

## Ezekiel Chapters 8 through 10 – John Karmelich

1. I call this lesson "Why are we judged?" In other words, what gets us in trouble with God?
  - a) This lesson covers three chapters of a four-chapter section that deals with why the Israelites were judged. Specifically, we learn why Jerusalem was destroyed.
  - b) In the last lesson, I talked about the fact that God can and does judge people based on our behavior. Christians can suffer in this lifetime based on our witness for God.
  - c) While this lesson does have some references to eternal salvation and behavior, I believe the real lessons for believers are the consequences we can suffer in this lifetime.
  - d) In other words, the last lesson focused on the fact that believers can be judged in this lifetime for being a bad witness for God. In this lesson, we get into the "why" question.
2. In this lesson Ezekiel gets a new vision. It takes place near the end of his "430" day prophecy that Ezekiel started a few lessons back.
  - a) Why would God speak to Ezekiel during near the end of the 430-day period? I suspect Ezekiel was tired of doing the same thing, day after day. As Ezekiel thought about the destruction of Jerusalem, he had questions as to "why". Thus, we get this prophecy.
  - b) Chapters 8 through 11 are a single unit and a single vision. I'm only going to cover three of those 4 chapters in this lesson as doing "all four" would make this lesson way too long. The lessons tie to the "why" question of judgment. The issue is the specific sins of the nation of Israel and what we can learn about not repeating the same mistakes.
  - c) With that said, I'm keeping this introduction brief, as we have a long ways to go today!
3. Chapter 8, Verse 1: 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 upon me there.
  - a) First, what does Ezekiel mean by the "sixth year, sixth month and fifth day"? The answer is Ezekiel was keeping time by the current king of Judah. That was the specific date of his reign as king. If you study the books of Kings and Chronicles, the Israelites kept time based on the life of the current king.
  - b) Tying this "sixth year" date to previous lessons, this date is less than the "430-days" after the last vision. That means Ezekiel is still acting out his demonstration of the destruction of Judah by laying for certain periods of time on his left side and right side all day. Again, I believe the reason for this new vision is to deal with the "why" question.
4. Verse 2: 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 to 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.
  - a) Ezekiel saw something that looked like a man. From this man's waste down, it looked like fire and "as bright as glowing metal". As I've stated before, the bible uses fire as a comparison to heating metal to a high temperature to eliminate impurities. The point is, whoever or whatever this "man" is, it is a picture of someone or something whose job it is to separate the pure from the impure. The picture is that of "fire" as in judgment.
  - b) What's the point of this vision? Ezekiel is about to learn of the sins of Israel. The point is the vision is teaching of God's judgment and "separation" of believers from nonbelievers.
  - c) In Verse 2 of this vision, Ezekiel saw the figure of a man. My personal view is that this is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, but that is speculation. God the Father is a separate entity in this vision, as stated in Verse 4. This "man on fire" in this vision has the job of separating the saved from the unsaved prior to the actual judgment process.

- d) In Verse 2, this "man-like thing" that was full of fire, grabbed Ezekiel up by the hair. In Verse 3, it says the Spirit (of God) lifted me up into heaven and took me to Jerusalem.
    - i) So did Ezekiel literally travel to heaven in this vision? Paul sort of answered that question when he had one of his visions. "I know a man (talking about himself) in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. (2nd Cor. 12:2 NIV).
    - ii) Paul had no idea what happened to him physically when he was caught up into heaven for a vision. I suspect, neither did Ezekiel.
    - iii) So how did Ezekiel know the "Spirit" lifted him up and not this "man-thing" that grabbed Ezekiel's hair? We don't know.
  - e) In Verse 4, it says that Ezekiel realized that he was in the presence of God.
  - f) In Verse 3, it describes what Ezekiel saw in Jerusalem: The vision is not focusing on God, but on the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel knows this is a vision, he is in God's presence, but the focus is on the bad things happening in the Temple, which is still standing in Jerusalem as of the time of this writing.
  - g) Its time for a quick review of the Temple: This is the temple built by Solomon several hundred years earlier. The Temple had an indoor section, which was enclosed within an outdoor section. The outdoor section was divided into two areas. In Ezekiel's vision, he was just outside the gate leading to the "inner" outdoor section.
5. Verse 5: 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.
- a) Here was Ezekiel, in heaven, focusing on Jerusalem. In particular, Ezekiel was focusing on The Temple in Jerusalem. In more focus, Ezekiel was standing at this north gate entrance where Ezekiel saw this "idol of jealousy". If Ezekiel is standing at the entrance to the inner court, he would be looking north toward the outer court.
    - i) The "idol of jealousy" refers to false idols that Ezekiel saw in the Temple.
    - ii) This leads me to believe that from heaven's advantage point, we (or at least, God) can see anywhere on earth, and can focus closely on an individual spot.
    - iii) Let me add a few verses, and then I'll explain what this means.
6. Verse 6: And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing--the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see things that are even more detestable."
- a) There is a poetic style this chapter. God gives Ezekiel a bunch of verses that say in effect, "look at this". Then God says in effect, "If you think that is bad, now take a look at this!"
  - b) So far, all we have is the fact that Ezekiel saw idols in the Temple area.
7. Verse 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 detestable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel. <sup>11</sup> In front of them stood seventy elders of the house 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.
- a) Imagine in this vision Ezekiel was standing in a courtyard, just outside the covered area of the Temple. God told Ezekiel to dig through a hole in the wall and see a doorway. Remember that all of this is a vision. I don't know if Ezekiel did any actual digging.
  - b) After Ezekiel dug his way in the room, he saw the "detestable things" being done there.
  - c) I wonder if God just wanted Ezekiel to go in the Temple, why didn't God just have Ezekiel go through the front doors and find this location?
    - i) My point is there is something significant about the "digging" factor.
  - d) This leads to my first application: The symbolism is that God can see in to the secret sins the Israelites were doing as well as God can see in our thoughts!

- e) We worship God with our thoughts and our hearts. One can think of our body as a Temple of God. If our temple to God is mixed with thoughts of other things, we are "polluting" our temples with other gods! If we choose to follow God, we must give Him our "whole" heart. Does this mean Christians can't have bad thoughts? No. It means we can't have a "mixed heart" and give ourselves to Him and no other.
  - f) Verse 10 described all sorts of crawling things and detestable animals. This is not about live animals and insects in the Temple. This is about drawings of things that some of the surrounding nations worshiped as god. For example, the Egyptians believed that gods existed in all sorts of insect and animal creatures. These verses are describing the Jewish leaders "reverting back" to the gods of the nations around them.
    - i) How can anybody worship a bug or an animal? It is strange to us. Part of the idea is that when you turn from the true God, one's heart still needs to worship something and one turns to created things versus the creator.
    - ii) The false mythological idea is that there is a whole series of gods and they manifest themselves in creatures. It's silly, but people believe that stuff.
  - g) In Verse 11, it described seventy leaders of Israel. There was one person given by name, which is "Jaazaniah". He was probably the leader of the group.
    - i) Some of you may remember the term "Sanhedrin". After the Jewish people will return from the Babylonian exile, Israeli court decisions were determined by a group of seventy leaders in Israel, collectively called the "Sanhedrin". When Jesus was put on trial in front of the Jewish leadership, He was in front of the Sanhedrin.
    - ii) My point is this is not the Sanhedrin here in Ezekiel. The concept of "70 leaders" pre-dates the Sanhedrin, but this is not that ruling council of elders.
    - iii) The point of the text is each of these 70 leaders had incense and were praying to these false god images in the temple. The point of the text is to show how far the leaders have sunk in that they were worshipping other gods in the Jewish Temple.
  - h) OK John, this is all interesting history. ☺ What does it have to do with my life?
    - i) The "Temple" is the most holy place where God was worshipped. One can think of it as the place where believers gather to worship him. Now imagine that when Christians get together, our "hearts" could be elsewhere when we should be focused on God.
    - ii) Yeah, but isn't the sin-of-the-moment idolatry? I'm not worshipping other Gods when I go to church. I am not accusing anyone of that sin.
    - iii) There are two related issues for us: One is to be aware that there are people out there who claim to be Christians, yet, they go to churches where leaders gives them "what they want to hear" as opposed to worshipping the true God.
      - a) This is the danger of worshipping God on our terms vs. God's terms.
    - iv) The danger for the true believer is to not do anything that can get us to lose our witness to God. For starters, it is having a "mixed heart" where we are trusting in God and trusting in other things as well.
    - v) Further, there are times in our lives where God goes silent. It is during such times where God is testing our faith whether or not we still trust Him. Here in Ezekiel, the leaders of Israel were turning to other gods. The lesson for us is God is still there, even in times when He appears to be silent in our lives.
8. Verse 12: He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house 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.' "
- a) In case Ezekiel missed the point of what was happening God is summarizing to Ezekiel what is going on in the Temple. The point is these Jewish leaders believed God had abandoned them and now they are turning to other "gods" for help. This gets back to the danger of turning to other gods during periods when God is silent in our life.

9. Verse 13: Again, he said, "You will see them doing things that are even more detestable." <sup>14</sup> Then he brought me to the entrance to the north gate of the house of the LORD, and I saw women sitting there, mourning for Tammuz.
  - a) Remember that God is showing Ezekiel their idolatry in stages. There are a bunch of times in this chapter where God says, "You think that is bad, check this out!" ☺ We have one of those statements here in Verse 13 and we'll have another one in Verse 15.
  - b) Verse 14 mentions women mourning for Tammuz. Remember Ezekiel was at the entrance to the north gate. Outside of this gate was the "outer area" of the Temple courtyard where women were allowed. "Tammuz" was part of a Babylonian religious system. The belief is that the goddess Tammuz lost her son and then her son was miraculously born again. Part of the ritual of this system was to weep for the loss of her son during the spring time.
    - i) Some of the false-religious concepts we associate with Easter come from this false worship system. If you wonder where the "bunny and egg" Easter tradition started, it was based on this system. When the "Roman world" was forced to accept Christianity centuries later, the Romans mixed some of the ancient practices of these rituals with our celebration of "Easter" to get the masses to accept it.
    - ii) Does this mean Christians should ignore "Easter"? No. In fact, I don't have problems with little kids hunting for Easter eggs! To me, "Easter" is an opportunity to share Jesus with people who don't spend a lot of time thinking about Christianity beyond a Sunday service or "Easter rituals".
  - c) Back to the verses, the point here is that when people turn from God, they eventually grow "worse and worse" in the things they turn to other than God Himself.
10. Verse 15: He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? You will see things that are even more detestable than this." <sup>16</sup> 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.
  - a) In Verse 15, we have another "something worse" statement. Here we have 25 men at the entrance to the Temple, with their backs to the Temple, bowing to the sun.
  - b) Why is this worse than the women praying to "Tammuz"? Probably because these 25 men were held to a higher standards as they were leaders and priests in the temple. Remember that we have moved in location from the outer outdoor court of the Temple grounds and now, we are at the entrance to the inside of the Temple.
  - c) Once again, we have Jewish leaders with their "backs" to the Temple worshiping another god. One of the main Egyptian gods was "sun worship" and that's what they're doing.
  - d) The point of all of this idolatry is that the Jewish leaders believed God had abandoned them and they were turning to other gods for protection.
    - i) Do I believe this was just the problem of the Jewish leadership and not the everyday people of Israel? No. Very often, leaders will simply reflect what the congregation wants to hear. Are there churches that mix worship of the true God with other sorts of practices? Yes, they exist now and have through history.
    - ii) Do Christians ever turn their backs on God? The modern equivalent might be to trust in one's wealth to get out of a bad situation or to pray to some "generic god" when things go bad. My point is idolatry is alive and well even in countries where Christianity is strong.
    - iii) For example, one of my brothers is currently struggling financially. We've had conversations about God and finances, but all he does spiritually is to pray to a generic god as he refuses to believe Christianity is the only way to God!
      - a) I pray for him daily. I suspect most of the readers of this lesson have their own stories of friends and relatives who are blinded to the truth of God and have their own idols.

11. Verse 17: He said to me, "Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the house of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? Must they also fill the land with violence and continually provoke me to anger? 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."
  - a) Here is God summarizing the problem of the Jewish people. God is saying these people have turned their collective backs on Him (God) so much, that God has no choice but to deal with them in anger and not pity them or spare them.
  - b) This leads back to our lesson them: "Why is God judging them"? God only tolerates so much idol worship before He says in effect, "OK, that's enough of them. They are beyond help. It is more merciful to kill them than to have them keep on going on this way!"
  - c) Let's talk about this from another perspective: In the earlier verses, the Israelite leaders were saying in effect that God had abandoned them and that is why they are turning to some of the false gods of that area for protection. Now God is saying in effect, "They are right, I have abandoned them as they have failed to honor me with their lives!"
    - i) A quick word on "God and ears". Verse 18 says God will not hear them, although they shout in my ears". God does not have physical ears. That is a metaphor. At the same time God does hear the prayers of the Israelites crying out to Him, but He has already made up His mind to punish them despite their prayers.
    - ii) What the Israelite people failed to realize is that if they just worshiped God the way they were supposed to, God wouldn't have to bring this punishment upon them in the first place! Yes God had abandoned the Israelites but it is because collectively, the Israelites first abandoned their commitment to God!
    - iii) Let's put it another way: Suppose we claim to worship God, but never change our lifestyle with that commitment. That is "collectively" what the Israelites did at this time. They claimed to follow God, but their hearts were not in it.
    - iv) Now think of someone who says they are a Christian but refuses to change their life in conformity of what God wants for their lives. Eventually the nicest thing God could do is take their lives in the same way killing a wounded horse is more merciful than letting a horse live with all of that pain for the rest of its life!
  - d) These verses are also teaching there is a "point of no return" with God. The last verse says in effect, "Even though they cry out to me, I will not hear them".
    - i) Is there a point of no return with God? The bible is clear on that point in the Old and New Testament. (E.g., Romans 1:26, 2:4-5). I don't know what is that point, nor do I want to find out! I simply know that for the unrepentant sinner that point does exist.
  - e) One technical note before I move on: Verse 17 said these people were "putting the branch to their nose". What does that mean? Most commentators believe the originally meaning is lost, but the essential idea is they are "thumbing their nose" at God.
12. Chapter 9, Verse 1: Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand."<sup>2</sup> And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar.
  - a) In Chapter 9, Ezekiel is still in heaven (where he was taken from Babylon) but is seeing Jerusalem. All of sudden, Ezekiel hears a voice in heaven call out for the "guards of the city". In Verse 2, we read of six men who are the guards of Jerusalem with a deadly weapon in their hands. There is also a seventh man, and I'll describe the seventh in a few moments.
  - b) First, who are these six "men"? They are angels. There are a number of occasions in the bible where angels are described as looking like men. (Example Genesis 18:2).

- c) Does this mean God has angels assigned to watch this city? Does our city or town have angels that guard and protect our location? Possibly. There is not much cross reference on this topic but apparently there were six special angels that protected Jerusalem. Now these six angels had weapons in their hands to destroy the city.
    - i) Was Jerusalem literally destroyed by angels? No. It was a Babylonian army that came in and destroyed this city. The idea is that the destruction was God permitted and now God is taking away the angels that protect this city.
    - ii) So are the angels literal or symbolic? I would say both. It was literal in the sense these angels "controlled" the destruction but symbolic in the sense they literally worked through an attacking army to destroy the city.
    - iii) Why six? Couldn't God use just one, or a thousand? I suspect the answer is something symbolic about "six and one" making a complete set just as God worked for six days and rested on the seventh day in Genesis Chapter 1.
  - d) This leads us to the seventh "man". We'll read more about him in a few verses. All we know about this seventh man so far was that he was dressed in "linen" and had a writing kit. This seventh "man" would mark those that are saved. The word "linen" in the bible is associated with purity. The clothes of the priests were in linens and they were only worn after a lot of rituals and washings. It represented purity before God.
13. Verse 3: Now 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. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side <sup>4</sup> 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."
- a) God has been speaking a lot directly to Ezekiel. Here in Verse 3 we get a brief description of where God was "located", which is above the cherubim.
  - b) Now let's pause for a moment: Isn't God everywhere? Yes, so how can God be above the cherubim and what are the cherubim anyway?
    - i) Let's start with God's location. God created this world so He must exist outside of it. Apparently God can watch all of the world at one time. At the same time, God is located in heaven and His throne is located above these Cherubim.
    - ii) Understand that God is not a physical thing that is limited to one space at one time. The idea is for us to approach God we must realize how "holy" (perfect) He is and approach Him on His terms, and not ours.
    - iii) So what are the "Cherubim"? It is the plural of "Cherub". (Like that helps! ☺)  
Remember those strange creatures from the early chapters with a bunch of wings and can move in all sorts of directions at once? That is them. The idea is God can go anywhere and everywhere at once, just as the Cherubim can move like that!
      - a) Confused? That's ok. One day in heaven we'll see all of this and it will become clear. The idea for us is how God can and does move everywhere to see all and know what is going on.
  - c) Back to the verses. God is speaking to this seventh angel. Remember in the earlier verses we had six "men" (i.e., angels) who were in charge of the destruction of Jerusalem. God is now pausing to talk to the seventh angel. God tells this 7th angel to "put a mark on the forehead of those who grieve and lament" over the idolatry being done.
    - i) This means that not everyone in Jerusalem had sunk to this level of idolatry. There were some loyal to God that grieved at how bad the idolatry had gotten.
    - ii) God says to put a mark on their forehead. That mark means they were not guilty of this crime. We'll get more on these saved people in upcoming verses.
    - iii) The King James Version of the bible calls mark "a cross". It is describing the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and in its original design, looked like a cross.
    - iv) I'll let you ponder the connection between "saved" and a cross-mark on them!

14. Verse 5: As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. <sup>6</sup> Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.
- a) In Verse 5, God orders the killings to begin. The order is to "Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark."
    - i) Does this mean only "guilty" people would be killed and those who lament over this destruction would be spared? It could refer to the literal killing, but I suspect it is more about eternal judgment.
  - b) Notice how old and young people were to be killed as well as women and children! Does this mean that God judges children the same way he does those who committed these sins? One has to separate eternal judgment from "group judgment". As far as eternal judgment, God judges everyone individually based on what they did know about God and how they acted on that knowledge.
  - c) As far as "group judgment" that is what the focus here. The families of those who were involved in this idolatry were guilty of association. At the same time, God did spare those who were not involved with this idolatry practice.
  - d) Does that mean those who didn't commit these crimes got to escape death? It is a possibility. I do believe the mark on their heads was a sign of eternal salvation.
  - e) Was this mark a visible thing one could see? I compare it to an invisible stamp one gets at say, an amusement park that is only visible under a black light. The point is God is sealing those who are loyal to Him and He knows who is saved.
  - f) Peter has a line that is relevant here. It goes, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1st Peter 4:17-18 NKJV).
    - i) The point is when we are judged as people, God "starts" by judging those who claim they are following Him and then "works outward" from that circle.
    - ii) Here in these verses in Ezekiel, we see judgment beginning at God's house. Later, we'll read of judgment on others. The point is God starts by judging those who claim to follow Him and then focuses on those who know less about Him.
15. Verse 7: Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and began killing throughout the city. <sup>8</sup> While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" <sup>9</sup> He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' <sup>10</sup> So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done."
- a) In these verses, as the killing had begun, the dead bodies were piled in the Temple area.
  - b) One has to remember that a dead body was considered unclean as it represented death.
  - c) While this killing was going on, Ezekiel wondered if all of Israel was to be destroyed.
    - i) God answered that question by saying in effect that Israel (as a collective nation) was "beyond help" and they were to be killed for the sin of idolatry.
    - ii) What about those who had this mark on their foreheads? God has already spared them (meaning either eternal salvation or somehow, they escaped the city) and now God is just talking about those that are left.
  - d) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. Again, how does this affect us today?
    - i) The main point is that sin causes people to "decay" physically and spiritually. There gets to a point where it is more merciful of God to kill them than to keep them alive and let them live longer. (See Romans 6:16 and 1st John 5:16).

- ii) Let's compare this to the "flood". It killed the whole world, except for eight people due to the wickedness of mankind. God promised at that time there would never be another world-wide flood. God did not promise Noah there would still be localized judgment based on one's loyalty to God for a lack of loyalty thereof!
  - iii) In these chapters of Ezekiel, we're reading of one time in history where God had a localized judgment for disobedience. Can God do that again today? The answer is yes, but it is different in that believers are not all gathered in one physical location like it was at this time. Still, understand that God does judge believers and we can suffer if we fail to be a good witness for Him.
- 16. Verse 11: Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded."
  - a) With all of this destruction, we have this reminder that some people are spared if they are still loyal to the God of the bible when everyone around them is turning away.
- 17. Chapter 10, Verse 1: I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim. <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city." And as I watched, he went in.
  - a) Before I start the description of Chapter 10, let me briefly summarize the entire chapter: The main purpose is to show that's God's presence will no longer be in "The Temple".
    - i) The price that Israel had to pay for its disobedience is that God would no longer "be" in this temple. The building itself was destroyed as part of the Babylonian attack and a new temple was built after the Israelites came back from captivity.
  - b) With that said, let me give the specifics of these verses: Ezekiel's focus changes from the destruction and sins of the leaders of Jerusalem back to God's throne room.
    - i) We have in view God the Father, called the LORD in these verses. When one reads the word "LORD" in all capitals, it is the most holy name of God: "Jehovah".
      - a) His throne is described as "sapphire", which is white in color. The idea (I believe) is that His throne represents "purity".
    - ii) We also have in view the "cherubim". These are the creatures that guard the throne and the ones described in the early chapters of this book.
    - iii) The third entity in focus is a "man clothed in linen". This is the same "guy" who marked the saved people with a "writing kit" in the last verse of Chapter 9. Now his job was to take burning coals and scatter them over Jerusalem. So what is the purpose of "spreading coal" over Jerusalem?
      - a) The answer is it is a symbol of judgment. Think of fire burning something up. Here we have fire from "God's throne" in the form of coals being spread over the city of Jerusalem. It is a symbol of the judgment of the city.
  - c) Again, John, this is all very interesting. How does it apply to us today?
    - i) The idea is how we approach God. This is based on Jesus forgiving our sins. God "cleanses" us so we can approach Him. The idea is we can't just do an end run around our sins to approach God the Father. That was the sin of the Israelites. They were ignoring God's commands, but still wanted His protection!
    - ii) Here were the Israelites worshiping other gods, yet they still wanted to be in God's temple. You can't have a "mixed bag" with God the Father!
- 18. Verse 3: Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. <sup>4</sup> Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.
  - a) Remember that all of this is a "vision". Ezekiel was taken up to heaven starting in Chapter 8 from his home in Babylon to see all of this.



- b) Let's give the big picture first. The idea is we are witnessing God leaving the Temple in that he, for the time being has given up on the Israelites in the land. As we will discover in later chapters, God is not done with Israel as a nation, He is just carrying out this punishment for disobedience. Part of that punishment is the presence of God leaving the Temple. That is what is in view here.
  - c) In these verses, we read of a cloud filling the Temple. In God's dealing with Moses, God's presence is often described as a cloud. The same was true in some reference to God the Father in the Gospels. (For example, Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7). The idea is that our understanding of God is limited and "foggy".
    - i) Besides the "cloud of God", we also read of the sound of the wings of the cherubim being heard in the temple. Remember this is a vision. Was the sound of the wings literal to those nearby, or was it part of Ezekiel's vision? We don't know. The important idea is for us to realize that God is leaving "His" temple!
  - d) God leaving the temple appears to be happening in stages for some reason.
    - i) In the last lesson, I talked about the spiritual aspect of what is "The Promised Land". It can be compared to is the state of mind where one is fully trusting in God and not anything else. I'd like to get back to that idea here. At this point in time, Israel collectively was turning from God, and therefore God is removing His presence from them! This ties to the idea of "God slowly leaving the temple". The idea is God is regretting that this is necessary and wishes it was not necessary.
    - ii) My point is the "application" of this lesson is about the times in our lives where God is silent and we make the mistake of turning from Him.
19. Verse 6: When the LORD commanded the man in linen, "Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim," the man went in and stood beside a wheel. <sup>7</sup> Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand to the fire that was among them. He took up some of it and put it into the hands of the man in linen, who took it and went out. <sup>8</sup> (Under the wings of the cherubim could be seen what looked like the hands of a man.)
- a) Let me describe the cast of characters in this scene. There is the "man in linen". This is an angelic creature who was also the one with the "ink horn" that marked who was saved in the previous chapter. He took some of the "fire" from the Cherubim.
    - i) Back in Chapter 1, we had details of what "Cherubim" looked like. They looked somewhat human, but they had a bunch of wings, human-like hands, and their feet where "wheel-like". There were four of them, and each of them worked individually, but they also worked in union.
  - b) Given that, one of the cherubim took some fire that was "among them" and put it in the hands of this "man/angel" creature. As stated earlier, this is all a word picture of judgment. So why doesn't Ezekiel just say, "And then God judged the Israelites? Why is there this strange vision of weird creatures and fire?"
    - i) One reason is we remember word pictures better than facts and figures.
    - ii) The other is to understand how "complete" God is in our dealings with Him. These "cherubim" are described (and will be described) as having the ability to see all and move "everywhere" at once. The idea is God knows what the Israelites are doing and God is doing what is right in judging them.
    - iii) The other theory, going back to the first chapter, is Ezekiel ate too much pizza before bed and saw this. ☺ Ezekiel would have been written off as a strange, weird guy a long time ago except that the judgments came literally true as written.

20. Verse 10: I looked, and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like chrysolite. <sup>10</sup> As for their appearance, the four of them looked alike; each was like a wheel intersecting a wheel. <sup>11</sup> As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the cherubim faced; the wheels did not turn about as the cherubim went. The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went. <sup>12</sup> Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels. <sup>13</sup> I heard the wheels being called "the whirling wheels." <sup>14</sup> Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.
- a) Just when you thought this could not get any weirder, it does. ☺ For those of you about to give up on this lesson as being "too weird", I want to encourage you to hang in there, as it eventually gets better. All of this judgment is necessary and I'll talk about that in the conclusion of this lesson.
  - b) In Verse 10, we get the description of the "feet" of these cherubim as being wheel like. We also got that back in Chapter 1. It says their feet were like wheels sparked like chrysolite. That means it was a brilliant yellow or gold color.
  - c) Here is what is important to remember: The idea is these "cherubim" can move anywhere and anyway quickly and easily. Verse 12 says their entire bodies were "full of eyes". The idea is that they see all as well as move quickly as a group.
    - i) What Ezekiel is trying to teach us with this strange vision is that God can see all and can be anywhere and everywhere at once and God knows what is happening not only in the Temple, but in our own hearts as well.
    - ii) So why doesn't Ezekiel just say, "God can see all and be everywhere", instead of describing these strange creatures? The answer is these word picture helps us to visualize the idea of how God can move and see everywhere. Do I believe these creatures are literal? Yes, but what is more important to us, is to teach us about where God is and how He comprehends us.
  - d) In Verse 14, we have a description of how each of the four cherubim has four faces. One face is of a "cherub", another of a man, another of a lion, and another of an eagle. Back in Chapter 1 Verse 10, we have almost the same description, except that one of the faces was an "ox" instead of a "cherub". There are college thesis papers written on why the word is "cherub" is here instead of ox. My personal theory is that the "ox" represents service. Since Israel is being judged hear, the idea of "service" is gone for now.
21. Verse 15: Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River. <sup>16</sup> When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side. <sup>17</sup> When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still; and when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them.
- a) There are some that say the creatures in Chapter 10 are different than the ones described in Chapter 1 due subtle differences in the text. The problem with that argument is "Verse 15", which says they are same creatures as the ones in Chapter 1.
  - b) To sum this up, these creatures had the ability to move anywhere and everywhere quickly. Their feet were like "wheels" and that was a way the people of Ezekiel's day could visualize quick movement. At the same time they could stand still as well.
  - c) The key point is "Verse 17" which says the "spirit of the living creatures was in them". That is a way of saying that the Holy Spirit was in control of their movement.
  - d) Again, if all of this "weirdness" is losing you, than simply remember there is symbolism of the Spirit of God moving at this time and besides being literal, it is also symbolic of the idea that God can see all and move and "be" anywhere at any time.

22. Verse 18: Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim.<sup>19</sup> 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 to the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.
- a) Remember we are witnessing the presence of God leaving the Temple. The cherubim are seen leaving with God as He leaves the temple.
  - b) Through this whole chapter, we are reading of God leaving "in stages" as opposed to an instant "whoosh" of God leaving all at once. What's the point? The idea is to get across the hesitancy on God's part to have to abandon His people, but at some point judgment is necessary when His people collectively turn their backs on Him!
  - c) The literal description talks about God leaving, and the cherubim spreading their wings as they rose from the ground. The wheels of the cherubim went with them. As strange as these creatures are to look at and describe, Ezekiel is trying his best to convey the literalness of these creatures and how God is controlling their movement.
  - d) Verse 19 describes how they stopped at the "East Gate". Again, we have God leaving in "phases". The east gate is considered the "Most Holy" entrance and the Messiah is predicted to enter through the East Gate, as we'll read much later in this book.
    - i) One has to "think Jewish" to fully appreciate this. The Jewish people depended upon God's presence for protection. They were waiting for the Promised Messiah to one day come through this east gate. Now we are reading of God leaving the Temple and stopping at the "main gate".
23. Verse 20: These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the Kebar River, and I realized that they were cherubim.<sup>21</sup> Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings was what looked like the hands of a man.<sup>22</sup> Their faces had the same appearance as those I had seen by the Kebar River. Each one went straight ahead.
- a) These last three verses are Ezekiel's editorial comment as he realized they were the same creatures he had seen in the first vision, over a year ago. Remember that Chapters 8 through 11 are all one vision that occurred over a year after the "first vision" of Chapter 1.
  - b) Ezekiel was putting the pieces of this puzzle together and realized he was seeing the same creatures that he saw in the first vision over a year earlier.
  - c) Again, it would be easy just to write off Ezekiel as some sort of nut at this point. In Deuteronomy, it states that if someone claims to be a prophet of God, they must be 100% accurate in all of their predictions. What "saves" Ezekiel is the accuracy in which his predictions come true. Jerusalem was literally destroyed by the Babylonians.
  - d) How do we know all of these "strange parts" are literal? We'll have to find out one day in heaven! The fact that Isaiah (over 100 years earlier), Ezekiel and even John in the Book of Revelation all describe similar "strange creatures" gives some support the literalness. (Cross reference: Isaiah Chapter 6 and Revelation Chapter 4).
24. At this point, I had to make an executive decision. ☺ Chapters 8 through Chapter 11 are all one vision. However, I've already written 11 pages, and I would need at least 3 or 4 more pages to cover the next chapter. As tempting as it was to cover all four chapters in one lesson, it would be more merciful to you the reader to cut it off here. Besides, we've had enough judgment for one lesson!
25. With that said, let's talk a little about God's judgment and "us".
- a) The main purpose of this section is to show Israel's collective disobedience to God and the fact they were judged by God as a nation. There were still individual Jews who did not participate in this practice and were spared the judgment. The last Chapter (10) focused on God himself leaving the Temple, which is symbolic of God no longer guarding over his people collectively as a united nation, even though God is not then, nor is God now, done with Israel collectively as a nation.

- b) Here's another issue: Why does this judgment go "on and on"? Why doesn't Ezekiel just write in a few sentences that the nation of Israel was disobedient, "God had enough" and they were destroyed and the survivors were put into exile to contemplate what God did.
    - i) In other words, why go on and on about "cherubim" and how God left the Temple and describe the Israelite's idolatry in great detail?
    - ii) Part of it is God wanted them and us to understand that turning from Him has eternal consequences as well as consequences in this lifetime.
    - iii) Here's another way to look at it: As far as going "on and on", when one goes through a tough time in one's life, it feels like it goes on forever. It rarely ends quickly. It is usually a long process to change our ways and understand what God wants for our lives. Having lessons that go "on and on" about God's judgment helps us to realize that sometimes our problems and issues take time to work out and we need to keep trusting God through such times.
  - c) It is one thing to never know about God and live accordingly. It is another to know about God or be living in a country where knowledge about the God of the bible is common and then not do anything about it! God holds us accountable for what we do (or should) know about Him.
    - i) The point is today, we have less of an excuse than the Israelites. We have God's message constantly broadcast to us on radio, television and now the Internet. I'm not saying one has to spend all their time on these sources. I'm just saying most people living today have no excuse to turn from God.
  - d) The next point is those who have committed their lives to God, are now responsible for that commitment. The good news is we can approach God through Jesus in that we have forgiveness of our sins, past, present and future. Therefore, we don't have to worry about our own judgment as no matter what we are saved. It is important to keep that in mind, no matter how bad things get in life.
  - e) As far as "group" judgment, we need to be aware of what groups we are associated with and do our best to live a life pleasing to God. If our "group" is judged by God for disobedience (be it our nation, our town or our church as examples), we will never know in this lifetime if we are being punished or if it just some other purpose God has. The point is to be aware that such judgment exists. It is something to be feared as a motivation to keep us on our toes for God.
    - i) The mistake the Israelites made is they simply turned from God and turned to their idols instead of trusting in God for their lives. It is one thing to sin and then confess it, and move on. It is another to keep on sinning and never want to turn from that sin. That is the sin of the specific Israelites in focus and the danger we all face if we make the commitment to turn from God in our lives.
26. Last thing: Would I rather preach about God's judgment or His grace and mercy? I'd much rather just teach on the latter. The problem is the bible emphasizes both. When we turn down God's grace and mercy, His judgment comes and the world has to accept that whether they like it or not.
27. OK, enough guilt. ☺ Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we read these lessons about your judgment on Your people, and it drives us to our knees. Thank you for forgiving our sins and providing a way we can approach You through Jesus your Son! Help us to remember that there is judgment for disobedience. There is judgment for believers in how good of a witness we are for you and then there is a much tougher judgment for nonbelievers coming. Help us to stick close to You and trust that You are working in our lives, especially in rough times when it appears like everything around us is falling apart.