

Ezekiel 9

- You'll remember that last week we began a new section in Ezekiel
 - We're studying how the Shechinah glory of God left the temple
 - The glory of the Lord set up residence within Solomon's temple over 300 years earlier
 - But now the time has come for Him to depart on account of Israel's repeated offenses against Him
 - Last week in chapter 8 we learned the offenses that have offended the Lord and caused Him to depart
 - In a vision, the Lord showed Ezekiel five abominations Israel committed in the house of the Lord
 - All five involved the worst kind of adultery and ungodliness
 - Any one of those offenses were reason enough by itself for the Lord to depart, since His glory will not reside alongside idols
 - So we can certainly understand why, collectively, these five offenses prompted the Lord to act
 - Now this week we move to part two of the four part story
 - In chapter 9 the Lord's glory begins its movement out of the temple
 - But His glory departs in stages, taking measured steps along the way
 - The first stage of that departure is described in chapter 9 while the second through third stages are described in chapters 10-11
- But today's chapter also features a strong, and even disturbing battle scene
 - The battle scene is the major feature of this chapter but it's not an actual battle
 - It's a picture of what the Lord will do and why
 - Let's begin with the first couple of verses

Ezek. 9:1 Then He 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.”

Ezek. 9:2 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.

- The chapter begins with the word “then” indicating that this is next thing Ezekiel sees following the events of the prior chapter
 - So this scene is a continuation of the one we studied in chapter 8
 - In that chapter we learned that Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem in a vision of God
 - He didn’t actually go anywhere
 - He’s experiencing these things as a vision, like a supernatural movie
 - So the events in this chapter are not happening in realtime
 - For example, the abominations described in chapter 8 were probably events from the past
 - Likewise, the the scene depicted in this chapter is revealing things to come in future years
 - But even then, the events of chapter 9 never happen in the exactly the way they are portrayed here
 - So this is a vision that foretells future events but uses symbolic actors to represent real things
- The scene begins with a loud voice crying for executioners to draw near to the city and temple
 - In response to the call, six men enter the temple through the upper gate that faces north
 - The north wall of the temple court had two northern entrances
 - We studied one of those entrances last week, where the idol was erected by the evil king Manasseh
 - The second was the upper gate in the northeast corner of the temple compound at the highest point of the temple mount

- Today, that would be the area of the Damascus gate
- Each of these men held a weapon in his hand
 - In v.1 the weapon is called a destroying weapon, or in Hebrew, a *machete*
 - But in v.2 it's called a shattering weapon, or in Hebrew, a *mappatz* or hammer
 - It seems Ezekiel isn't exactly sure how to describe what he sees
- That's our first clue that these aren't mere men but are angels
 - There's something supernatural about them
 - Their appearance is like men, but they carrying strange weapons
 - And they hear and obey the call of the Lord to do His work in the city
 - We'll see even greater evidence of their angelic powers later
- Among them was another man, a seventh, wearing white linen and carrying a writing case strapped to his side
 - This man carries no weapon and is dressed in peculiar way
 - First, he carries a writing case (sometimes called an inkhorn)
 - The small box had holes for holding reed pens, with an ink-holder at one end of the case
 - These were usually made of bone, hardwood or silver and richly ornamented
 - Inkhorns were carried in the waistband of a tunic by high officials or scribes
 - Secondly, this man is dressed in white linen
 - Linen was the required clothing of the priests of Israel, suggesting this man serves a priestly function
 - His dress is similar to another enigmatic character mentioned elsewhere in the Bible
 - In Daniel 10 & 12 a man appears dressed in linen floating above a river

- In studying those chapters of Daniel, we come to learn the man in linen is a pre-incarnate Jesus Christ
- And so that would be a reasonable and appropriate to make the same conclusion here
 - Especially since we know Jesus is our High Priest, our intercessor and mediator before God
 - But what of the writing box...well, we need to read a little further to put it all together

Ezek. 9:3 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.

Ezek. 9:4 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.”

Ezek. 9:5 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.

Ezek. 9:6 “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.

Ezek. 9:7 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.

- Here we have the first movement of the glory of God
 - In the Holy of Holies of the temple stood the ark of the covenant
 - On the top of this golden chest were carved statues of two cherubim in gold
 - These two angels spread their golden wings over the center of the chest forming a space underneath
 - In that space the glory of God would appear
 - The glory of God filled the holy of Holies with light
 - In fact, it was the only light in the Holy of Holies
 - The plans for the tabernacle never provided for a lamp or light of any kind in the Holy of Holies

- Because the Lord knew His light would be there
- Except now in v.3 the Lord's glory departs the Holy of Holies
 - It goes up to rest for a time on the threshold of the temple
 - The threshold is the doorstep leading into the temple building, into the Holy Place
 - So the glory moved out of the Holy of Holies, past the veil, through the length of the Holy Place
 - Then it exited the door of the temple and stopped at the threshold
- This is the last time in the history of Israel thus far that the glory of God dwelled in the Holy of Holies of the temple
 - Never again did God's glory occupy this part of the Second Temple
 - Forever after when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he entered a pitch black dark room
- As I mentioned, the glory of God is departing the temple, but it does so in stages
 - We might ask why God moves in this manner, moving slowly, residing from place to place
 - Why doesn't His glory just leave in an instant?
 - The answer is this movement of the glory of God serves as a shadow of Christ
 - We'll take a closer look that connection as we go along in these chapters
- As the glory rests on the threshold, the voice calls to the man in linen commanding Him to go throughout Jerusalem marking foreheads
 - Now we understand why he carries an inkhorn
 - He is to mark the men of the city who sigh and groan over the abominations committed in their midst
 - Obviously, sighing and groaning are disapproving responses to these things

- So these are men (and women) who disapprove of Israel's idolatry
- In other words, they are God-fearing and faithful to Yahweh, which means they are the remnant of Israel
 - As as the remnant, they are being protected by this marking is a against the coming judgment
 - The Lord is providing protection for His people even as He of prepares to bring judgment to the ungodly of Israel
- This passage is a good example of an important biblical principle at work
 - Whenever the Lord acts by His wrath against ungodliness, He will protect His children from His judgments
 - Peter puts it this way:

2Pet. 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

2Pet. 2:5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

2Pet. 2:6 and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter;

2Pet. 2:7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men

2Pet. 2:8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds),

2Pet. 2:9 then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,

- Peter uses two examples of God's judgment from the Old Testament to contrast how the Lord deals with the ungodly vs. the godly
 - To the ungodly angels who sinned in the days of Noah, He cast them into hell
 - To the ungodly men on the earth, he brought the flood
 - But He preserved the godly family of Noah

- The Lord condemned the perverse and ungodly cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction as an example
- But He rescued righteous Lot who lived among them
- Therefore, Peter concludes the Lord knows ways to rescue the godly while holding the ungodly accountable
 - But notice also the differences between Noah and Lot
 - In Noah's case, the Lord provided a rescue for a godly man who clearly desired to escape the coming flood
 - But in Lot's case, the Lord provided a rescue for Lot even though Lot was tempted to remain in the city and wasn't heeding the call to leave
- So Peter concludes that the Lord is so determined and powerful to protect His people from judgment that He even rescues us from temptation
 - Of course, Peter's not promising that God removes all our temptations
 - But he is teaching that when our temptations threaten to leave us vulnerable to God's judgments, He will intervene for His own name sake
 - The Lord will never be seen to judge wrongly, as Abraham reminded him shortly before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

Gen. 18:25 “Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

- Paul tells us in Romans 8 that we who are in Christ Jesus by faith have no condemnation
 - You and I have been likewise marked on our forehead, spiritually-speaking
 - Though we still have sin, we are not condemned for it because Christ has taken that condemnation for us
 - And through the Enemy may accuse us and others may condemn us...and we may even condemn ourselves at times

- Nevertheless, the Lord does not condemn us now, nor will He ever condemn us because of His Son's payment for us
- So while you and I may not have visible marks on our bodies, the Lord knows who His sheep are and He will protect us from His wrath
- Meanwhile, we live in the days of Ezekiel, times of great sin, and our world is growing more ungodly by the day, as Paul said it would
 - The ungodly world collectively thumbs its nose at God daring Him to do something about it
 - We who have God's law written on our hearts will sigh and groan over what we see around us
 - We should also be fearful for sooner or later the Lord must respond
- And scripture says one day He will...
 - But before He brings judgment on the ungodly, the Bible teaches that the Lord will provide protection to the godly
 - In a moment commonly called the Rapture, the Lord will claim His people from the earth, removing us from harm's way
 - Then judgment comes like a thief in the night upon those who remain behind
 - We could call that day our great escape, and it reveals the lengths God is prepared to go to protect His people
- Later during the Tribulation, the Lord provides yet another escape for the believing remnant of Israel enduring those days on earth
 - The Bible says the Lord will escort believing Israel into the wilderness to a place of protection called Petra
 - In this place, the remnant will be held in safety for 3.5 years until the end of the Tribulation judgments
 - Here again, another example of the power of God to protect His people
- So now in Jerusalem God commands the "Man" in linen to inscribe the few believers in the city with a mark of protection

- The fact that the man in linen is doing the marking is another confirmation that He is Christ
 - The Bible tells us that the Lord is the One Who marks us for eternal life and preserves us from condemnation
 - Speaking to the church in Revelation, Jesus says

Rev. 3:4 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

Rev. 3:5 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.'

- Jesus is the Great Scribe Who writes our name in the book of life
 - Elsewhere in Revelation that same book is called the book of life of the Lamb
 - It's His book and He is its Scribe
 - And those He records in His book of life can never be erased
- Having marked those who are God's, the time has come to bring judgment upon the city, so in vs.5-6 the Lord commands the other six to show no pity
 - They are told to strike down every last person
 - There is no mercy shown no matter the gender or age
 - Old men, married women, young men, virgins, little children even
 - All who lack the mark are destroyed by this judgment
 - And it begins with the leaders in the sanctuary, moving outward from there
 - Historically, we know that the city of Jerusalem was not destroyed by six men, much less by six angels
 - It was destroyed by a Babylonian army of thousands
 - Therefore, these warrior angels are a representation of that coming judgment
 - Notice these angels come into the temple from the northeast entrance

- Babylon is northeast of Jerusalem and their armies came from that direction as well
- Furthermore, the Babylonian army accomplished a destruction that matches the orders given to the angels
 - When the Babylonians attacked the city following their long final siege, they showed no mercy
 - They killed indiscriminately, including the women and children
 - The only difference is that killing didn't happen with hammer-wielding angels
 - It happened with ordinary soldiers
- So that's how we should understand this vision given to Ezekiel
 - The Lord is explaining to the prophet that when this destruction comes upon the city, the Lord wasn't unable to stop it or AWOL when it happened
 - Instead, He consecrated it
 - This was His doing by means of the Babylonian army
- So how do we understand God's decision to take the lives of even the very young?
 - Naturally, it concerns us to see women and children dying as a result of the Lord's order, doesn't it?
 - We assume the children are innocent by virtue of their age
 - And we assume that many of the women and even the men were not personally responsible for these abominations
 - So then we wonder why they are caught up in the destruction?
 - First, the entire city has been polluted by the sin of a few
 - And when a society embraces ungodliness, everyone in that society is at risk
 - Because God is not a respecter of persons and doesn't grade on the curve
 - Therefore, all of the city must suffer the penalty, as the Lord declared in His word

Ex. 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

Ex. 20:5 “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

Ex. 20:6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

- Furthermore, a person’s age and status doesn’t change the fundamental question of whether they are deserving God’s wrath or not
 - We may see young people of the city and those who played no part in the abominations as innocent in some sense
 - But the reality is, each person is still guilty of his or her own sin and ungodliness
- And so when God acts against unbelievers, He is just regardless of their age
 - It makes no difference whether a person is 1 or 5 or 50 or 100...if that person is not of faith, then they are not righteous
 - We know the Lord has already marked those in the city who were of faith, including some women and children
 - Therefore, those who are left are the unrighteous
- Notice the Lord says in v.5 that “the others” were to be destroyed, meaning those who were not His by faith
 - This is the way the Lord works routinely
 - Remember, the Lord ordered Joshua to destroy whole cities of Canaanites including women and children when Israel took the land
 - And the tenth judgment against Egypt resulted in the first born of every Egyptian dying, including many children
 - And in Tribulation, the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments will take the lives of uncountable numbers of all ages
- Ezekiel has a similar concern, as evidenced by his next statement

Ezek. 9:8 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?”

Ezek. 9:9 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!’

Ezek. 9:10 “But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads.”

Ezek. 9:11 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.”

- Ezekiel is distraught, and in effect he asks the Lord if He was intent on destroying all Israel
 - He says are you destroying the remnant?
 - Remember, the remnant is the Bible’s word for the faith, believing people of Israel
 - The Bible says the Lord will always preserve a remnant within Israel
 - No matter how bad things get, there will always be believing Jews on earth somewhere
 - But because the Lord’s order to destroy the city is so comprehensive, Ezekiel wonders if anyone will be left when it’s over
 - The irony is Ezekiel is one of the remnant
 - Remember, the city has already seen two sieges before this moment
 - And in each conflict, the Babylonians moved some of the population into Babylon
 - This was the means the Lord used to preserve His remnant
 - He kept them safe in captivity in Babylon
 - These are the one’s represented by the men marked on their foreheads
 - That mark meant that in the battle they wouldn’t be killed by the Babylonians

- But that doesn't mean they wouldn't be captured or enslaved
- So the Lord does not answer Ezekiel's question in this moment, because the answer is self-evident: no
 - No, the Lord is not destroying the remnant, or else Ezekiel himself wouldn't be standing
 - He is destroying the city and its walls
 - He will destroy His sanctuary after His glory departs
 - He will destroy the ungodly in the city
 - And He will preserve a remnant in captivity for a time
- If you are still struggling with the notion that there are no exceptions to God's judgments against ungodliness, then ask yourself why you're not worried about God taking exception in His promises of mercy to you?
 - After all, if you expect God to play favorites or make exceptions for the ungodly, then why shouldn't you expect Him to make exceptions for those of faith?
 - If some ungodly can escape judgment merely on God's whim, then perhaps some godly may still receive condemnation despite their faith?
 - You see, it must work both ways
 - If God is not perfect in His justice, then He cannot be perfect in His mercy
 - But it's because God is perfect in all ways that we can rest in the assurance of scripture
 - Because scripture says that by our faith in Jesus Christ we are assured eternal life with Him
 - Though we are all sinners, our sins have been washed clean by the blood of Christ who took the penalty for us
 - The Father set loose warring angels against His Son instead of against you and me
 - So that every human being is included in the plan of judgment one way or another