the promise (ch 11).

The Tour of Sin: God takes Ezekiel to the Temple Ezk 8

*In the sixth year, in the sixth month on the fifth day, while I was sitting in my house and the elders of Judah were sitting before me, the hand of the Sovereign Lord came on me there. <sup>2</sup> I looked, and I saw a figure like that of a man. From what appeared to be his waist down he was like fire, and from there up, his appearance was as bright as glowing metal. <sup>3</sup> He stretched out what looked like a hand, and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up, between earth and heaven, and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood. <sup>4</sup> And there before me was the glory of the God of Israel, as in the vision I had seen in the plain (in Ezekiel 1).*

<sup>5</sup> *Then he said to me, "Son of man, look toward the north." So I looked, and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar I saw this idol of jealousy. <sup>6</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the Israelites are doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see things that are even more detestable."*

The temple in Jerusalem and its courtyard was a cluster of buildings, and I don't know exactly where God and Ezekiel are here. But a few things are clear. One, Jews in Jerusalem have idols set up right at God's temple. God calls this "my sanctuary." It's at the temple. And God is provoked and offended that they worship idols right at his sanctuary.

You can feel God's outrage, his jealousy, for his own sanctuary. These things will drive God away from his sanctuary, and two. And there is more of the same going on, and it is even worse, even more detestable.

God took Ezekiel to three more places in and around the temple. I'll just read them. We just saw the idol of jealousy; that one did not have any people in front of it, though it was in a gate. Second, the 70 elders of Israel burning incense, third, the women sitting and mourning their god, and last, twenty five men bowing to the sun with their backs to the LORD's temple.

Second Tour Stop – 8:7 *Then he brought me to the entrance to the court. I looked, and I saw a hole in the wall.* <sup>8</sup> *He said to me, "Son of man, now dig into the wall." So I dug into the wall and saw a doorway there.* <sup>9</sup> *And he said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here."* <sup>10</sup> *So I went in and looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and unclean animals, and all the idols of Israel.* <sup>11</sup> *In front of them stood seventy elders of Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand, and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising.* <sup>12</sup> *He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, 'The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land.'"* <sup>13</sup> *Again, he said, "You will see them doing things that are even more detestable."*

Third Tour Stop 8:14 *Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the Lord, and I saw women sitting there, mourning the god Tammuz.* <sup>15</sup> *He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? You will see things that are even more detestable than this."*

Fourth Tour Stop 8:16 *He then brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord, and there at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men. With their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, they were bowing down to the sun in the east.*

God's Summary 8:17 *He said to me, "Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the people of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? Look at them putting the branch to their nose!"* <sup>18</sup> *Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them."*

The temple itself is full of idolatry. God calls the temple, "my sanctuary." In 8:16 it's "the house of the Lord" and in the same sentence, "the temple of the Lord." God's house, God's sanctuary, God's temple, is full of idolatry. It is a vision, but we should assume that these things are all taking place in real life at the temple.

There's more: in 8:17 God says, *Must they also fill the land with violence and continually arouse my anger?* This comes up again in this vision: *The land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice* (9:9), and in 11:2 the leaders of the city *plot evil and give wicked advice in this city*.

Why is God about to leave? The *temple* of God, his sanctuary, is full of idols and his people worshiping idols. And the *city* of Jerusalem is full of violence, bloodshed, evil, and injustice. These things have been true a long time, and they will drive God far from his sanctuary. That's why God is about to leave.

But don't miss how bad it has to get for God to leave. If God was a God of law, he'd have left long ago, and many times over. Twice in this vision, the people say, "God has forsaken us, God does not see." Neither of those were true. God did not leave until the people had overwhelmingly already left him. God only left after they had already left him.

Judgment and Protection Ezekiel 9 alternates between God's judgment and God's protection.

Judgment: Next scene in Ezekiel's vision: God called out in a loud voice for those whom he had appointed to execute judgment on the city, six men with deadly weapons. Along with them came a seventh man, clothed in linen, not dressed for battle at all, carrying a writing kit.

Protection 9:3-4 *Then the Lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."*

Some people in Jerusalem were distressed about the horrible things done in the temple and in the city. They get a mark on their foreheads.

Judgment 9:5-6 *He said to the other (six), "Follow him (the man marking foreheads) through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. 6 Slaughter the old men, the young men and women, the mothers and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark."*

Does this sound familiar? In Revelation 7 we have the same thing. An angel calls with a loud voice, "do not harm the earth until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads." That's what's we see here in Ezekiel. Revelation gets the forehead seal from Ezekiel.

But this starts with Moses. The Passover in Egypt was like this. The Israelites marked their doorways with the blood of the Passover lamb, and the destroying angel left alone the homes with that mark.

Ezekiel's readers will have caught the similarity to Passover protection. In Egypt, the blood on the door separated Israelites from Egyptians. Here, the mark God puts on the forehead separates faithful Israelites from unfaithful Israelites. God knows his own, and takes care of them. When we trust God and live in his ways, he sees, and he acts on our behalf. He marks us to protect us.

In Ezekiel's day, of course, there was no actual visible mark on the foreheads of the Israelites who grieved and mourned the detestable things that were happening. But to God, they were marked and protected. We should understand the marks in Revelation the same way.

God prepares to leave - Ezekiel 9:3

I omitted a important verse. 9:3 *The glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple.*

Solomon's temple was set up like the tabernacle in the wilderness. The inner room was the holy of holies, and God's presence was there between the two gold cherubim. God moved out of the holy of holies, through other rooms, to the threshold of the temple.

The threshold is the stone or plank on the bottom of the door that divided inside from outside. God is now at the doorway, on the verge of leaving the temple. God begins to leave, this is the first stage. God leaves as the slaughter takes place of the third Babylonian invasion.

Ezekiel has this vision in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiachin's exile. The Babylonians invaded three times. Daniel and other nobles were taken in the first invasion, Ezekiel, and king Jehoiachin, and many others were taken in the second invasion. There were about 12 years between the second and third invasions, and Ezekiel has this vision in the middle of that 12 years.

So Ezekiel, in this vision is seeing God's judgement, and God leaving, about 6 years before it actually happened.

Summary of Ezekiel 9 - One, God appoints destroyers, who are actually the Babylonians. Two, before the slaughter, God marks all the righteous people, just as Israelites were marked and protected in Egypt at the first Passover. God protected the righteous from his judgement. Three, God begins to leave the temple. As judgement begins, he's in the doorway.

We've had the tour of sin, and the judgment; now the leaving, then the promise.

### The Glory of God Leaves Jerusalem – Ezekiel 10

In 9:3, we read that the glory of God went up from the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. And then foreheads were marked, and the killing began. That was the beginning of ch 9. At the beginning of ch 10, in 10:4, we read exactly the same things: the glory of God went up from the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple.

By beginning Ezk 9 and Ezk 10 at the same stage, God moving to the threshold of the temple, Ezekiel is telling us that these two scenes of his vision are happening at the same time.

In Ezk 9, Ezekiel sees the man in linen mark the foreheads of the people who are on God's side, and then the other six judge the unrighteous. That's Ezk 9. The next scene, in Ezk 10, has God's four wheeled chariot throne rise up into the air, and then God gets on it, and it leaves.

But these two scenes, the judgment scene and the leaving scene, occur simultaneously. God only goes to the threshold once. Both scenes begin at that point in time, to tell us that judgement and leaving happen at the same time.

God's leaving happens in three stages. The first we already know about: God's glory rose from above the cherubim (he got off his chariot throne), and moved to the threshold of the temple.

Second stage of leaving: 10:15 – *Then the cherubim rose upward. 10:18-19 Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.*

God's chariot-throne lifts into the air, and God gets on, and they are now parked in the air over the east gate of the courtyard of the Lord's house. The garden of Eden had a gate on the east side, so the main gate of the temple and the courtyard always faced east.

Third stage of leaving: 11:23 - *The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. Then the vision I had seen went up from me, and I told the exiles everything the Lord had shown me.*

In the third stage, God leaves Jerusalem and stops on the mountain east of it, and at that point the vision ends. God has left his temple, and he has left the city of Jerusalem. Ezekiel saw all this about 6 years before it happened. He told the exiles all this.

He told them so they would understand that the Babylonians, when they came, did not come because God had already left Jerusalem. The Babylonians came because Israelites left God. He was still the Almighty God, present in Jerusalem on his chariot throne. But they would not honour and serve him.

The Promise Ezekiel 11:17-20 – While God was still in the city, he made this promise. This happens after the second stage, when God rose from the threshold and parked over the east gate, but before God left the city. *This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.*

*18 "They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. 19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and*

*give them a heart of flesh. 20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.*

I will gather you from the nations, I will bring you back from this scattering, I will give you back the land, I will give you an undivided heart, I will put a new spirit in you. You will follow my decrees, you'll be careful with my laws. You will be my people, and I will be your God.

And after God said that, he left the city.

This whole sequence is most of all a story about our God. Our God acts passionately. He explained himself clearly, openly, six years before it happened. This is what I am going to do, and this is why I am going to do it. And then he did it.

The temple tour, the four stops of the tour of idolatry, get us on God's side at the start. We have some sympathy for God. We don't like the destruction afterward, but we would not like people violating our homes and houses like that either. God explained what he was going to do, and why, and then he did it.

This is our God. We also are in covenant with this very God. This is the God we thank for our food, this is the God we pray to in our troubles. We want him to know how we feel about things. And he wants us to know how he feels about things, and that's what vision is about.

Good news in this hard story:

It has to get very bad for God to leave. God only leaves when people have already left him in every way they can think of. And it has to be like that for a long, long time.

God knows his own, and he marks us for protection. We don't know what the mark actually accomplished. The Passover in Egypt did not make the Israelite's lives easy, but it certainly saved them from something awful. We should assume the same in Ezekiel's day. It did not make their lives easy, but it saved them from something very severe.

And according to Revelation, we also have God's mark on our foreheads, God's seal, and will also have God's special protection. God knows his own, and marks them for protection.

And God promises restoration. He promises very good things to come. We will live with him in the place he gives us, he and us together, he will be good to us, and we will be good to him, together in the land he gives us. If we trust this God, our story ends with him and us doing very well together.

PRAYER: O God, you are the Mighty God. We see sides of you here we don't know very well, and they frighten us. Have mercy on us. Equip us with everything good for doing your will. Work in us what pleases you. Thank you for a hunger to live in your ways and bring glory to you. What a priceless gift that hunger is! Keep us from falling, bring us into your glorious presence without fault and with great joy, so we can praise you and worship you there, through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make us holy through and through. May our whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls us is faithful. He will do it. Amen.

Go in God's peace, to love and serve the Lord.