

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION TO EZEKIEL 8

This chapter contains a vision the prophet had of the idolatry of the Jews, which was the cause of their destruction. The time when, place, where, and persons with whom he was, when the hand of the Lord came upon him, are mentioned, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:1); then follows a description of the divine Person that appeared to him, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:2); and an account is given how he was in a visionary way brought to Jerusalem, and to the temple, where he saw the glory of the God of Israel, and the idolatry of the people, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:3,4); which latter was gradually represented to him; first the image of jealousy in the entry at the gate of the altar northward, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:5); then greater abominations through a hole in the wall, by which he saw their idols, in the form of reptiles and four footed beasts, portrayed on the wall, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:6-10); next seventy of the ancients of Israel, among whom were one mentioned by name, offering incense to these idols, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:11,12); after this, greater abominations still are showed him, at the north of the temple, women weeping for Tammuz, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:13,14); and then again far greater ones, twenty five men, between the porch and the altar, with their backs to the temple, and their face to the east, worshipping the sun, and putting the branch to the nose, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:15-17); wherefore it is reasoned to deal with them in fury, without any mercy, pity, and compassion, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 8:18).

Ver. 1. *And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth [month], in the fifth [day] of the month, &c.* This was the sixth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin; the sixth month was the month Elul, which answers to part of August, and part of September. The Septuagint and Arabic versions wrongly render it, the fifth month. The fifth day of the month is thought to have been the sabbath day, which seems probable by what follows; this was just a year and two months from the first vision, (^{<ARB>}Ezekiel 1:1,2);

[as] I sat in mine house; in Chaldea, by the river Chebar; he was now sitting, the time of lying on his side, both right and left, being now up, even four hundred and thirty days. It was in the fifth year, and on the fifth of Tammuz, that the first vision was; seven days the prophet sat with them of

the captivity at Telabib; at the end of which he was ordered to lie on his side; first on his left side three hundred ninety days, and then on his right side forty days: now reckoning from the middle of Tammuz, to the fifth of Elul in the sixth year, were but, as Kimchi observes, four hundred days; but this being, as another Jewish writer says^{f112}, an intercalated year, by the intercalation of a month, which consisted of thirty days, the whole number was completed, and the prophet was now sitting: or it may be this position is observed, because he was now teaching and instructing the people, which was frequently done sitting; (see Gill on “~~40B~~ Matthew 5:1”); and this in his own private house, being now in captivity, and having neither temple nor synagogue to teach in;

and the elders of Judah sat before me; to hear the word of the Lord from his mouth, the law explained, or any fresh prophecy delivered by him; or to have his advice and counsel in their present circumstances. These were the elders of Judah that were carried captive along with Jehoiachin; though some think they were those that were at Jerusalem, and that all this was only in a visionary way; but the former sense seems most agreeable; seeing this was previous to the vision, and with what goes before describes the time, place, and witnesses of the vision;

that the hand of the Lord fell there upon me; which the Targum interprets of the spirit of prophecy, which came with power upon him: it denotes the energy and efficacy of the Spirit of God in throwing him into an ecstasy, and acting upon him, and revealing to him the things he did; which are related in the following verses.

Ver. 2. *And then one beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire, &c.]* The Septuagint and Arabic versions render it, “behold the likeness of a man”; reading *çya*, “a man”, for *ça*, “fire”; but without supposing such a reading, for which there is no foundation, this likeness may very well be understood of the likeness of a man; since mention is made of his joins in the next clause, and of his hand in (~~40B~~ Ezekiel 8:3); and the description agrees with the appearance of a man in (~~40D~~ Ezekiel 1:26,27); it was usual for the Son of God, who doubtless is here meant, to appear in a human form; and so Junius and Tremellius supply the words,

“and lo a likeness “of a man”, as in the appearance of fire:”

it was the form of a fiery man that was seen, as he is further described:

from the appearance of his loins, even downward, fire; his lower parts, thighs, legs, and feet; expressive either of the light of grace communicated from Christ to his people; or of his fervent love towards them, or flaming zeal for God and his house; or rather of his wrath against an idolatrous people; (see ^{<6015>}Revelation 1:15); a like description is in (^{<3012>}Ezekiel 1:27);

and from his loins, even upward, as the appearance of brightness; his upper parts, back, belly, breast, shoulders, arms, head, &c. which may denote his incomprehensible majesty and glory; his glory being the glory of the only begotten, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. The Targum renders both the one and the other part of the description thus,

“and I saw, and twelve a likeness as the look of fire, the look of glory, which the eye cannot see, nor is it possible to look upon it; and beneath the look of fire, and the look of glory, which the eye cannot behold, nor is it possible to contemplate it; and above, as the look of brightness:”

as the colour of amber: or “chasmal”: which some take to be the name of an angel. The Syriac version is, “as the look of God”; (see Gill on ^{<3010>}Ezekiel 1:4”); and (see Gill on ^{<3012>}Ezekiel 1:27”).

Ver. 3. *And he put forth the form of an hand, &c.*] That is, he that appeared in the likeness of a man, and with so much glory and splendour, out of the midst of the fire and brightness which were about him, put forth the form of a hand, that looked like a man's hand; for this appearance was not real, only visionary; and this seems to design the Spirit of God sent forth by Christ, sometimes called the finger of God, (^{<2121>}Luke 11:20); as appears by what follows:

and took me by a lock of mine head; without hurting him, showing his power over him; and by this means raising him from his seat, as it seemed to the prophet:

and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and heaven; took him off of his seat, and out of his house, lifted him up in the air, and carried him through it, as he thought; for this was not real and local; in like manner as the spirit caught away Philip, (^{<483>}Acts 8:39); but in vision, as follows:

and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem; so it was represented to him in a true vision, which was of God, and not of Satan, that he was

carried from Chaldea to Jerusalem; not that he really was, for he was still in Chaldea; and here in vision was he brought again, and found himself to be when that vision was over, (^{<24124>}Ezekiel 11:24,25); but things so appeared to him, as if he was actually brought to Jerusalem by the power of the Spirit of God:

to the door of the inner gate: not of Jerusalem, but the temple, or rather the court, the inner court; (see ^{<26108>}Ezekiel 10:3); and so it should be rendered “to the door of the gate of the inner court”^{f113}; and thus it is explained by Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech:

that looketh toward the north; for there were gates on every side:

where [was] the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy; some graven image, perhaps the image of Baal; so called, because it provoked the Lord to jealousy, (^{<47221>}Deuteronomy 32:21). Gussetius^{f114} suggests, that **I ms**, “Semel”, here may be the same with Semele; who, in the opinion of the Heathens, made Juno jealous.

Ver. 4. *And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel [was] there, &c.*] In the temple, between the cherubim, where the Shechinah or the glory of the divine Majesty dwelt; for as yet he had not removed, though provoked to it, and as he afterwards did; or he was here to destroy the idols, and both city and temple, for the idolatry of the people; or this is here mentioned, to show the baseness and wickedness of the people, that they should place an idol where the Lord himself was:

according to the vision that I saw in the plain; it was the same glorious Person he saw in the temple whom he had before seen in the plain, (^{<24122>}Ezekiel 3:22,23); and that was the same he had seen in the vision by the river Chebar, (^{<24108>}Ezekiel 1:3,28).

Ver. 5. *Then said he unto me, son of man, &c.*] That is, the glorious Person described above in this vision, the glorious God of Israel, seen by the prophet in the temple, he spoke unto him, calling him son of man; a name by which he often goes in this prophecy:

lift up thine eyes now toward the north; of the mountain of the house without the court, as Jarchi interprets it:

so I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north: being obedient to the heavenly vision:

and behold northward at the gate of the altar; at the northern gate of the inner court, where was the altar of burnt offering, brought by Ahaz; to the north of the altar he built in imitation of that at Damascus, (^{<2160>}2 Kings 16:10-14); and here stood

this image of jealousy in the entry; or the image of this jealousy; the image before mentioned, which provoked the Lord to jealousy; this stood at the entry of the northern gate, which led into the inner court, and to the altar.

Ver. 6. *He said furthermore unto me, son of man, &c.*] He continued his speech to the prophet, saying

seest thou what they do? the idolatrous Jews, who had set up a graven image at the northern gate of the court, where the altar was, and were sacrificing to it:

[even] the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here; for to set up an idol where he was, and an altar by his altar, and to sacrifice to Baal, and not to him, or to Baal along with him, or besides him, or to any other idol, were very abominable to the Lord: even to such a degree,

that I should go far from my sanctuary? be obliged to leave it, not being able to bear such abominable idolatries: or, “that they should go far from my sanctuary”^{f115}; depart from the true worship and service of it, and fall into idolatry:

but turn thee yet again; from the north to the south it may be; however, to some other part of the temple:

[and] thou shalt see greater abominations; or, “great abominations”^{f116}; for there is no necessity of rendering it “greater”: but the meaning is, that he should see other great abominations besides what he had seen, than which there could not be anything well greater.

Ver. 7. *And he brought me to the door of the court, &c.*] Of the inner court, the court of the priests and Levites. Dr. Lightfoot^{f117} says this was the east gate, and most common way of entrance; and in that gate the sanhedrim used to sit in these times; and there the prophet sees their council chamber painted about with imagery:

and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall; of one of the chambers of the priests and Levites, where they lay.

Ver. 8. *Then said he unto me, son of man, dig now in the wall, &c.]* And so make the hole larger; that he might have a fuller view of what was to be seen within the wall:

and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door; an opening, by which he could go into the cell or chamber, and take a full view of what was to be seen there. All this was visionary, for in reality the prophet did not dig, nor could he, not having anything to dig with; but so things appeared to his mind in the vision: first a little hole, by which he could discern there was a room; then, by making use of some means, a large door appeared, at which there was an entrance into it.

Ver. 9. *And he said unto me, go in, &c.]* Into the room or chamber the door opened into:

and behold the wicked abominations they do here; the idolatries there committed, wicked in themselves, and abominable to God.

Ver. 10. *So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, &c.]* As beetles and others, worshipped for gods:

and abominable beasts; unclean ones; not only oxen, but dogs and cats, and other impure creatures; for such were the gods of the Egyptians, from whom the Jews took their deities:

and all the idols of the house of Israel; which were many, even as numerous as their cities:

portrayed upon the wall round about; the pictures of them were drawn and placed around the wall of the room or chamber; and where they were worshipped by the priests and Levites, and members of the sanhedrim; and this was not in one chamber only, but in many, as appears from (³⁸⁸²Ezekiel 8:12).

Ver. 11. *And there stood before them, &c.]* Before the pictures, as the Vulgate Latin version expresses it, praying, sacrificing, and offering incense unto them:

seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel; the whole sanhedrim, or great court of judicature among the Jews, as Kimchi; or at least there is an allusion to that number, which were appointed in Moses' time to be officers over the people, and govern and direct them, (⁴¹¹⁶Numbers 11:16); which shows how sadly depraved and corrupted the state was, that not the

common people only, but the civil magistrates, the chief rulers and governors, were given to idolatry; and those that should have taught the people the right way led them wrong; and it is still a further aggravation of their crime that they should do this in the chambers of the priests and Levites, where they ought not to have been:

and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan; who was either the prince of the sanhedrim, or at least a person of great note and esteem; and shows the corruption to be general, from the least to the greatest: Shaphan was a scribe in Josiah's time, who had a son named Ahikam, perhaps the father of this, (^{221B}2 Kings 22:3,12); in (^{311D}Ezekiel 11:2); he is said to be the son of Azur, and one of the princes of the people:

with every man his censer in his hand; to offer incense to the idols portrayed on the wall; and which they did, for it follows:

and a thick cloud of incense went up; there were many that offered; and perhaps they offered a large quantity, being very liberal and profuse in this kind of devotion to their idols.

Ver. 12. *Then said he unto me, son of man, hast thou seen, &c.*] Here should be a stop, as the accent "segolta" shows; hast thou taken notice of, hast thou considered, what thou hast seen, the amazing shocking abominations committed by these men? it follows, and the question is to be repeated, "hast thou seen"

what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark? their deeds being evil, such as will not bear the light, of which they had reason to be ashamed before men; and which they imagined would not be seen by the Lord, though the darkness and the light are both alike to him:

every man in the chambers of his imagery? the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, render it, "in his hidden" or "secret chamber"; and the Vulgate Latin version, "in the hidden place of his bedchamber". The Targum is,

"in the chamber of the house of his bed;"

in his bedchamber; that is, in those chambers of the temple, which belonged to the priests and Levites, on the walls of which were portrayed the images and pictures of their gods. Here they had their secret rites or

mysteries performed, in imitation of the Heathens; who had the several mysteries of their religion privately observed; to which none were admitted but those that were initiated into them; as those of Osiris among the Egyptians; of Ceres with the Grecians; and of Bona Dea among the Romans; as Junius observes. Though some interpret this of the imaginations of their minds, according to which they framed to themselves deities, and a form of worship;

for they say, the Lord seeth not, the Lord hath forsaken the earth; this they gave as a reason of their idolatry, because the Lord took no notice of them, did not help them when in distress; but, as they concluded, had forsaken them; therefore they betook themselves to the gods of the Egyptians, Syrians, and other nations, for their assistance and protection: for these words are not the language of Epicureans, or such who deny the providence of God in general; who think that God takes no notice of the lower world, only of the upper one, as Kimchi and others interpret them; for these elders of Israel were not so ignorant and stupid as to deny the general providence of God, only distrusted his particular care of them.

Ver. 13. *He said also unto me, turn thee yet again, &c.]* Towards the north, as before; (see Gill on “²¹⁸⁶Ezekiel 8:6”);

[and] thou shall see greater abominations that they do; or: “the great abominations”; for so the words may be strictly rendered; nor does it appear that what follows, though great abominations, were greater than the creeping things, four footed beasts, and other idols, or dunghill gods, portrayed upon the walls, which the elders of Israel burnt incense to.

Ver. 14. *Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house, which [was] towards the north, &c.]* By “the Lord’s house” no doubt is meant the temple, which the Targum here calls the house of the sanctuary of the Lord; that gate of the temple (for the temple had several gates) which was to the north was the gate called Teri or Tedi, and was very little used^{f118}. In this part of the temple were the sacrifices offered; and therefore it was the greater abomination to commit idolatry where the Lord was more solemnly worshipped:

and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz; they were not in the court of the women, where they should have been; but at the northern gate, near the place of sacrifice; and they were sitting there, which none but the kings of the house of Judah, and of the family of David, were allowed in

the temple^{f119}; but, what was the greatest abomination, they were weeping for Tammuz. Jarchi says this was an image, which they heated inwardly, and its eyes were of lead; and these being melted with the heat, it seemed to weep; wherefore (the women) said, it asks for an offering: but not the idol, but the women, wept. Kimchi relates various interpretations of it;

“some (he says) expound it by an antiphrasis, “making Tammuz glad”; in the month of Tammuz they made a feast to the idol, and the women came to make him glad: others say, that with great diligence they brought water to the eyes of the idol called Tammuz, and it wept; signifying that it desired they would worship it: others interpret the word Tammuz as signifying “burnt”; (from the words in (זרבי) Daniel 3:19); **anwtal azml**, “to heat the furnace”;) as if should say, they wept for him, because he was for they burnt their sons and daughters in the fire, and the women wept for them. He further observes, that Maimonides^{f120} writes, that he found written in one of the books of the ancient idolaters, that there was a man of the idolatrous prophets, whose name was Tammuz; who called to a certain king, and commanded him to worship the seven stars, and the twelve signs of the zodiac, for which the king put him to a violent death; and, the same night he died, all the images from the ends of the earth gathered together to the temple of Babylon, to a golden image which was the image of the sun; and this image was hanging between the heavens and the earth, and it fell into the midst of the temple, and so all the images round about it; and it declared unto them what had happened to Tammuz the prophet; and all the images wept and lamented all that night; and when it was morning, they all fled to their temples at the ends of the earth; and this became an everlasting statute to them, that at the beginning of the first day of the month Tammuz, every year, they lament and weeps for Tammuz; and there are others that expound Tammuz the name of a beast which they worship;”

but, leaving these interpretations, Tammuz was either the Adonis of the Grecians; and so the Vulgate Latin version renders it Adonis; who was a young man beloved by Venus, and, being killed by a boar, his death was lamented by her; and, in respect to the goddess, an anniversary solemnity was kept by men and women lamenting his death, especially by women. So Pausanias, speaking of a certain place, there (says he) the women of the Argives (a people in Greece) mourn for Adonis^{f121}. Lucian^{f122} gives a

particular account of this ceremony, as performed at Byblus, a city in Phoenicia, not far from Judea; from whence the Jews might have borrowed this custom.

“I have seen (says he), in Byblus, a large temple of Venus Byblia, where they performed the rites unto Adonis, and I was a spectator of them. The Byblians say the affair relating to Adonis (or his death) by a boar happened in their country; and, in memory of it, every year they beat themselves, lament and offer sacrifice, and great mourning goes through the whole country; and when they beat themselves and mourn, they sacrifice to Adonis as dead; but the day following they pretend he is alive; and they shave their heads, as the Egyptians do at the death of Apis;”

and indeed it is thought by some that this Tammuz is the Osiris of the Egyptians; the same with Mizraim, the first king of Egypt, who, being slain in battle, his wife his ordered that he should be worshipped as a god, and a yearly lamentation made for him; and indeed Osiris and Adonis seem to be one and the same, only in different nations called by different names. Mention is made in Plato^{f123} of Thamuz, a king that reigned at Thebes over all Egypt, and was the god called Ammon; no doubt the same with this Tammuz; and who is here called, in the Syriac and Arabic versions, Thamuz or Tamuz; he seems to be the same with Ham; and Egypt was called, the land of Ham, (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 105:27); and it is most probable the Jews borrowed this piece of idolatry from the Egyptians their neighbours; with whom they were now very familiar, and from whom they expected help against the Chaldeans; but as there were such shocking obscenities used in this idolatrous service, it is most amazing that the Jewish women, who had been instructed in the law and worship of God, should ever go into it. Gussetius^{f124} thinks that Bacchus, the god of wine, is meant; and gives several reasons for it; and among the rest observes, that in the fourth month, called Tammuz from him, the vine was forming in ripe grapes; near the beginning of a fifth month, it was pressed out, and tunned up; and by the next month, having done fermenting, it was stopped up, which represented him buried; and for which the weeping was in this month.

Ver. 15. *Then said he unto me, hast thou seen [this], O son of man? &c.]* This shocking piece of idolatry, women weeping for Tammuz:

turn thee yet again, [and] thou shalt see greater abominations than these; or, “great abominations besides these”^{f125}.

Ver. 16. *And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, &c.]* The court of the priests, where they offered sacrifice, and into which none might come but themselves:

and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar; the porch that led into the temple, and the brasen altar, the altar of burnt offerings, which was a very sacred place, and reckoned more holy than the court of the priests^{f126}

[were] about five and twenty men; the number, more or less, not being exactly known; who they were, whether the priests or princes of the people, is not certain; probably some of both:

with their backs towards the temple of the Lord; that is, the most holy place, which they were obliged to, in order to do what is afterwards affirmed of them; for the sanctuary was built to the west, that in their worship the Jews might not look to the east, as the Gentiles did; wherefore these men, that they might imitate the Gentiles in their idolatry, turned their backs to the most holy place; which is an aggravation of their impiety; casting the utmost contempt on God, his worship, and the place of it:

and their faces towards the east: when the sun rises:

and they worshipped the sun towards the east; as many nations did, though forbidden the Jews by an express law of God, (^{<RHB>}Deuteronomy 4:19 17:2, 3); yet this they fell into, and had horses and chariots devoted to this idolatry; (see ^{<ZKB>}2 Kings 21:3,5 23:5,11). The word rendered “worshipped” is compounded of two words; one signifying to “corrupt”, the other to “worship”: showing that, by worshipping the sun, they corrupted themselves, and the house of God; and so the Targum renders it,

“and, lo, they corrupted themselves, worshipping in the east the sun;”

and so it is explained in the Jerusalem Talmud,

“they corrupted the temple, and worshipped the sun;”

but Kimchi thinks the word^{f127} consists of the verb in the past tense, and of the participle; and that the sense is, when the prophet saw the men worshipping the sun to the east, as amazed at it, put this question to those that went in, “do ye worship also?”^{f128} so Ben Melech.

Ver. 17. *Then he said unto me, hast thou seen [this], O son of man? &c.]* Took notice of and considered this piece of idolatry, worshipping the sun toward the east:

is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? could these things, which are such dreadful abominations, committed here in the temple, be reckoned light things by them, as surely they cannot? yet these are not all that they have done:

for they have filled the land with violence; with rapine and oppression; doing injury to the poor and needy, the widow and the fatherless, in all places:

and have returned to provoke me to anger; by other instances of idolatry:

and, lo, they put the branch to their nose; a laurel, or olive, or vine branch, which idolaters carried in their hands, and put to their nose, in honour of the idol they worshipped; in like manner as they kissed their hand at the sight of the sun, (¹⁸¹²⁶Job 31:26,27); and which the Jews did in imitation of the Heathen. This is one of the eighteen places in which there is “tikun sopherim”, or a “correction of the scribes”; who, instead of “my nose”, direct to read “their nose”; hence the words are differently interpreted by the Jewish commentators; who, by *hrwmz*, rendered “branch”, think an ill smell is meant; arising either from their posteriors, their back being towards the temple; or from the incense which they offered up to their idols; so Kimchi and Menachem in Jarchi; agreeably to which Fortunatus Scacchus^{f129} understands this, not of any branch used by idolaters, which they put to the nose of their idol, or their own, for the honour of that; but of the censer which the Israelites used, contrary to the command of God, and which they put to their nose to enjoy a forbidden smell; (see ²⁹⁶⁸Ezekiel 16:18 23:41); but Gussetius^{f130} gives another sense of the words, rendering them, “they send forth a branch to their anger”; the Israelites are compared to a vine, as in (²⁹⁰⁰Isaiah 5:1); sending forth bad branches, idolatrous actions, as here in this chapter; and to these bad branches they sent forth or added another, even anger against God, the prophets, true believers, and right worshippers of God; and therefore he also would deal in fury and wrath, as in (²⁹⁸⁸Ezekiel 8:18); so Dr. Lightfoot^{f131} renders it,

““they send the branch to my wrath”, or “to their own wrath”; that is, to what they have deserved; as if it was said, in the same manner that anyone puts wood to the fire, the branch of the wild vine, that

it may the more quickly be burnt; so do these put the branch to my wrath, that it may burn the more fiercely; hence it follows, “therefore will I also deal in fury”, &c.”

The Targum is,

“and, lo, they bring shame (or confusion) to their faces;”

what they do turns to their own ruin and destruction; as follows:

Ver. 18. *Therefore will I also deal in fury, &c.*] Being provoked by such abominable idolatries, and such horrid insolence, and most contemptuous treatment:

mine eye shall not spare: neither will I have pity: (see ^{<3151>}Ezekiel 5:11 7:4,9);

and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice; very pressingly and earnestly for help, being in great distress:

[yet] will I not hear them; as they turned their backs on him, he will turn a deaf ear to them, and not regard their cries. The Targum is,

“they shall pray before me, with a great voice, and I will not receive their prayer.”