Ezekiel 8

Behind the Wall: Abominations in God's House

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

God takes Ezekiel on a tour of His own house and shows him what the leaders thought no one could see. Each room is worse than the last — an idol at the gate, elders in a secret chamber, women weeping for a pagan god, priests with their backs to the LORD. God's glory was still there, but the people had turned their backs on Him, and now He was about to leave.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

EZEKIEL 8 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold — God — His character & actions	Green — Command / instruction	⇄ Sky — Key repeated word
⚠ Rose — Sin / warning	★ Violet — Promise / blessing	◷ Amber — Time / place / contrast

1 And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that ▲ the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.

2 Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber.

3 And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in ▲ the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the ⚠ image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.

4 And, behold, ▲ the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain.

5 Then said he unto me, ⇄ Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this ⚠ image of jealousy in the entry.

6 He said furthermore unto me, ⇄ Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great ⇄ abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, ⚠ that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but ◷ turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater ⇄ abominations.

7 And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall.

8 Then said he unto me, ⇄ Son of man, Green dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.

9 And he said unto me, Green Go in, and behold the wicked ⇄ abominations that they do here.

10 So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and ⚠ all the idols of the house of Israel, pourtrayed upon the wall round about.

11 And there stood before them ◷ seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood ◷ Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.

12 Then said he unto me, ⇄ Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do ⚠ in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, ⚠ The LORD seeth us not; ⚠ the LORD hath forsaken the earth.

13 He said also unto me, ◷ Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater ⇄ abominations that they do.

14 Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat ⚠ women weeping for Tammuz.

15 Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O ⇄ son of man? ◷ turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater ⇄ abominations than these.

16 And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, ⚠ with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and ⚠ they worshipped the sun toward the east.

17 Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O ⇄ son of man? 🕒 Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the ⇄ abominations which they commit here? for ⚠ they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, ⚠ they put the branch to their nose.

18 Therefore will I also deal in fury: ▲ mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, ▲ yet will I not hear them.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ▲ the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me
- **v3** ▲ the visions of God
- **v3** ⚠ image of jealousy *(every occurrence)*
- **v4** ▲ the glory of the God of Israel was there
- **v5** ⇄ Son of man *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ⇄ abominations *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ⚠ that I should go far off from my sanctuary
- **v6** 🕒 turn thee yet again *(every occurrence)*
- **v8** dig now in the wall
- **v9** Go in, and behold
- **v10** ⚠ all the idols of the house of Israel
- **v11** 🕒 seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel
- **v11** 🕒 Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan
- **v12** ⚠ in the dark
- **v12** ⚠ The LORD seeth us not
- **v12** ⚠ the LORD hath forsaken the earth
- **v14** ⚠ women weeping for Tammuz
- **v16** ⚠ with their backs toward the temple of the LORD
- **v16** ⚠ they worshipped the sun toward the east
- **v17** 🕒 Is it a light thing
- **v17** ⚠ they have filled the land with violence
- **v17** ⚠ they put the branch to their nose
- **v18** ▲ mine eye shall not spare
- **v18** ▲ yet will I not hear them

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 8:6 (KJV)

6 He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary? but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.

Setting

"In the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month" (v1) — the sixth year of Jehoiachin's exile, about September 592 BC, some fourteen months after Ezekiel's call (1:2). Ezekiel is in Babylon "sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me" (v1) when "the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there" (v1). Chapters 8–11 are one long vision: Ezekiel is carried "in the visions of God to Jerusalem" (v3) and shown what is happening inside the temple while Zedekiah still reigns. His body stays in Babylon (11:24).

Structure

- vv1–4 — **taken to Jerusalem:** Ezekiel sees "a likeness as the appearance of a man" (v2), fiery and bright, as in chapter 1. The Spirit lifts him "between earth and heaven" and brings him "in the visions of God to Jerusalem" (v3), to the north gate of the inner court, where stood "the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy" (v3). And yet "the glory of the God of Israel was there" (v4).
- vv5–6 — **abomination one, the idol at the gate:** north of the altar gate stands "this idol of jealousy at the entrance" (v5). "Son of man, do you see what they are doing … so that I would be far from My sanctuary?" (v6). "Yet you will see still greater abominations" (v6).
- vv7–13 — **abomination two, the elders in the dark:** Ezekiel finds "a hole in the wall" (v7), digs, finds a door, and is told, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here" (v9). Creeping things, beasts and "all the idols of the house of Israel" are "carved on the wall all around" (v10). Before them stand "seventy elders of the house of Israel" with "Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan" among them, "each man with his censer in his hand" (v11). They do this "in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images" (v12), saying, "The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land" (v12).
- vv14–15 — **abomination three, weeping for Tammuz:** at the north gate of the LORD's house "women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz" (v14). "Yet you will see still greater abominations than these" (v15).
- vv16–18 — **abomination four, sun worship at the door of the temple:** in the inner court, between the porch and the altar, about twenty-five men stand "with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east" (v16), "prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun" (v16). "Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah …?" (v17). "They have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly" (v17), and "they are putting the twig to their nose" (v17). "I indeed will deal in wrath … though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them" (v18).

Repeated words

abominations (vv6, 9, 13, 15, 17); greater abominations (vv6, 13, 15); son of man (vv5, 6, 8, 12, 15, 17); see / seen (vv6, 9, 12, 13, 15, 17); north (vv3, 5, 14); jealousy (vv3, 5); elders (vv1, 11, 12).

Contrasts

The elders of Judah sitting before God's prophet in Babylon (v1) ⟷ the elders of Israel bowing to carved images in Jerusalem (vv11–12). "The glory of the God of Israel was there" (v4) ⟷ an idol of jealousy at the gate (v5). Seventy elders with censers (v11) ⟷ the seventy elders of Moses' day who saw the God of Israel (Exod 24:9–10). "The LORD does not see us" (v12) ⟷ God showing Ezekiel every room. Done in the dark (v12) ⟷ done openly at the temple door (v16). Faces toward the sun ⟷ backs to the temple of the LORD (v16). They cry loudly (v18) ⟷ God will not listen (v18).

Chapter theme (my words)

God takes Ezekiel on a tour of His own house and shows him what the leaders thought no one could see. Each room is worse than the last — an idol at the gate, elders in a secret chamber, women weeping for a pagan god, priests with their backs to the LORD. God's glory was still there, but the people had turned their backs on Him, and now He was about to leave.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 8:3 (KJV)

3 And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in ▲ the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the ⚠ image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy.

The vision and the glory (vv1–4)

Ezekiel is transported "in the visions of God" (v3) — Guzik cites Feinberg: "That he did not actually leave Babylon is clear from Ezekiel 11:24." The figure of fire and brightness matches the figure with the appearance of a man on the throne in 1:26–27; many interpreters see here the LORD Himself, and some Christians see a preview of the Son. The vision is a guided tour with a purpose: the exiles in Babylon thought Jerusalem was still holy and safe, and God shows why it is not. Guzik organizes the four scenes by who is guilty: the king's gate (vv5–6), the leaders (vv7–13), the women (vv14–15) and the priests (vv16–18). Over it all, "the glory of the God of Israel was there" (v4) — He had not yet left, but chapters 10–11 will show Him going.

The idol of jealousy (vv3–6)

The word for idol (*semel*) is rare. Wright, in Guzik, connects it with Manasseh, who set a carved image in the temple (2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 33:7, 15), and with Josiah's later cleansing (2 Kgs 23:6) — the sin had crept back. It "provokes to jealousy" because the LORD is a jealous God who will not share His

people's worship (Exod 20:5; Deut 32:16). Guzik notes Taylor's point that the north gate was the king's preferred entrance. The result is spelled out: these things drive God "far from My sanctuary" (v6).

The elders in the dark (vv7–13)

Ezekiel has to dig through a wall to see it — Guzik notes that seeing the true state of things can take real effort. Inside, the walls are carved with animals and idols. Guzik cites Feinberg: "The consensus of interpreters is that these were the animal cults of Egypt" — Judah was looking to Egypt for help against Babylon (17:15). Seventy elders echo the seventy whom Moses appointed (Num 11:16) — the men meant to lead Israel in the worship of the LORD. Jaazaniah son of Shaphan stands out because Shaphan was Josiah's faithful secretary (2 Kgs 22:8–12), and his other sons protected Jeremiah (Jer 26:24); Guzik cites Taylor calling him "the black sheep of a worthy family." Their excuse — "The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land" (v12) — mixes practical atheism with self-pity: God isn't watching, and He has abandoned us anyway. Guzik, citing Block, notes that the claim is false of the LORD but true of the idols they serve (Ps 115:4–7).

Weeping for Tammuz (vv14–15)

This verse needs care. Guzik: "This is the only mention of Tammuz in Ezekiel and the Old Testament," and he describes Tammuz as "a deity worshipped by many in neighboring nations, often with immoral or impure rites." From ancient Mesopotamian texts we know Tammuz as the Sumerian Dumuzi — a shepherd god and the lover of the goddess Inanna (Ishtar). In the myth he is taken down to the underworld, and he was mourned with ritual laments, tied to the seasons when the land dried up; the fourth Babylonian month bore his name, and the Jewish calendar still calls that month Tammuz (June–July). Jerome, translating the Latin Bible, identified him with the Greek Adonis. Two cautions keep us fair to the text:

- **What the text says:** women of Judah, at the LORD's own house, are grieving for a foreign god — giving their tears and devotion to a dead idol instead of the living God. That is the abomination, and it is "greater" than the one before because it brings pagan ritual into the LORD's house in broad daylight.
- **What the text does not say:** some popular teaching, especially Alexander Hislop's *The Two Babylons* (1858), makes Tammuz the son of Nimrod and Semiramis and traces Lent, the cross and other church customs back to his cult. The ancient sources don't support those links, and most historians and many evangelical scholars reject them. Whether Tammuz was believed to "rise" each year is debated among scholars. Believers can take the warning seriously — mixing pagan worship into God's house is deadly — without resting it on claims the evidence can't carry.

Note also that the vision is dated to the sixth month, not the month of Tammuz; scholars differ on whether the rite was kept at other times or whether the vision gathers typical scenes. Either way, the point stands.

Backs to the temple (vv16–18)

The worst scene is at the very door of the sanctuary, "between the porch and the altar" (v16) — the place where priests should weep before the LORD (Joel 2:17). About twenty-five men, likely priests (Guzik notes Alexander's suggestion: the twenty-four priestly courses plus the high priest), turn their backs on the temple and bow to the sun. God had forbidden exactly this (Deut 4:19; 17:3), and Josiah

had removed the horses and chariots of the sun (2 Kgs 23:11). Guzik quotes Wiersbe: "The idolatry of the seventy elders was hidden in the temple, but these men practiced their idolatry openly!" "Is it too light a thing …?" (v17) — they thought it was small; God did not. Idolatry went with violence in the land. "Putting the twig to their nose" is found only here, and its meaning is uncertain; Guzik lists the views — an insulting gesture (Block), a ritual gesture, perhaps imitating the Egyptian ankh or tied to plants sacred to Tammuz (Wright), or a scribal change meaning their "stench" in God's nose (Vawter and Hoppe). No one view is certain. The chapter ends with God's resolve: no pity, and no listening when they cry (v18; compare Prov 1:28; Isa 1:15).

Word study (Hebrew)

- **hand — *yad* (H3027):** the hand, power; here God's power taking hold of the prophet.
- **visions — *marʾah* (H4759):** a vision, a seeing.
- **idol — *semel* (H5566):** an image, statue.
- **jealousy — *qinʾah* (H7068):** zeal, jealousy — the ardor of covenant love.
- **provokes to jealousy — *qanaʾ* (H7065):** to be jealous, zealous.
- **glory — *kabod* (H3519):** weight, honor, splendor.
- **abominations — *toʿebah* (H8441):** something detestable, especially idolatry.
- **sanctuary — *miqdash* (H4720):** a holy place.
- **carved images — *maskith* (H4906):** an image, carved figure, imagination.
- **censer — *miqtereth* (H4730):** a censer, incense pan.
- **forsaken — *ʿazab* (H5800):** to leave, abandon.
- **Tammuz — *Tammuz* (H8542):** a Mesopotamian god (Sumerian Dumuzi).
- **prostrating — *shachah* (H7812):** to bow down, worship.
- **twig — *zemorah* (H2156):** a branch, shoot.
- **violence — *chamas* (H2555):** violence, wrong.

Cross-references

Exod 20:3–5; Exod 24:9–10; Num 11:16; Deut 4:15–19; Deut 32:16; 2 Kgs 21:1–7; 2 Kgs 22:8–12; 2 Kgs 23:4–11; 2 Chr 33:7; Ps 94:7–9; Ps 115:4–8; Ps 139:11–12; Prov 1:28; Isa 29:15; Jer 7:9–11; Jer 26:24; Ezek 1:26–28; Ezek 10:18–19; Ezek 11:22–24; Joel 2:17; Rom 1:22–25; 1 Cor 10:14; 1 John 5:21.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · EZEKIEL 8:8 (KJV)

8 Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall: and when I had digged in the wall, behold a door.

Command to obey — "Go in and see."

God made Ezekiel dig through the wall and look (vv8–9). I'll let God show me what is behind the walls of my own life — the rooms I keep locked. For the men I disciple, real recovery starts when a man stops managing the front room and lets God and a brother walk into the back rooms with him.

Sin to confess — "The LORD does not see us."

The elders acted as if no one was watching. Every secret sin says the same thing. I'll confess what I do "in the dark" (v12) as if God doesn't see — because He does (Ps 139:11–12; Heb 4:13).

Warning to heed — "Is it too light a thing?"

Judah thought its compromises were small. God called each one greater than the last. Sin escalates: the idol at the gate became priests with their backs to God. And I can weep for the wrong things — give my tears and passion to what can't save me. I'll ask what has my devotion that should belong to God alone (1 John 5:21).

Promise to trust — the glory was still there

Even with idols in every corner, "the glory of the God of Israel was there" (v4). God does not leave quickly; He shows, He warns, He waits. For the man who thinks he has gone too far for God to bother with him: He is still showing you the truth because He has not given up on you yet. Turn while He is near (Isa 55:6).

Example to follow — the elders who sat before the prophet

In Babylon, the elders of Judah came and sat before God's word (v1); in Jerusalem, the elders hid in the dark. I want to be the man who sits under the Word, not the man who hides from it — and to lead other men to sit there with me.

Worship

The LORD sees every room. He is a jealous God who will not share His glory with idols. He is holy, and His patience is not weakness. I turn my face toward His house, not away from it.

Prayer

LORD, You see what is done in the dark. Dig through the walls I have built and show me my hidden rooms. Forgive me for the idols I have tolerated and the tears I have spent on things that cannot save. Turn my face to You. Keep Your glory in my life, and make me a man who leads others into the light. Amen.