

03. Ezekiel 8-14



Ezekiel 8:1 - 12:20 A Vision of God's judgment on Jerusalem

Ezekiel 8:1-4

In the sixth year (592BC), in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord YHWH fell upon me there. I looked, and there was a figure that had the appearance of fire (compare 1:27); below what appeared to be its loins down was fire, and from the loins up was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming amber. It stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in a vision from God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, to the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy (compare Jeremiah 11:13). And the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I had seen in the valley.

Ezekiel 8:5-18 describes the idolatry happening in Jerusalem

Ezekiel 8:16

At the entrance of the temple of YHWH, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of YHWH, and their faces toward the east, prostrating themselves to the sun toward the east.

Compare:

‘Your gods have become as many as your towns, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal’ (Jeremiah 11:13).

With the capture of the city in 598, people thought YHWH had abandoned them. They were looking to other gods to protect them.

Ezekiel 9

Chapter 8 listed the behaviour that demanded that God ‘act in wrath’ (8:18). The sins of Jerusalem could not be allowed to go unchecked.

In chapter 9 God summons the destroying angels (seven of them) to effect divine punishment. The idea is traditional. One thinks of the destroying angel in Egypt (Exodus 12:23), and the destroying angel that (in one tradition) struck down the Assyrian army of Sennacherib, in order to break the siege of Jerusalem (2Kings 19:35).

Ezekiel 9:3-4

‘The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. YHWH called to the man clothed in linen, who had the inkhorn at his side; and said to him, “Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.”

Ezekiel 9:7-10

“Then YHWH said to them, “Fill the courts with the slain. Go!” So they went out and killed in the city. While they were killing, and I was left alone, I fell prostrate on my face and cried out, “Ah Lord YHWH! will you destroy all who remain of Israel as you pour out your wrath upon Jerusalem?” He said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city full of perversity; for they say, ‘YHWH has forsaken the land, and YHWH does not see.’ As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will bring down their deeds upon their heads.”

Ezekiel 10:4

‘The glory of YHWH rose up from the cherub to the threshold of the house; the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the glory of YHWH.’

Ezekiel 10:18-19

‘The glory of YHWH went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubs. The cherub lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of YHWH; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.’

Ezekiel 11:16-20

Thus says the Lord YHWH: Though I removed them far away among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them in a little way in the countries where they have gone. Therefore say: Thus says the Lord YHWH: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. When they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations.

I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then **they shall be my people, and I will be their God.**

Ezekiel 11:22-25

‘Then the cherubs lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of YHWH ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city.

The spirit lifted me up and brought me in a vision by the spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen left me. And I told the exiles all the things that YHWH had shown me.’

Twice we have heard that Ezekiel in his vision saw the glory of YHWH rise from throne in the sanctuary and go to the temple threshold (see 9:3 and 10:4). Then he saw the throne with the presence move and stop at the east gate of the temple (10:19). Now the divine presence leaves the city, crosses the Kidron valley and stops on the Mount of Olives to the east of the city.

Ezekiel 12:1-16

Ezekiel hears about Zedekiah's failed attempt to organise an anti-Babylonian alliance in 594. He is instructed to demonstrate that there is going to be a second group of exiles from Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 12:17-20

Another description of the terrible situation that is to befall Jerusalem. We are reminded of the following from Jeremiah 4:19-20.

'My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain!
Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly;
I cannot keep silent;
for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.
Disaster overtakes disaster, the whole land is laid waste.'

Ezekiel 12:21 - 14:23 A critique of Prophecy

Ezekiel 12:23-25

‘Say to them, The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision. For there shall no longer be any false vision or flattering divination within the house of Israel. But I YHWH will speak the word that I speak, and it will be fulfilled. It will no longer be delayed; but in your days, O rebellious house, I will speak the word and fulfill it, says the Lord YHWH.’

Ezekiel 13:1-7

The word of YHWH came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are prophesying; say to those who prophesy out of their own heart: “Hear the word of YHWH!”

Thus says the Lord YHWH: Alas for the senseless prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or repaired a wall for the house of Israel, so that it might stand in battle on the day of YHWH.

They have envisioned falsehood and lying divination; they say, “Says YHWH,” when YHWH has not sent them, and yet they wait for the fulfilment of their word! Have you not seen a false vision or uttered a lying divination, when you have said, “Says YHWH,” even though I did not speak?’

Ezekiel is not the first to criticise those who claim to speak from God but do not. Amos did not want to be associated with those who claimed to be prophets (see Amos 7:14). Hosea speaks of the prophet who ‘stumbles in the dark’ (Hosea 4:5). Isaiah criticises prophets who ‘err in vision’ and ‘stumble in giving judgment’ (Isaiah 28:7). They prattle on and say nothing of value (28:10).

Micah has this to say (3:5-7). ‘Thus says YHWH concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who cry “Peace” when they have something to eat, but declare war against those who put nothing into their mouths. Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without revelation. The sun shall go down upon the prophets, and the day shall be black over them; the seers shall be disgraced, and the diviners put to shame; they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer from God.’

Again and again Jeremiah denounces the false prophets who say what people want to hear with no regard for YHWH. The following are but a few examples:

‘The prophets are nothing but wind for the word is not in them’ (Jeremiah 5:13).

‘The prophets are prophesying lies in my name’ (Jeremiah 14:14).

‘The prophets are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of YHWH ... I did not send the prophets yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied’ (Jeremiah 23:16,21).

Prophecy, says Ezekiel, is not something that comes from the prophet's own 'heart'. A prophet must 'hear the word of YHWH' (Ezekiel 13:2). A prophet is not to follow his own 'spirit'. A prophet must see what God is revealing (Ezekiel 13:3). When a breach occurs in the people's faith in YHWH, the prophet is not to be like a jackal which takes advantage of the breach to attack and ruin the vineyard. The prophet is to stand in the breach to protect the vineyard, and to repair the wall (Ezekiel 13:4-5).

Ezekiel 13:1-7

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Thus says the Lord YHWH: Alas for the senseless prophets who follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or repaired a wall for the house of Israel, so that it might stand in battle on the day of YHWH.

They have envisioned falsehood and lying divination; they say, “Says YHWH,” when YHWH has not sent them, and yet they wait for the fulfilment of their word! Have you not seen a false vision or uttered a lying divination, when you have said, “Says YHWH,” even though I did not speak?’

Ezekiel 13:10-12

‘They have misled my people, saying, “Peace,” when there is no peace; and when the people build a wall, these prophets smear whitewash on it. Say to those who smear whitewash on it that it shall fall. There will be a deluge of rain, great hailstones will fall, and a stormy wind will break out. When the wall falls, will it not be said to you, “Where is the whitewash you smeared on it?”’

Ezekiel 14:9

We are told of the punishment inflicted on a ‘prophet’ who dares to utter a word in YHWH’s name that does not come from YHWH. This is an extreme form of the second commandment: ‘You shall not make wrongful use of the name of YHWH your God, for YHWH will not acquit anyone who misuses his name’(Exodus 20:7). The false prophet will be ‘cut off’ from the people.

Ezekiel 14:12-14

‘The word of YHWH came to me: Son of man, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it human beings and animals, even if Noah, Danel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord YHWH.’

The presence of heroic people in a community does not mean that the community will avoid suffering the consequences of its infidelity.

Noah was saved but could not prevent the flood (Genesis 6:9)

Danel (a wise and food Phoenician king from ancient times)

Job, the just man delivered by God (see Job 42)

Ezekiel 14:22-23

‘Yet, survivors shall be left in it, sons and daughters who will be brought out; they will come out to you. When you see their ways and their deeds, you will be consoled for the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, for all that I have brought upon it. They shall console you, when you see their ways and their deeds; and you shall know that it was not without cause that I did all that I have done in it, says the Lord YHWH.’