

Ezekiel 8-10 • Where is the Glory of God?

Introduction

Ever since leaving Egypt, Israel could visibly, physically know whether or not it was walking in faithfulness to God by whether or not His presence—the Shekinah glory—was inhabiting first the Tabernacle and later the Temple. However, when it wasn't visible, God had not left them completely but only in the visible realm while He continued to work on their stubborn hearts to return to Him through many and varied forms of discipline. But just as in the Last Days, Ezekiel was shown that the opportunity for reconciliation does not remain forever; a holy God that cannot abide the presence of sin must, sooner or later, destroy that sin.

⁵Then He said to me, “Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north.”

So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.

⁶And He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations.”

[Read 8:5-6]

Background: This is the outer court of the temple where idols and images to other gods have been set up.

Q: What does it mean in v.6 when God says, “...so that I would be far from My sanctuary”?

A: A holy God cannot co-exist with unholiness. Installing idols to other gods in the One True God's house is, effectively, driving Him out from it.

Q: What is significant about this first of many abominations God shows Ezekiel?

A: It's the most obvious to anyone coming even close to the temple; everyone would be able to see these images and know that something is wrong, perhaps even confused for whom the temple was originally built--the One True God or any of these false gods.

⁷Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. ⁸He said to me, “Son of man, now dig through the wall.”

So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.

⁹And He said to me, “Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here.”

¹⁰So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around. ¹¹Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.

¹²Then He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.’” ¹³And He said to me, “Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing.”

[Read 8:7-13]

Background: The court of the temple is the place where the public activities of the court took place such as the sacrifices and washing. Digging through the wall into the inner court is a place where only priests were allowed. One of the ironies is that Jaazaniah's name means “The Lord Hears”, reinforcing the problem stated in v.12, “For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us....”

Q: What is the O.T. significance of “70 elders”?

A: It was 70 elders of Israel who accompanied Moses onto the mount to enter into God's covenant with Israel. This is a powerful way of saying that it is not God that has broken the covenant but Israel.

Q: What's wrong with the fact that elders are burning incense in the inner court?

A: **No one but priests** are supposed to be allowed into the inner courts, and **no one but priests** are allowed to burn incense before God. This is another powerful image that both the priesthood and leadership have completely forsaken God's law. The elders are usurping spiritual authority and the priesthood is allowing it to happen.

Also: It shows the use of things and practices intended for the worship of the One True God in His house being used for the worship of false gods. This is a powerful example of how apostasy and deception work within the church in that the things of God are used to legitimize false beliefs and doctrine.

Q: What is the difference between these abominations and those mentioned previously?

A: Whereas the first are visible and readily apparent to even the most casual passer-by, these can only be viewed by entering the temple.

Ezekiel 8-10 • Where is the Glory of God?, Page 1 of 6

Moving further into the inner court is the place reserved for the priests and represents a place where their true self and beliefs are revealed out of public view, but within full view of the Holy of Holies where God's glory would reside. It's an indication of the powerful apostasy taking place among leadership, the corrupt condition of the church, so to speak, from within. Once inside not only are their activities exposed but the wall carvings, possibly indicating devotion to another word, not God's Word.

¹⁴Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

¹⁵He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these."

[Read 8:14-15]

Background: *Not only does this indicate that the people themselves have forsaken God, but the worship of Tammuz indicates sin and iniquity on many, deeper levels. This is the Babylonian god of fertility and the "worship" involves ritual prostitution. When God accuses Israel of infidelity and acting like a harlot on the high places, sometimes it's not a figure of speech; in the case of Tammuz worship it's quite literal.*

Q: How does this fit in with the sequence of events so far?

A: The unfaithfulness is not just limited to national leadership and the priesthood—it's amongst the people. They have come to the gates of the house of the One True God in the name of a false god they've chosen over Him. Their hearts and minds have been made up to follow another god long before they enter God's house. This type of worship indicates they've given their hearts, souls, and mind completely over to another.

¹⁶Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.

¹⁷He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose. ¹⁸Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them."

[Read 8:16-18]

Q: What's the significance of the direction in which they're facing?

A: Away from the Holy of Holies—God's throne—and instead towards the sun which they're worshipping.

Q: What is the meaning of "they are putting a twig to their nose"?

1. Some believe this refers to an act of worship to false gods wherein people held a tree branch or bundle of twigs to their nose at daybreak, singing hymns to the rising sun.
2. Some believe it refers to the role of trees in the course of false worship to these idols and gods.
3. Some believe it is an idiom indicating that by their actions they are arousing God's anger to their destruction.
4. All of the explanations seem to have the common denominator that this speaks not of one-time disobedience but of turning one's back on the One True God to worship another in His place.

Q: What is the significance of God mentioning "they have filled the land with violence"?

A: God may be referring to the fact that they've completely and totally forsaken **BOTH** tablets of His commandments, the 1st containing the first four commandments summed up as "love the Lord thy God only", governing worship and sole devotion to Him (which they've broken by embracing other gods), and the 2nd containing the remaining six commandments that are summed up as "love thy neighbor" (which they've broken by invoking violence on their neighbor instead of love).

Point: All of these things combined clearly indicate that it is Israel who has broken the covenant with God, Israel who has turned its back on God, and that it's Israel that has brought unholiness into such close proximity to God that it repels Him. They haven't "back-slidden" but completely left God.

[Read 9:1-2]

¹Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand."

²Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand; and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Background: This makes a total of 7 men, a number often associated with judgment. (Trumpets, bowls, etc.) Linen is always an indication of holiness and always worn by the priests ministering before God and special envoys or beings working directly for God.

Q: There are two things highly significant about the exact place that these men are standing. What are they?

A: The bronze altar is where sacrifices are made and their presence next to it indicates that a sacrifice is about to be made. This is also the place one stands and prays while the priests offers his sacrifices. Note that they stand there awaiting instructions from God Who is about to demonstrate how things should work through the working of his judgment.

[Read 9:3a]

^{3a}Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple.

Q: What did we learn from this week's reading is "the glory of the God of Israel"?

A: Ezekiel's vision of God's glory, His very presence.

Q: What is the significance of its moving?

A: It has moved **OUT** of the Holy of Holies and to the threshold of the temple, about to depart. It signals that whereas God disciplined people in the past for their own good so that they would change their hearts and return to Him, their rejection of Him is about to cause His **total** rejection of them. This is not about reconciliation or discipline but judgment.

[Read 9:3b-7]

And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. ⁴The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." ⁵But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. ⁶Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary."

So they started with the elders who were before the temple.

⁷And He said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!"

Thus they went out and struck down the people in the city.

Q: What are the qualifications of those God marks for exemption from this judgment?

A: "...men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." These are not merely people who don't like what's going on or who haven't "joined" with the others—these are committed Believer's who are as nearly grieved as God over the apostasy and false worship taking place.

Application: Both Daniel—and again Jesus quoting Daniel—instruct us to know that the end is near based on our personal recognition of "the abomination of desolation" that will take place. In other words, the only ones who will truly recognize the signs of the End Times and who will not be deceived are those who are focused on the spiritual signs of the time as well as the physical, and personally mourning the recognized apostasy, false doctrines, and ungodly behavior.

Q: Why does God specifically mention women and children and old men and such?

A: Judgment is for everyone because everyone must live by their own choice. There is no excuse.

Q: Where does judgment start? Why might this be significant?

A: It starts with God's sanctuary, or temple. It shows that judgment always begins with the church/His people, with those that are purported to be His followers but have in reality made another choice. God's own house, so to speak, is put in order first; judgment on non-believers (those that never claimed to follow the One True God in the first place) comes after.

Point: An example is given to us here that will serve as a pattern for understanding the End Times.

- God's servants are waiting, prepared to execute His judgment but not until the time He's designated.
- The activities of judgment are executed on **EVERYONE**, but individuals are marked for salvation by Him. (What are examples of God marking people? Pentecost, Noah, 144,000 in Revelation, the Holy Spirit in us. FYI: In this verse, they are marked with the Hebrew letter "tav", which looks very much like a cross.)
- Judgment—as we learned from the chapter 8—is a result of **OUR** sin, **OUR** breaking the covenant of God, and the things **WE** worship in the place of God.
- God's glory lingers for as long as possible until finally having to depart.

⁸As they were striking the people and I alone was left, I fell on my face and cried out saying, "Alas, LORD God! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?"

⁹Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!' ¹⁰But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads."

¹¹Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as You have commanded me."

¹Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them. ²And He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, "Enter between the whirling wheels under the cherubim and fill your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And he entered in my sight.

[Read 9:8-11]

Q: To what is God giving an answer? What were the people's assertion in 8:12?

A: "...For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" This appears to be a direct rebuttal to the people's assertion in 8:12 that God does not see what's in their hearts nor what they do in secret or public.

Q: If righteous men have been marked for exemption from this judgment, why does Ezekiel worry that there may be no one left alive?

A: Probably because so few are marked, an indication of how great the number of those that have forsaken God compared to those that remained faithful. If we studied all the times God has left a remnant—and He always does—we'd discover that statistically the remnant is extremely small compared to the whole.

[Read 10:1-2]

Q: The men were standing next to the altar but they take fire from God's glory rather than from the altar. Is there a significance in this distinction?

A: The fire from the altar would indicate a chance for reconciliation and peace with God and therefore the judgment under those conditions is really a form of discipline. Fire from His glory indicates there is no longer opportunity for peace with God and therefore this is a judgment to completely destroy sin; all of these actions flow naturally from the holiness of God.

Point: When something has rejected every effort by God for reconciliation, it becomes devoted to destruction. For example, during the 430 years of Israel's time in Egypt, the nations of Canaan rebuffed every opportunity to be reconciled to God. Therefore in His instructions to Israel for taking possession of the land, those nations were devoted to complete and total destruction. God gives many opportunities, but eventually they come to an end.

¹⁸Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. ¹⁹When the cherubim departed, they lifted their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight with the wheels beside them; and they stood still at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them.

²²Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. ²³The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. ²⁴And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God to the exiles in Chaldea. So the vision that I had seen left me. ²⁵Then I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.

[Read 10:18-19]

Q: What is the glory of God doing? Where is it going?

A: It's left the inner part of the temple and is now poised at the gate of the outer part of the temple, about to leave the temple entirely.

[Read 11:22-25]

Q: Did the glory of God merely depart from the Temple?

A: No, it left Jerusalem entirely.

Q: What is the exact mountain east of Jerusalem to which the glory of God departs?

A: The Mt. of Olives.

Q: To the best of our knowledge, has the glory of God ever returned to the temple?

A: Yes, in the form of Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

Q: What happened to the glory of God incarnated in Christ?

A: Christ departed the temple and left Jerusalem completely. In fact, the last time Jesus left the temple, He went to the Mt. of Olives and gave what we now call "The Olivet Discourse". (Matthew 24)

Q: From where did Christ ascend into heaven?

A: "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." (Luke 24:50-51) It was **NOT** the Mt. of Olives.

Q: Why is it significant that it was not the Mt. of Olives?

A: Because that is the place of the return of the glory of God at the time of Jesus' Second Coming as explained in Zechariah 14:4, "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very larger valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south." The Glory of God, when it returns permanently, will return at the Mt. of Olives. Jesus' ascension at Bethany is an indication of an event yet to come.

Overall Application

[Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-20]

¹⁸Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Q: So how do we relate the situation in Ezekiel with our own experience?

A: Just as the Shekinah glory dwelt in the temple, so the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Q: What is the affect of being a temple containing God's holiness when we allow sin and idolatry to co-exist within as well?

A: Judgment, discontent, etc., etc. We're not to tolerate sin in our lives but to "flee immorality", which is the most common element in all idolatry and false worship.

Q: Does this mean that if a believer continually commits iniquity and wickedness—even idolatry—that the Holy Spirit might depart?

A: In believers who indulge in sin, the Spirit is "quenched" and "grieved" to the degree that for all intent and purposes He has "departed". Therefore the believer has no protection from God and therefore we see verses like 1 Corinthians 5:5: "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." The principle is the same as in what happened to the nation Israel and the final judgment to come.

Q: Does God give us warnings today through prophets as He did back then to the Jews?

A: Yes. Through His Word, pastors, Christian leaders, members of the body and, in the case of children, through their parents. It's the spirit of prophecy at work in the church, warning against unrighteousness and encouraging righteousness.

Q: In regard to the nation of Israel, where did God's cleansing begin?

A: It started with the sanctuary. So it will begin with the church in the End Times.

Point: Jesus and all the Apostles spend more time warning about deception and apostasy in the church as a sign and problem in the End Times far more than any other thing. In their teachings as well, the principle is that judgment begins with the church before moving on to the rest of the world.

Application: What parts of your life, or choices you've made, have been coming to mind throughout this study? What are the idols and false gods you need to throw out of your own temple? What do you need to do to make your own sanctuary devoted to the One True God and Him only? If you were completely honest, how closely do you identify to those that were marked by God as having as much concern for the behavior of those claiming to be Christians but not actually living like one? Are you a Christian in name only, thinking God does not see how you live the rest of the week?