

The Book of Ezekiel

Lesson 14-Chapter Eight (Ezekiel 8:1-12)

Executive Summary

The core takeaway is the systematic documentation of "abominations" occurring within the most sacred spaces of Israel. The document highlights a direct conflict between the physical presence of the Glory of God and the establishment of idols, specifically the "idol of jealousy." Central to this narrative is the exposure of the national leadership (the elders), who, despite the nation's previous two invasions, continued to practice secret idolatry under the rationalization that the Lord had forsaken them. This visionary evidence serves as the formal rationale for the total destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

I. Historical and Temporal Context

Ezekiel provides specific time markers and locations to ground the vision in a historical reality for his audience of exiles.

Chronology and Location

- **Date:** The sixth year, the fifth day of the sixth month.
- **Setting:** Ezekiel was sitting in his house with the elders of Judah sitting before him.
- **Historical Backdrop:** By this time, Judah had already experienced two Babylonian raids:
 - First Raid (598 BC): Nebuchadnezzar bound King Jehoiakim in chains and took him to Babylon along with temple articles.
 - Second Raid (587 BC): Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, taking King Jehoiachin prisoner and stripping the temple of its gold and treasures.

II. The Visionary Encounter

The vision begins with a physical and spiritual "hand of the Lord GOD" falling upon Ezekiel. This interaction is characterized by a high degree of supernatural phenomena.

The Appearance of the Divine Figure

Ezekiel describes a figure bearing the appearance of a man, similar to the vision he previously received at the River Chebar (Ezekiel 1:26-27):

- **From the waist down:** The appearance of fire.
- **From the waist up:** A glow like gleaming metal.

The Role of the Spirit

The prophet records that the figure extended a hand, took him by the hair, and the "Spirit lifted [him] up between earth and heaven." This state is identified by the specific Hebrew phrase *maraw' eloheem* (Visions of God), which occurs only three times in the Hebrew Scriptures—all within the book of Ezekiel. This phrase denotes God's specific perspective on the activity within Israel.

III. The Desecration of the Temple

The vision brings Ezekiel to the north gate of the inner courtyard in Jerusalem, where he observes the "idol of jealousy."

Defining the "Idol of Jealousy"

The text analyzes the linguistic roots of the terms used:

- **Idol (*semel*):** Occurs five times in Hebrew Scripture; means "resemblance," "image," or "figure."

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- **Jealousy (*qin'a*):** Occurs 43 times in Hebrew Scripture, most frequently in Ezekiel. It represents a state of being applicable to humans or to God as a "consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24-25).

The specific "idol of jealousy" is likely Asherah, a partner deity to Baal associated with fertility and motherhood. The text notes the profound irony that these idols were established while the Glory of the Lord was still physically present at the temple.

The Progression of Abominations

The vision reveals that the rebellion was not limited to the public courtyards but had permeated the inner structures of the temple.

1. **The Outer/Inner Court:** Priests were observed sacrificing to and honoring false deities in the open among the people.
2. **The Secret Chamber:** God directed Ezekiel to dig through a hole in the wall. Inside a hidden entrance, Ezekiel discovered:
 - Carvings of "creeping things," "beasts," and "detestable things" all around the walls.
 - **Seventy elders** of Israel standing in the dark.
 - **Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan** (a prominent figure whose father was a scribe who read the Law to the King) standing among them.
 - Each man held a censer with a rising cloud of incense, an ordinance of worship dedicated to these idols.

Conclusion: Rationale and Motivations

The vision concludes by exposing the psychological and theological motivations of the ruling class. The elders justified their secret idolatry by claiming, "The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land."

By rejecting the Law of Moses and the covenant, the leadership shifted their appeals from God to false idols. The document emphasizes that these acts are not the end of the transgressions; God explicitly tells Ezekiel, "Yet you will see still greater abominations," signaling that the rationale for Jerusalem's destruction is both deep-seated and ongoing.