

The Fire of God's Jealousy Kindled Ezekiel 8

Good morning, everyone. Turn in your bibles to Ezekiel Chapter 8.

Ezekiel was a prophet from the tribe of Levi who ministered God's word to the exiles from Judah who were living in Babylon. Last week we studied the passages where Ezekiel tells about how God called him to minister as a prophet after being exiled away from Judah to Babylon in the 2nd deportation. Ezekiel had a vision of the glory of God at the river Chebar in Babylon. God told him that He would be giving him messages to relay to his fellow exiles; that he would be like a watchmen for a city who when seeing danger warned his fellow countryman.

The book of Ezekiel is divided up into 4 sections of prophetic messages and ministry.

Section 1: God's calling of Ezekiel to prophetic ministry Ch. 1-3

Section 2: Visions/Messages concerning the coming fall of Jerusalem (594-587 BC.) Ch. 4-24

Section 3: Visions/Messages concerning the nations which cursed Judah Ch.. 25-33

Section 4: Visions/Messages concerning future hope of return Ch. 34-48

Today's message, and the next two weeks, will be coming from Section 2. All the material between Chapters 4-24 concern one event: the fall and demise of the southern kingdom of Israel. A few months back we did a study of the 2 Chronicles 36 which was about that event. I called it "The Obituary of the Southern Kingdom." But during the years leading up to that event God had been speaking through Ezekiel to the people who had been exiled away from Jerusalem to Babylon in advance of this event.

God's judgment of His people for their rejection of the covenant took place in three phases with three deportations or exiles. The first was in 605 BC (Daniel and others). The second was in 598 BC (King Jehoiachin, Ezekiel and others). Five years into the exile, God called Ezekiel to proclaim prophetic messages about the third wave: the final judgment which will fall on Jerusalem and the whole land of Judah in 587 BC (12 years later). This judgment would result in much death, bloodshed, and a final exile of survivors.

The prophetic vision and message from God that I've chosen depicts this judgment and the departure of the glory of God from the temple.

The title of my message is "**The Fire of God's Jealousy Kindled**"

Now, this vision and message that God gave to Ezekiel spans three chapters and we're going to work through it over the next three weeks. And rather than the usual outline form, my message is going to largely be reading with commentary along the way, and then I will wrap up with some reflections and applications.

Ezekiel 8 –

It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there. 2 Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man ; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal. 3 He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head ; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, (the temple) where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located. 4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.

Now remember, this is a vision, not an actual literal experience. He is seeing all of this like what we would call a dream. So some kind of heavenly being, perhaps like an angel, picks Ezekiel up in Babylon and takes him to the temple in Jerusalem. No one really knows what the Idol of Jealousy was. But it is some kind of idol which had been set up in the inner court of the temple. This is where the priests in days gone by made sacrifice on the brazen altar. That, of course, had ceased and instead some kind of idol had been erected and was being worshipped there. And we mustn't miss v. 4 "the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain."

So we have the glory of God and in proximity is the idol of jealousy. An idol erected by the altar in front of the temple and in the presence of the glory of God is like a person committing adultery in front of their spouse in their own bedroom.

5 Then 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. 6 And 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? (God is alluding here to their sinfulness driving away God's presence from the temple.) But yet you will see still greater abominations."

God is letting Ezekiel see what God was having to see every day back in Jerusalem. This would help Ezekiel realize how bad things had gotten. Perhaps, before God showed him the judgment that would soon come upon the holy city, He wanted him to see the justification for it. What God was showing Ezekiel He called "*great abominations*".

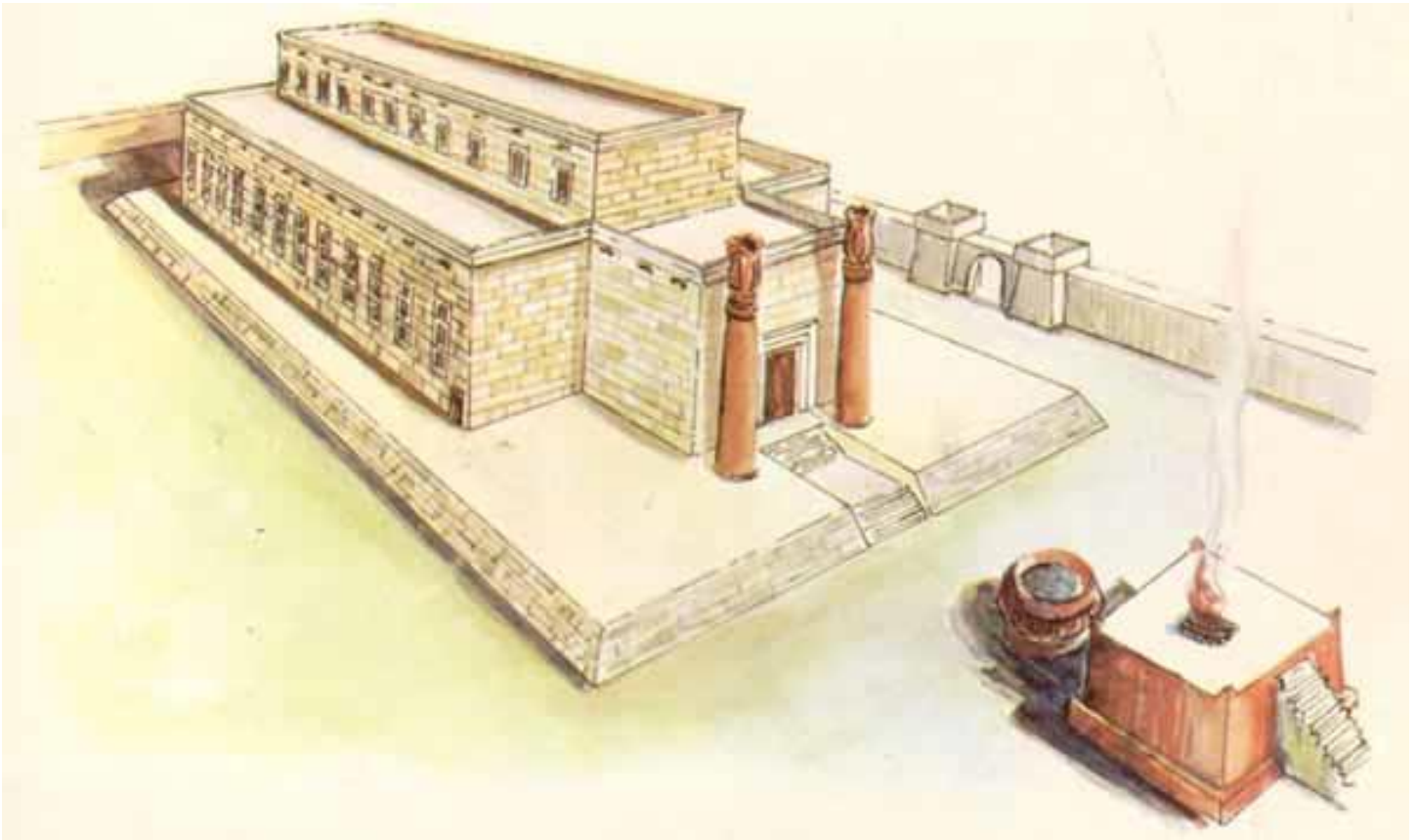
7 Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall. 8 He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. 9 And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here." 10 So 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. 11 Standing 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. 12 Then 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.'" 13 And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing."

What God showed Ezekiel here emphasized the depths to which His people had sunk. The unclean things God's people would have once deplored, avoided, and refused to even touch, they were here depicted as worshipping or praying to them. And the worship is being conducted by those who should be the spiritual leaders of Judah. And yet it gets worse.

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

Tammuz was an Acadian fertility god. This god supposedly died every fall resulting in the dying off of foliage during winter and was resurrected in the spring bringing forth the early budding of plant and vegetation. The women are actually mourning the fall death as though this were really true. They were bought in. God's own people no longer were acknowledging him as the creator and sustainer of the earth. No longer the provider and sovereign over the cycles of that which produced harvests. And you can just feel the grieving heart of God in this vision.

16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house (again the place of sacrifices). 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.



So with backs to the entrance of the temple and facing east they worshipped the sun as it rose from the horizon. And what would be right in front of them? The brazen altar, which for the Jewish people was to be the regular reminder to them that apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. It is the Old Testament figure of what would be the cross of Christ. It was there at that altar where the throats of lambs and goats would be cut, the blood collected and then offered up to God as a substitute payment for the sins of the people. Not only that, it was representative of the future sacrifice of Himself. They were no longer looking for the future sacrifice. They were worshipping what God had created instead of God.

Normally the acts of worship would move from the outer court to the altar of the inner court, into the Holy Place and ultimately into the Holy of Holies where the cherubim stood over the Ark of the Covenant and where the glory of God resided. These men who had turned their back on God, the sacrifice, the altar and His glorious presence.

17 He 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. 18 "Therefore, 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."

Chapter 8 helps us to see what God is seeing. It is the “why” behind the judgment that would be coming. It’s important for Ezekiel to understand the justification for what is about to take place.

Summary: This first part of the vision seems to be meant to help Ezekiel, and the exiles when he shares it with them later, to see what was going on from God's perspective.

We can see and feel and hear the jealousy of God for His people's worship. We can see feel and hear how God is grieving over how far His people have sunk from what He intended when He entered the covenant with them.

The vision starts with a vision of the glory of the unexplainable, incomprehensible God and ends with a vision of His own people worshipping the detestable creepy crawly creatures and the sun which He created to give light and life and fertility to the earth. It continues in Chapter 9 with foretelling the gory details of God's own people being overcome and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Then at the very end of the vision, at the end of Chapter 10, Ezekiel relays all he saw in this vision to the elders who have come to his house to hear what the Lord has said.

What do you suppose God would have wanted the impact of this to be?

Remember, it's their former friends and relatives and fellow Israelites who are going to be massacred by the king of Babylon and there is nothing they can do to stop it. So why hear about this?

Answer 1: Perhaps this vision would move some to grieve with God and even for God and move them to be jealous for God's glory and Him being worshiped and loved by His people

Answer 2: Perhaps they will pray for their fellow Israelites.

Answer 3: Perhaps they will thank God for His mercy in exiling them and receiving a lesser judgment than they deserved.

Answer 4: Perhaps they will realize how important it is for them to prepare and train their fellow exiles there in Babylon for the future day when they go back to live in faithful covenant relationship with God. Or...

Answer 5: Perhaps they will be so hardened that it won't even phase them.

Application for us:

The deceitfulness of sin: The bible says that the heart of man is exceedingly wicked and capable of great self-deception. We have the ability to slowly be desensitized to the evil that is around us and come to justify things which earlier in our lives would have been abhorred, or things which our parents' generation would have looked upon with great disdain.

James says that friendship with the world is hostility toward God. We cannot worship Him with acceptable worship while justifying obstinate, rebellious sin in our lives. God is jealous for His own name and for your exclusive worship and love.

Your and my life, as His children, is what makes His name great in this world. May we be ever so careful as to not kindle His wrath against us by slowly and gradually justifying ungodliness and the bowing down of our minds and souls to objects or even to the created world around us.

Acknowledging God: Consider the sun that rises to the east every morning for us. It is the same sun that arose and was worshipped by God's people. How do you respond to the sun rising, the rain falling, the faithful cycles of the seasons? Most of you I'm sure cannot help but think of the great and glorious God who is behind it all.

It's a reminder of His glory and never-ending faithfulness that you might worship Him.

Consider the fall leaves as they turn color and fall to the ground and the dreariness of winter sets in. Consider the soon coming buds of spring. You serve a faithful Creator God. His glory is manifest to us through what has been made by the authority of His word.

We live in a world and a culture that worships the earth. We worship the Creator of the earth. But if God's people became like so many today who bow down to worship the creation rather than the Creator behind it, Ezekiel 8 gives a window to what that would do to the heart of our great and glorious God.

We're going to take several minutes to watch and listen to this attribution to God. Open your ears and eyes to hear and see your God communicating to you about His love, power and majesty through what He has created.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F79Ck8rFIes>

Conclusion:

God covets the day-to-day faithful worship of generation after generation of His people. He wants a love relationship with people. Something just the opposite of the vision He gave to Ezekiel. And through that vision God is giving us a vision of what He wants.

A people who love Him with their whole heart, mind, and soul. A people who do not fall for all the propaganda around them and fall headlong into the deceptions that our society and culture fall for.

He has created a way for us to have a relationship with Him: The Good News of the gospel. He has called for our undivided love and worship. He outlives generation after generation, and what will this one be known for?