

## The God which the Fall of Jerusalem Reveals

### Ezekiel 9-11

Good morning, everyone. Please turn in your bibles to Ezekiel Chapter 9. In our Old Testament Journey we are now studying a few of the prophetic books from the period of the exile.

Ezekiel was a priest who was a part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of exiles deported from Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BC. And so there were at that time many, many Jewish exiles living in Babylon. God “removed them from before God’s sight,” which means He excommunicated them geographically from the Promiseland, from the temple, and from the Holy place where God had promised to dwell in their midst. But God had been appearing in visions to Ezekiel to communicate with these exiles.

And any time God communicates to His people it is an act of His grace, regardless of the nature of His message. That God was still speaking to them was a good thing.

So last week we learned in this vision, which began in Chapter 8, that Jewish elders had gathered to the house of Ezekiel in Babylon to hear what Ezekiel would say next. While waiting, God gave Ezekiel a vision.

In this vision Ezekiel was transported from Babylon to the city of Jerusalem, and specifically to the temple. There God showed him the great abominations which were taking place. These acts were described as inciting God’s jealousy for Judah’s devotion, love and worship. Their abominable idolatries were kindling and stoking the fire of God’s wrathful judgment against them.

Now, one of the most important features of this vision will be missed by the reader if he does not understand one very important promise God made with the Jewish people in the Mosaic Covenant. God promised that He would dwell among His people. And He would do this by allowing a manifestation of His glory to abide within the temple. Because of His holiness and the sinfulness of His people there would have to be a barrier. This was accomplished within the temple by a veil of separation between the first room called the Holy Place and the second room called the Holy of Holies. The door of the temple provided a barrier between the Holy Place and the inner court just outside the temple. And a stone wall separated between the inner courtyard and the outer courtyard. So the structure of the temple building and the area surrounding the temple was all about separation from God because of sin. All of this is to emphasize that God will not allow sinful, unforgiven, unrepentant, unatoned for people to abide in His presence.

Now, for the first time since the beginning of the Mosaic Covenant, all this was about to change. Judgment was coming on the people, the city, the temple itself and the Promiseland too. And so because God cannot judge Himself or dwell among men without a separation or barrier .... Well, let’s just pray and then we’ll read for ourselves.

Read Ezekiel Chapter 9

1 Then He (God) 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." 2 Behold, 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. **3 Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple.** And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. 4 The 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." 5 But 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. 6 "Utterly 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.** 7 And 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.

Now remember that here in Chapter 9 God is showing Ezekiel the sort of thing that is going to happen at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar's destroying Army. Nebuchadnezzar and his forces will be merciless when they come. This will not take place for another 5 years. But God is sovereign over what will be happening. He would not be preventing or protecting them anymore. He will make sure however that those who grieve with God over Judah's sins would receive mercy.

8 As 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?" 9 Then 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!' 10 "But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads." 11 Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as You have commanded me."

Now we know that the way this took place from the human perspective was at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar roughly 4-5 years after this vision.

So in reality in 587 when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem he was merely an instrument of judgment in the hand of God.

A few key observations:

- 1) The glory of the Lord moved from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the temple. V.3
- 2) God marked out and distinguished between the righteous and the wicked
- 3) God's judgment began with the spiritual leaders of Judah there at the temple
- 4) And the reason for the judgment is underscored: the iniquity of the house of Judah is very, very great!

Now in Chapter 10 we have another revelation of God's glory to Ezekiel which is a repeat of the description of the revelation back when God called Ezekiel to prophetic ministry in Chapter 1. It's a vision within the vision. Now I'm not going to read it word for word because it's so difficult to comprehend and picture merely with a verbal description (read it for yourself on your own).

But here is what is made clear from this vision within the vision (Ch 10):

- 1) Ezekiel is getting a glimpse of God who is uncomprehendable to the mind and eye of man.
- 2) The glory of God is continuing to depart. (v 4, 18-19, 11:23)
- 3) The vision of God's glory is identical to the one Ezekiel received at his prophetic calling.

Now let's read Chapter 11. The 4<sup>th</sup> and final phase of the vision of God's judgment.

*1 Moreover, the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the LORD'S house which faced eastward. And behold, there were twenty-five men at the entrance of the gate, and among them I saw Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people. 2 He said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give evil advice in this city, 3 who say, 'The time is not near to build houses. This city is the pot and we are the flesh.' 4 "Therefore, prophesy against them, son of man, prophesy !" 5 Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and He said to me, "Say, 'Thus says the LORD, "So you think, house of Israel, for I know your thoughts . 6 "You have multiplied your slain in this city, filling its streets with them." 7 "Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of the city are the flesh and this city is the pot ; but I will bring you out of it. 8 "You have feared a sword ; so I will bring a sword upon you," the Lord GOD declares. 9 "And I will bring you out of the midst of the city and deliver you into the hands of strangers and execute judgments against you. 10 "You will fall by the sword. I will judge you to the border of*

*Israel ; so you shall know that I am the LORD. 11 "This city will not be a pot for you, nor will you be flesh in the midst of it, but I will judge you to the border of Israel.*

In this part of the vision God is predicting that some will die in the city but the arrogant will be driven from the city trying to escape (but they will not). They will die without honor. It was considered more of an honor to die defending the capital rather than seeking to save their own lives through escape. But it is clear there will be no escape for those to whom God is speaking.

But the greater emphasis here in this section is in vs 12-13.

*12 "Thus you will know that I am the LORD ; for you have not walked in My statutes nor have you executed My ordinances, but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations around you." 13 Now it came about as I prophesied, that Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, "Alas, Lord GOD ! Will You bring the remnant of Israel to a complete end?"*

It is underscored that the objects of God's wrath have brought this judgment upon themselves through their disobedience to the covenant. And Ezekiel is almost in a panic over it all. Why? It seems to him as if God is making an end of His people all together. From his perspective, Judah will have been either exiled or executed. And Israel will have been brought to a complete end. But that is not the whole picture.

Next week we will focus on God's message of hope and how He is continuing His faithfulness to His people.

God's presence will be gone and God's people will be gone. To him this does not look like a temporary judgment. But a final end to all hope of God redeeming the world through Israel.

But not so. There is yet a message of hope. It is here where the plot turns.

*14 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 15 "Son of man, your brothers, your relatives, your fellow exiles and the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those to whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD ; this land has been given us as a possession.' 16 "Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Though I had removed them far away among the nations and though I had scattered them among the countries, yet I was a sanctuary for them a little while in the countries where they had gone."'*

The proud Jews back in the land were wrongly assuming that their fellow Jews who had been exiled were the objects of judgment but in actuality the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> exiles were an act of God's mercy sparing them from the harsher judgment that was coming. And those who thought they had been spared and could take full advantage of the property of the exiles were in fact being held in Jerusalem and Judah for the final judgment. Arrogance blinds people in denial.

Now here is the message that is directed at the Jewish exiles directly. All of the vision is for them to hear. But this part concerns them particularly.

*17 "Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries among which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel."' 18 "When they come there, they will remove all its detestable things and all its abominations from it. 19 "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, 20 that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God. 21 "But as for those whose hearts go after their detestable things and abominations, I will bring their conduct down on their heads," declares the Lord GOD. 22 **Then the cherubim lifted up their wings with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered over them. 23 The glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood over the mountain which is east of the city. 24 And 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. 25 Then I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.*

Now that's an awful lot to take in, but it is one scene with one message - and the message was not for those back in Jerusalem and in Judea. The vision and its message was for the exiles. When I study this vision and I ask myself, "What purpose does this vision have for the exiles?"

The exiles have basically lost their faith. They are wondering if they as a people and as a nation will just be blended into the rest of humanity and be a people without identity, purpose or land. And this vision answers that question in the message of hope that we will see next week. But it also makes clear some other important revelations that they really need to consider if they want to continue to be God's people.

Today I'm just going to focus on the refreshed revelation of God's character that this judgment would have clarified for the exiles. They had lost touch with who God is; what His plans were for His people; and what was at stake with their faithfulness. This vision would have renewed all that. So quickly **two revelations of God:**

**Revelation 1: God is holy; and His purposes require a holy, obedient people.**

The vision places emphasis on the glory of God departing from the city because of its many abominations. It emphasizes divine wrath being poured out because of the iniquity of the city was very, very great. Together, these emphases revealed to the exiles and all of us who desire to walk with God and be his people the incompatibility of a holy God working with and through an unrepentant wicked people.

And in the vision of hope God describes the people He will bring back and occupy land and be His instruments like this as a people:

(11:18-20)

- 1) Who would remove the abominations from the land
- 2) Have renewed, tender, pliable hearts rather than be hard-hearted towards God.
- 3) They would have a renewed spirit
- 4) They would walk in God's statutes and keep His ordinances

Unholy, unrighteous, hard-hearted people cannot walk in step with God and conduct the work of God in this world. We cannot properly represent Him unless we are a holy and humbly obedient people. We are practically useless to God if we are not obedient to God and have soft hearts toward His word.

What God was promising to recreate in those exiles is the same thing He wants in the church in our land today.

A New Testament passage which closely correlates to this revelation of God is found in **2 Timothy 2:20-22**.

**Revelation 2: God is just and distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.**

The man in the vision with the writing case marked the foreheads of those who shared God's grief over the abominations of the city. Why? Their hearts resembled God's heart and God was saying they would be spared.

In the New Testament, Jesus one time told a parable of the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the dragnet. All parables that emphasize the judgment of God between the righteous and the unrighteous.

Many look around the world at all the injustice and they question the justice of God. And then when God meets out justice they criticize God for being unloving and merciless. This vision emphasizes that God can and does show mercy and execute justice. He judges between the righteous and the wicked.

Now, by righteous I do not mean that some are intrinsically good and some are not. All are wicked and sinful; but some through faith in the promised redeemer, Jesus Christ, have been declared righteous by God. All sin is taken into account and it will all be judged. Either on the cross of Jesus Christ, or like in this passage, it will be brought back on the heads of the guilty. But make no mistake, God will be and is just. Justice will flow like a river, but so will God's mercy.

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters, our God is an awesome God. He is a God of fierce wrath against our sin, but of unbelievable mercy towards the humble and repentant who turn in faith towards God's provision of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Earlier in this series I mentioned that Jehoiachin, who carried the Messianic seed, was actually among the exiles there in Babylon. Before the judgments of God took place which are predicted and described in this vision actually took place, God had mercifully and faithfully removed the Messianic seed from Jerusalem. In so doing, the Savior was among them - albeit in the form of the Messianic seed.

God wanted these Jewish exiles to understand that in addition to what He was going to do when the 70 years of exile were through, He wanted them to know that His expectations for His people are not negotiable.

God's worshippers then, and now, need to understand from the vision of Ezekiel that it is no laughing or light matter to blend into the world around us. Our actions, our values, our beliefs, and our faith practices are to be a reflection of our God - not of our culture.

We are to be different and separate that the world may know and see glimpses of the glory, love and holiness of God among us, and so that through us His plan of redemption for the world can move forward.