

# Ezekiel

## Week 7

### *The Temple Vision Continued*

### *Chapters 10-11*

#### **The Glory of the Lord Leaves the Temple (10)**

Ezekiel describes his vision of Yahweh on His chariot-throne with many of the same images and phrases from his inaugural vision in 1:1–28. This vision focuses on Yahweh’s departure from His temple. In the ancient world, gods were believed to have a limited range or sphere of influence. Ezekiel’s vision shows that Yahweh is free to leave His chosen earthly dwelling without His power being diminished. Yahweh was not conquered or overcome by the foreign invaders or their gods; He chose to leave the temple because Israel defiled it and abandoned the covenant.<sup>1</sup>

*cherubim*. The “living creatures” of 1:5, having animal and human features. These beings, mentioned over 90 times in the Bible, are most commonly associated with the presence of God (cf Ex 25:22). They guard the throne of God (Ps 80:1) and are probably the “living creatures” referred to as standing around the throne in Rv 4:6. “Cherubim” is probably best understood as a common noun referring to a variety of beings (described differently in the Bible) rather than as the name of a specific type of being. The term is also known from the ancient Near East, where it is sometimes used for the mythological beasts that stand guard over the gates of cities, an example of how the truth about God and His ways is often preserved in a distorted form in ancient mythology (e.g., the widespread accounts of the flood in various cultures).<sup>2</sup>

On top of the cherubim, the prophet sees a throne, at first empty (Ezek. 10:1). The divine chariot is drawn up on the south side of the temple (10:3), as far away as possible from the abominations on the northern side of the city. Then Ezekiel sees a cloud filling the inner court and the glory of God on the move once more, just as it had been in the days of the desert wanderings (cf. Ex. 40:34–37). It departs slowly, haltingly, as if reluctant to leave. First it passes from the earthly cherubim in the Most Holy Place to the threshold of the temple (Ezek. 10:4), then from the threshold of the temple to the divine chariot over the (real) cherubim (10:18). From there the glory moves to the east gate of the temple courtyard (10:19), where there is a pause during which the prophet receives a further oracle and vision. Finally the glory moves on to the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, outside the city limits. The city itself is now effectively doomed, cut off from divine aid from its true protector, waiting for the ax to fall. The Lord has abandoned the city to the empty hope offered by the idols for which the people abandoned him.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Eze 10:1–22). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>2</sup> Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1322). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

<sup>3</sup> Duguid, I. M. (1999). *Ezekiel* (pp. 147–148). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

*importance of the threshold.* Entranceways have great symbolic significance in the biblical world. They serve as a place of judgment (Deut 22:20–21) as well as a legal site where acts of submission and worship may take place (1 Sam 5:4; Ezek 46:1–2). They also mark the point of entry and exit from a private home or, as in Ezekiel, from the realm of sacred space to the secular world.<sup>4</sup>

*east gate.* This would be the gate of the outer court of the temple. While the temple complex had an east-west orientation, it is unclear how closely tied to this sacred precincts were the buildings and courtyards of the royal palace. It is possible that the gate Ezekiel is referring to in this case is one of those that connected temple and palace. If this is the case, then its significance is heightened as Yahweh prepares to abandon both the religious community and the secular authorities to their fate.<sup>5</sup>

### **Judgment Against Jerusalem's Rulers (11)**

The final scene of Ezekiel's vision appears to depict a time prior to the scene in 9:1–11 when the wicked of Jerusalem are destroyed in judgment. The prophet observes a council of Judah's leaders who apparently are deliberating about their course of action in light of Babylonian oppression. The reign of Zedekiah, Judah's last Davidic king (597–586 bc), serves as the historical backdrop for this scene and the oracles in chs. 12–14. Zedekiah, Josiah's brother, was installed as a puppet ruler by Nebuchadnezzar after the failed rebellions of Josiah's son and grandson, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (sometimes called Jeconiah). Zedekiah, who initially was loyal to Babylon, faced mounting pressure from influential leaders who favored rebellion against Babylon and alliance with Egypt. Help from an Egyptian alliance failed to materialize. As a result, Zedekiah was captured, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple was burned. Ezekiel's vision comes before the destruction and addresses the leaders' failure to discern the true cause of the disaster.<sup>6</sup>

At the entrance to the east gate, Ezekiel sees a group of men whose number (twenty-five, Ezek. 11:1) and whose function (giving advice, v. 2) suggest them to be elders. Included in their number are two "leaders of the people" (*šārê hā'ām*), who are named as Jaazaniah ben Azzur (not the same as Jaazaniah ben Shaphan in 8:11) and Pelatiah. The "leaders" (*šārîm*) were a small council of high officials of the king, who wielded considerable power in Judah. During the reign of Zedekiah, they apparently extended their powers in the face of his weakness and were even able to act independently of the king to some degree (see Jer. 38:25).

In the vision, Ezekiel is told that these leaders have been "plotting evil and giving wicked advice in this city" (Ezek. 11:2). In opposition to the prophetic word of forthcoming judgment on Jerusalem, they have apparently been arrogantly asserting the security of their position. The exact meaning of the terse expression in 11:3a (lit., "not near building houses") has been much debated. The niv, along with most translations and commentators,

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<sup>4</sup> Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). *The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament* (electronic ed., Eze 10:18). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>5</sup> Matthews & Walton. 10:19

<sup>6</sup> Barry, et al. 11:1-13

takes the “near” in a temporal sense, construing the phrase as a question: “Will it not soon be time to build houses?”<sup>8</sup> However, a better sense is obtained if “near” is taken in a spatial sense, so that the inhabitants of Judah are referring to themselves as those who are “near,” in contrast to the exiles as those who are “far away” (cf. 11:15). The phrase then becomes, “It is not for the one who is near to build houses,” with an obvious reference to the letter that Jeremiah sent the exiles urging them to “build houses” (Jer. 29:5). As Fairbairn paraphrases it: “Those who are far off in the land of exile may, if they please, take the prophet’s advice and set about building houses for themselves; that does not concern us.”

This understanding seems to fit better with the second half of their statement: “This city is a cooking pot, and we are the meat” (Ezek. 11:3b). This may be interpreted as a statement of the relative value of those who remain in Jerusalem and the exiles (the best part, the “meat,” is put in the cooking pot while the undesired portion, the offal, is thrown into the fire). Alternatively, it may speak of the relative safety of the Jerusalemites (the cooking pot, while not a safe place to be, is at least better than being in the fire—as is implied in our proverb “Out of the frying pan, into the fire”),<sup>12</sup> or it may imply both. In either case, a contrast is implied between those who remain in Jerusalem and the exiles, a contrast that favors the inhabitants of the city.

To pick up the further quotation of their thoughts in 11:15, on the Jerusalemites’ view, “They [the exiles] are far away from the Lord; this land was given to us as our possession.” On the grounds that “possession is nine-tenths of the law,” they regard the de facto situation as an expression of God’s favor on them and displeasure with those in exile. They think of themselves as the true remnant while those in exile are under God’s judgment.<sup>7</sup>

*You made your slain ones numerous in this city.* Warns that the destruction depicted in Ezek 9:7 is their own responsibility, even though it is divinely mandated. Their sin has made the judgment inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

*I will bring you out from its midst.* A contrast between the high-ranking officials who will be brought out and the common people who will be slain in the city. Second Kings 25:4–7 records how Zedekiah and his officers made a breach in the city wall and escaped at night, leaving the city to Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction. Their 11th-hour escape was part of Yahweh’s plan to separate them for special judgment.<sup>9</sup>

In this prophecy there is not simply reference to the actual events of history, whereby many of the leading citizens were put to death by Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (2 Kings 25:21), but more fundamentally there is a challenge to the Jerusalemites’ claim to possess the land. The language is carefully chosen to depict their fate as a kind of anti-exodus. The Lord will “drive them out of the city,” just as he earlier brought Israel out of the land of Egypt (Ezek. 11:9; cf. Ex. 6:6). Whereas once he promised to deliver Israel from the hand of

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<sup>7</sup> Duguid. 148-149

<sup>8</sup> Barry, et al. 11:6

<sup>9</sup> Barry, et al. 11:9

the Egyptians (Ex. 3:8), now he threatens to give them into the hand of foreigners (Ezek. 11:9). The judgments that once fell on Egypt (Ex. 6:6; 12:12) now fall on the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ezek. 11:10).<sup>10</sup>

The response to Ezekiel's second cry (11:13) is a glorious declaration that the future of Israel lies among the exiles: It is Ezekiel and his brothers and "blood relatives"—his fellow exiles—who constitute "the whole house of Israel" (11:15). Yes, they have been sent far away from the land of Israel, but even there they have not been cast out of the Lord's presence because "for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone" (11:16). By this we see that the Lord's movement is not simply a departure *from* Jerusalem, on account of the idolatries that have profaned the sanctuary there (8:6), but also a departure *to* Babylon, to be a sanctuary for his true people there.<sup>11</sup>

The Lord will create in his new people "an undivided heart," not so much in the sense of mutual agreement among the people, but rather in the sense of undivided loyalty to the Lord, a single-minded commitment to him (cf. Jer. 32:39). In place of the old spirit, whose mindset resulted in death (Ezek. 11:5–6), God's new people will be given "a new spirit." They will receive "a heart of flesh" that will respond to the Lord in place of their old stony heart (cf. 3:7).<sup>12</sup>

"The Holy Scriptures do not credit the human powers of the natural free will with conversion, faith in Christ, regeneration, renewal, and all that belongs to their effective beginning and end. They do not credit free will the whole way, half way, or in any way, even in the smallest or most trivial way. They credit conversion solely and completely to the Holy Spirit's divine work, as also the Apology teaches. Reason and free will are able to live an outwardly decent life to a certain extent. But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew [John 3:5] and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire. He opens the mind and heart to understand the Scriptures and to listen to the Word" (FC SD II 25–26).<sup>13</sup>

*Mountain east of the city.* The mount to the east of the temple complex would be the Mount of Olives. From here one can look down on the temple mount and the city. From a vantagepoint in Jerusalem, this would be the limit of how far one could look to the east. Whether the implication is that God is going to sit outside the city and watch (compare Jon 4:5), or whether it is from here that he returns to heaven (it is the traditional site of the ascension of Christ as well, though New Testament support is slight).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Duguid. 149-150

<sup>11</sup> Duguid. 150-151

<sup>12</sup> Duguid. 151

<sup>13</sup> Engelbrecht. 1326

<sup>14</sup> Matthews & Walton. 11:23