

CHAPTER 8

God, having given the prophet a clear foresight of the people's miseries that were hastening on, here gives him a clear insight into the people's wickedness, by which God was provoked to bring these miseries upon them, that he might justify God in all his judgments, might the more particularly reprove the sins of the people, and with the more satisfaction foretel their ruin. Here God, in vision, brings him to Jerusalem, to show him the sins that were committed there, though God had begun to contend with them (v. 1-4), and there he sees,

- I.** The image of jealousy set up at the gate of the altar (v. 5, 6).
- II.** The elders of Israel worshipping all manner of images in a secret chamber (v. 7-12).
- III.** The women weeping for Tammuz (v. 13, 14).
- IV.** The men worshipping the sun (v. 15, 16). And then appeals to him whether such a provoking people should have any pity shown them (v. 17, 18).

~~388~~ EZEKIEL 8:1-6

THE VISION OF DIVINE GLORY

Ezekiel was now in Babylon; but the messages of wrath he had delivered in the foregoing chapters related to Jerusalem, for in the peace or trouble thereof the captives looked upon themselves to have peace or trouble, and therefore here he has a vision of what was done at Jerusalem, and this vision is continued to the close of the 11th chapter.

I. Here is the date of this vision. The first vision he had was in *the fifth year of the captivity, in the fourth month and the fifth day of the month*, ~~300~~ Ezekiel 1:1, 2. This was just fourteen months after. Perhaps it was after he had lain 390 days on his left side, to bear the iniquity of Israel, and before he began the forty days on his right side, to bear the iniquity of Judah; for now he was sitting in the house, not lying. Note, God keeps a

particular account of the messages he sends to us, because he will shortly call us to account about them.

II. The opportunity is taken notice of, as well as the time.

1. The prophet was himself *sitting in his house*, in a sedate composed frame, deep perhaps in contemplation. Note, The more we retreat from the world, and retire into our own hearts, the better frame we are in for communion with God: those that sit down to consider what they have learned shall be taught more. Or, he *sat in his house*, ready to preach to the company that resorted to him, but waiting for instructions what to say. God will communicate more knowledge to those who are communicative of what they do know.

2. *The elders of Judah*, that were now in captivity with him, *sat before him*. It is probable that it was on the sabbath day, and that it was usual for them to attend on the prophet every sabbath day, both to hear the word from him and to join with him and prayer and praise: and how could they spend the sabbath better, now that they had neither temple nor synagogue, neither priest nor altar? It was a great mercy that they had opportunity to spend it so well, as the good people in Elisha's time, ^{<1003>}2 Kings 4:23. But some think it was on some extraordinary occasion that they attended him, to enquire of the Lord, and *sat down* at his feet to *hear his word*. Observe here,

(1.) When the *law had perished from the priests* at Jerusalem, whose *lips should keep knowledge* (^{<1020>}Ezekiel 7:26), those in Babylon had a prophet to consult. God is not tied to places or persons.

(2.) Now that the elders of Judah were in captivity they paid more respect to God's prophets, and his word in their mouth, than they did when they lived in peace in their own land. When God brings men into the *cords of affliction*, then he *opens their ears to discipline*, ^{<1018>}Job 36:8, 10; ^{<1016>}Psalms 141:6. Those that despised vision in the *valley of vision* prized it now that the word of the Lord precious and there was *no open vision*.

(3.) When our teachers are driven into corners, and are forced to preach in private houses, we must diligently attend them there. A minister's house should be a church for all his neighbours. Paul preached in his own hired house at Rome, and God owned him there, and *no man forbid him*.

III. The divine influence and impression that the prophet was now under: *The hand of the Lord fell there upon me.* God's hand took hold of him, and arrested him, as it were, to employ him in this vision, but at the same time supported him to bear it.

IV. The vision that the prophet saw, v. 2. He *beheld a likeness*, of a man we may suppose, for that was the likeness he saw before, but it was all *brightness* above the girdle and all *fire* below, fire and flame. This agrees with the description we had before of the apparition he saw, ^{<367>}Ezekiel 1:27. It is probably that it was the same person, the man Christ Jesus. It is probable that the elders that *sat with him* (as the men that journeyed with Paul) saw a light and were afraid, and this happy sight they gained by attending the prophet in a private meeting, but they had no distinct view of him that spoke to him, ^{<428>}Acts 22:9.

V. The prophet's remove, in vision, to Jerusalem. The apparition he saw *put forth the form of a hand*, which *took him by a lock of his head*, and the Spirit was that hand which was put forth, for the Spirit of God is called *the finger of God*. Or, The spirit within him *lifted him up*, so that he was borne up and carried on by an internal principle, not an external violence. A faithful ready servant of God will be drawn by a hair, by the least intimation of the divine will, to his duty; for he has that within him which inclines him to a compliance with it, ^{<378>}Psalm 27:8. He was miraculously *lifted up between heaven and earth*, as if he were to fly away upon eagles' wings. This, it is probable (so Grotius thinks), the elders that sat with him saw; they were witnesses of *the hand taking him by the lock* of hair, and *lifting him up*, and then perhaps laying him down again in a trance of ecstasy, while he had the following visions, *whether in the body or out of the body*, we may suppose, he *could not tell*, any more than Paul in a like case, much less can we. Note, Those are best prepared for communion with God and the communications of divine light that by divine grace are raised up above the earth and the things of it, to be out of their attractive force. But, being lifted up towards heaven, he was carried in vision to Jerusalem, and to God's sanctuary there; for those that would go to heaven must take that in their way. The Spirit represented to his mind the city and temple as plainly as if he had been there in person. O that by faith we could thus enter into the Jerusalem, the holy city, above, and see the things that are invisible!

VI. The discoveries that were made to him there.

1. There he saw the glory of God (v. 4): *Behold, the glory of the god of Israel was there*, the same appearance of the living creatures, and the wheels, and the throne, that he had seen, Ezekiel 1. Note, God's servants, wherever they are and whithersoever they go, ought to carry about with them a believing regard to the glory of God and to set that always before them; and those that have seen God's power and glory in the sanctuary should desire to see them again, so as they have seen them, ^{<193E>}Psalm 63:2. Ezekiel has this repeated vision of the glory of God both to give credit to and to put honour upon the following discoveries. But it seems to have a further intention here; it was to aggravate this sin of Israel, in changing their own God, the God of Israel (who is a God of so much glory as here he appears to be), for dunghill gods, scandalous gods, false gods, and indeed no gods. Note, The more glorious we see God to be the more odious we shall see sin to be, especially idolatry, which turns his truth into a lie, his glory into shame. It was also to aggravate their approaching misery, when this glory of the Lord should remove from them (^{<341D>}Ezekiel 11:23) and leave the house and city desolate.

2. There he saw the reproach of Israel — and that was *the image of jealousy, set northward, at the gate of the altar*, v. 3, 5. What image this was is uncertain, probably an image of Baal, or of the grove, which Manasseh made and set in the temple (^{<121E>}2 Kings 21:7, ^{<483B>}2 Chronicles 33:3), which Josiah removed, but his successors, it seems, replace there, as probably they did the *chariots of the sun* which he found *at the entering in of the house of the Lord* (^{<123I>}2 Kings 23:11), and this is here said to be *in the entry*. But the prophet, instead of telling us what image it was, which might gratify our curiosity, tells us that it was *the image of jealousy*, to convince our consciences that, whatever image it was, it was in the highest degree offensive to God and *provoked him to jealousy*. he resented it as a husband would resent the whoredoms of his wife, and would certainly revenge it; for *God is jealous, and the Lord revenges*, ^{<340E>}Nahum 1:2.

(1.) The very setting up of this image *in the house of the Lord* was enough to *provoke him to jealousy*; for it is in the matters of his worship that we are particularly told, *I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*. Those that placed this image *at the door of the inner gate*, where the people assembled, called *the gate of the altar* (v. 5), thereby plainly intended,

[1.] To affront God, to provoke him to his face, by advancing an idol to be a rival with him for the adoration of his people, in contempt of his law and in defiance of his justice.

[2.] To debauch the people, and pick them up as they were entering into the courts of the Lord's house to bring their offerings to him, and to tempt them to offer them to this image; like the adulteress Solomon describes, that *sits at the door of her house, to call passengers who go right on their ways, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither,* ~~2004~~Proverbs 9:14-16. With good reason therefore is this called *the image of jealousy*.

(2.) We may well imagine what a surprise and what a grief it was to Ezekiel to see this image in the house of God, when he was in hopes that the judgments they were under had, by this time, wrought some reformation among them; but there is more wickedness in the world, in the church, than good men think there is. And now,

[1.] God appeals to him whether this was not bad enough, and a sufficient ground for God to go upon in casting off this people and abandoning them to ruin. Could he, or any one else, expect any other than *that God should go far from his sanctuary*, when there were such abominations committed there, in that very place; nay, was he not perfectly driven thence? They did these things designedly, and on purpose that he should leave his sanctuary, and so shall their doom be; they have hereby, in effect, like the Gadarenes, desired him *to depart out of their coasts*, and therefore he will depart; he will no more dignify and protect his sanctuary, as he has done, but will give it up to reproach and ruin. But,

[2.] Though this is bad enough, and serves abundantly to justify God in all that he brings upon them, yet the matter will appear to be much worse: *But turn thyself yet again*, and thou wilt be amazed to *see greater abominations than these*. Where there is one abomination it will be found that there are many more. Sins do not go alone.

~~2002~~ EZEKIEL 8:7-12

SECRET ABOMINATIONS DISCOVERED

We have here a further discovery of the abominations that were committed at Jerusalem, and within the confines of the temple, too. Now observe,

I. How this discovery is made. God, in vision, brought Ezekiel to the *door of the court*, the outer court, along the sides of which the priests' lodgings were. God could have introduced him at first into *the chambers of imagery*, but he brings him to them by degrees, partly to employ his own industry in searching out these mysteries of iniquity, and partly to make him sensible with what care and caution those idolaters concealed their idolatries. Before the priests' apartments they had run up a wall, to make them the more private, that they might not lie open to the observation of those who passed by — a shrews sign that they did something which they had reason to be ashamed of. *He that doth evil hates the light*. They were not willing that those who saw them in God's house should see them in their own, lest they should see them contradict themselves and undo in private what they did in public. But, *behold, a hole in the wall*, (v. 7), a spy-hole, by which you might see that which would give cause to suspect them. When hypocrites screen themselves behind the wall of an external profession, and with it think to conceal their wickedness from the eye of the world and carry on their designs the more successfully, it is hard for them to manage it with so much art by that there is some hole or other left in the wall, something that betrays them, to those who look diligently, not to be what they pretend to be. The ass's ears in the fable appeared from under the lion's skin. This *hole in the wall* Ezekiel made wider, and *behold a door*, v. 8. This door he goes in by into *the treasury*, or some of the apartments of the priests, and sees *the wicked abominations that they do there*, v. 9. Note, Those that would discover the mystery of iniquity in others, or in themselves, must accomplish a diligent search; for Satan has his wiles, and depths, and devices, which we should not be ignorant of, and *the heart is deceitful above all things*; in the examining of it therefore we are concerned to be very strict.

II. What the discovery is. It is a very melancholy one.

1. He sees a chamber set round with idolatrous pictures (v. 10): *All the idols of the house of Israel*, which they had borrowed from the neighbouring nations, were *portrayed upon the wall round about*, even the vilest of them, *the forms of creeping things*, which they worshipped, and *beasts*, even *abominable ones*, which are poisonous and venomous; at least they were abominable when they were worshipped. This was a sort of pantheon, a collection of all the idols together which they paid their

devotions to. Though the second commandment, in the letter of it, forbids only graven images, yet painted ones are as bad and as dangerous.

2. He sees this chamber filled with idolatrous worshippers (v. 11): There were *seventy men of the elders of Israel* offering incense to these painted idols. here was a great number of idolaters strengthening one another's hands in this wickedness; though it was in a private chamber, and the meeting industriously concealed, yet here were seventy men engaged in it. I doubt these elders were many more than those in Babylon that sat before the prophet in his house, v. 1. They were *seventy men*, the number of the great Sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation, and, we have reason to fear, the same men; for they were *the ancients of the house of Israel*, not only in age, but in office, who were bound, by the duty of their place, to restrain and punish idolatry and to destroy and abolish all superstitious images wherever they found them; yet these were those that did themselves worship them in private, so undermining that religion which in public they professed to own and promote only because by it they held their preferments. They had *every man his censer in his hand*; so fond were they of the idolatrous service that they would all be their own priests, and very prodigal they were of their perfumes in honour of these images, for *a thick cloud of incense went up*, that filled the room. O that the zeal of these idolaters might shame the worshippers of the true God out of their indifference to his service! The prophet took particular notice of one whom he knew, who *stood in the midst* of these idolaters, as chief among them, being perhaps president of the great council at this time or most forward in this wickedness. No wonder the people were corrupt when the elders were so. The sins of leaders are leading sins.

III. What the remark is that made upon it (v. 12): “*Son of man, hast thou seen this? Couldst thou have imagined that there was such wickedness committed?*” It is here observed concerning it,

1. That it was done *in the dark*; for sinful works are *works of darkness*. They concealed it, lest they should lose their places, or at least their credit. There is a great deal of secret wickedness in the world, which the day will declare, *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*.

2. That this one idolatrous chapel was but a specimen of many the like. Here they met together, to worship their images in concert, but, it should seem, they had *every man the chamber of his imagery* besides, a room in

his own house for this purpose, in which every man gratified his own fancy with such pictures as he liked best. Idolaters had their household gods, and their family worship of them in private, which is a shame to those who call themselves Christians and yet have no church in their house, no worship of God in their family. Had they *chambers of imagery*, and shall not we have chambers of devotion?

3. That atheism was at the bottom of their idolatry. They worship images *in the dark*, the images of the gods of other nations, and *they say*, “Jehovah, the God of Israel, whom we should serve, *seeth us not*. Jehovah *hath forsaken the earth*, and we may worship what God we will; he regards us not.”

(1.) They think themselves out of God's sight: *They say, The Lord seeth us not*. They imagined, because the matter was carried on so closely that men could not discover it, nor did any of their neighbours suspect them to be idolaters, that therefore it was hidden from the eye of God; as if there were any *darkness, or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*. Note, A practical disbelief of God's omniscience is at the bottom of our treacherous departures from him; but the church argues justly, as to this very sin of idolatry (⁴⁴Psalm 44:20, 21), *If we have forgotten the name of our God, and stretched forth our hand to a strange god, will not God search this out?* No doubt he will.

(2.) They think themselves out of God's care: “*The Lord has forsaken the earth*, and looks not after the affairs of it; and then we may as well worship any other god as him.” Or, “He has forsaken our land, and left it to be a prey to its enemies; and therefore it is time for us to look out for some other god, to whom to commit the protection of it. Our one God cannot, or will not, deliver us; and therefore let us have many.” This was a blasphemous reflection upon God, as if he had forsaken them first, else they would not have forsaken him. Note, Those are ripe indeed for ruin who have arrived at such a pitch of impudence as to lay the blame of their sins upon God himself.

EZEKIEL 8:13-18

THE CHAMBERS OF IMAGERY

Here we have,

I. More and greater abominations discovered to the prophet. He thought that what he had seen was bad enough and yet (v. 13): *Turn thyself again, and thou shalt see yet greater abominations*, and greater still, v. 15, as before, v. 6. There are those who live in retirement who do not think what wickedness there is in this world; and the more we converse with it, and the further we go abroad into it, the more corrupt we see it. When we have seen that which is bad we may have our wonder at it made to cease by the discovery of that which, upon some account or other, is a great deal worse. We shall find it so in examining our own hearts and searching into them; there is a world of iniquity in them, a great abundance and variety of abominations, and, when we have found out much amiss, still we shall find more; for *the heart is desperately wicked, who can know it perfectly?* Now the abominations here discovered were,

1. *Women weeping for Tammuz*, v. 14. An abominable thing indeed, that any should choose rather to serve an idol in tears than to serve the true God *with joyfulness and gladness of heart!* Yet such absurdities as these are those guilty of who *follow after lying vanities and forsake their own mercies*. Some think it was for Adonis, an idol among the Greeks, other for Osiris, an idol of the Egyptians, that they shed these tears. The image, they say, was made to weep, and then the worshippers wept with it. They bewailed the death of this Tammuz, and anon rejoiced in its returning to life again. These mourning women *sat at the door of the gate of the Lord's house*, and there shed their idolatrous tears, as it were in defiance of God and the sacred rites of his worship, and some think, with their idolatry, prostrating themselves also to corporeal whoredom; for these two commonly went together, and those that dishonoured the divine nature by the one were justly *given up to vile affections* and a reprobate sense to dishonour the human nature, which nowhere ever sunk so far below itself as in these idolatrous rites.

2. *Men worshipping the sun*, v. 16. And this was so much the greater an abomination that it was practised *in the inner court of the Lord's house at*

the door of the temple of the lord, between the porch and the altar. There, where the most sacred rites of their holy religion used to be performed, was this abominable wickedness committed. Justly might God in jealousy say to those who thus affronted him at his own door, as the king to Haman, *Will he force the queen also before me in the house?* Here were about twenty-five men giving that honour to the sun which is due to God only. Some think they were the king and his princes; it should rather seem that they were priests, for this was the court of the priests, and the proper place to find them in. Those that were entrusted with the true religion, had it committed to their care and were charged with the custody of it, they were the men that betrayed it.

(1.) They turned *their backs towards the temple of the Lord*, resolvedly forgetting it and designedly slighting it and putting contempt upon it. Note, When men turn their backs upon God's institutions, and despise them, it is no marvel if they wander endlessly after their own inventions. Impiety is the beginning of idolatry and all iniquity.

(2.) They turned *their faces towards the east, and worshipped the sun*, the rising sun. This was an ancient instance of idolatry; it is mentioned in Job's time (^{<8826>}Job 31:26), and had been generally practised among the nations, some worshipping the sun under one name, others under another. These priests, finding it had antiquity and general consent and usage on its side (the two pleas which the papists use at this day in defence of their superstitious rites, and particularly this of worshipping towards the east), practised it in the court of the temple, thinking it an omission that it was not inserted in their ritual. See the folly of idolaters in worshipping that as a god, and calling it *Baal — a lord*, which God made to be a servant to the universe (for such the sun is, and so his name *Shemesh* signified, ^{<8749>}Deuteronomy 4:19), and in adoring the borrowed light and despising the *Father of lights*.

II. The inference drawn from these discoveries (v. 17): "*Hast thou seen this, O son of man!* and couldst thou have thought ever to see such things done in the temple of the Lord?" Now,

1. he appeals to the prophet himself concerning the heinousness of the crime. Can he think it *is a light thing to the house of Judah*, who know and profess better things, and are dignified with so many privileges above other nations? Is it an excusable thing in those that have God's oracles and

ordinances *that they commit the abominations which they commit here?* Do not those deserve to suffer that thus sin? Should not such abominations as these *make desolate?* ^{<2107>}Daniel 9:27.

2. He aggravates it from the fraud and oppression that were to be found in all parts of the nations: *They have filled the land with violence.* It is not strange if those that wrong God thus make no conscience of wronging one another, and with all that is sacred trample likewise upon all that is just. And their wickedness in their conversations made even the worship they paid to their own God an abomination (^{<2311>}Isaiah 1:11, etc.): *“They fill the land with violence, and then they return to the temple to provoke me to anger there; for even their sacrifices, instead of making an atonement, do but add to their guilt. They return to provoke me (they repeat the provocation, do it, and do it again), and, lo, they put the branch to their nose”* — a proverbial expression denoting perhaps their scoffing at God and having him in derision; they snuffed at his service, as men do when they *put a branch to their nose*. Or it was some custom used by idolaters in honour of the idols they served. We read of garlands used in their idolatrous worships (^{<4443>}Acts 14:13), out of which every zealot took a branch which they smelled to as a nosegay. Dr. Lightfoot (*Hor. Hebrews in John 15.6*) gives another sense of this place: *They put the branch to their wrath, or to his wrath,* as the Masorites read it; that is, they are still bringing more fuel (such as the withered branches of the vine) to the fire of divine wrath, which they have already kindled, as if that wrath did not burn hot enough already. Or putting the branch to the nose may signify the giving of a very great affront and provocation either to God or man; they are an abusive generation of men.

3. he passes sentence upon them that they shall be utterly cut off: *Therefore, because they are thus furiously bent upon sin, I will also deal in fury with them, v. 18. They filled the land with their violence, and God will fill it with the violence of their enemies; and he will not lend a favourable ear to the suggestions either,*

(1.) Of his own pity: *My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; repentance shall be hidden from his eyes; or,*

(2.) Of their prayers: *Though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them;* for still their sins cry more loudly for vengeance than their prayers cry for mercy. God will now be as deaf to their prayers as their own idols were, on whom they cried aloud, but in vain, ^{<1186>}1 Kings

18:26. Time was when God was ready to hear even *before they cried* and to *answer while they were yet speaking*; but now *they shall seek me early and not find me*, ~~and~~ Proverbs 1:28. It is not the loud voice, but the upright heart, that God will regard.