

## Ezekiel 6

Ezekiel 6:1-14 forms a single literary unit; it starts with the words, “the word of the LORD came to me saying” just as the next section does (7:1). It is divided into two subsections, each beginning with a hostile gesture. In 6:2, Ezekiel is told to set his face against Israel, and in 6:11 he is told to clap his hand and stamp his foot.

**6:1** *And the word of the LORD came to me saying,*

**6:2** *"Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them*

**6:3** *and say, 'Mountains of Israel, listen to the word of the Lord GOD! Thus says the Lord GOD to the mountains, the hills, the ravines and the valleys: "Behold, I Myself am going to bring a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places.*

**6:4** *"So your altars will become desolate and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will make your slain fall in front of your idols.*

**6:5** *"I will also lay the dead bodies of the sons of Israel in front of their idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars.*

**6:6** *"In all your dwellings, cities will become waste and the high places will be desolate, that your altars may become waste and desolate, your idols may be broken and brought to an end, your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be blotted out.*

**6:7** *"The slain will fall among you, and you will know that I am the LORD."*

The expression, “listen to the word of the Lord GOD” (6:3) occurs frequently in the Books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah and reflects the people’s stubbornness to listen to the prophets’ authority. Although those who actually hear Ezekiel are the exiles in Babylon, he addresses the nation from the perspective of the homeland.

*First, God announces that He will bring a sword over the land (6:3), and His specific target is the “high places.”* In Ezekiel’s day, the high places were places of idolatrous worship that were often set up on hilltops; in a more general sense, this was a designation for any shrine that was set up to worship other gods (there were numerous places designated as “high places” that were located in valleys such as the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem – Jer. 7:31; 19:5-6; 32:35 and within Jerusalem itself). There were times in the nation’s history when syncretistic governmental leaders in Israel and Judah officially sanctioned the high places (1 Ki. 12:31-33; 2 Ki. 21:3; 23:5, 15-20), and even though men like Hezekiah and Josiah tried to eradicate them (2 Ki. 18:4; 23:4-20; 2 Chron. 31:1), they always reappeared with more vitality than ever (see end notes for more detail and a slightly different perspective).

Verses 4-7 describe what will happen when Yahweh’s sword strikes. The altars would be destroyed. In pagan worship as well as OT worship, altars played a key role in offering sacrifices when worshipping a deity. They could be constructed of wood, stone, bronze, or even wood overlaid with metal (in the case of altars used for incense). God says He will level them (6:4).

Idols are also mentioned (6:5-6). The term used by Ezekiel is his favorite expression for idols (גִּלּוּל *gillul*). The word is found in the book 39 of the 48 times it appears in the OT, but refers to the pellet-like shape of sheep feces, and has nothing to do with idols at all. Modern translators' sensitivities prevent the word from ever making it into a translation, but had Ezekiel been preaching today, he would have probably been using a four-letter word for excrement (Block, 226). One can hardly imagine a more scathing way of speaking of idolatry. In verse 6, God says He will blot out their works; He will "wipe Jerusalem clean as one wipes a dirty dish" (Block, 227). The fact that God can destroy idols testifies to His power over false gods, and the slaying of the idolaters demonstrates the inability of these gods to protect their devotees.

*Secondly, God's sword will target the idolatrous people.* Centuries earlier, when Israel entered the land of Canaan, the Israelites were told to eliminate the idols along with the people who worshiped them (Deut. 7:1-5). "Now the descendants of Israel will discover the Canaanite sentence to be their own" (Block, 227); God will slay them, lay the corpses in front of the idols, and scatter their bones around the altars.

Verse 7 gives the motivation behind God's acts: "you will know that I am the LORD"; He must be acknowledged as the only true God even if it takes judgment to bring that to light.

***6:8 "However, I will leave a remnant, for you will have those who escaped the sword among the nations when you are scattered among the countries.***

***6:9 "Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations.***

***6:10 " Then they will know that I am the LORD; I have not said in vain that I would inflict this disaster on them."***

Verses 8-10 present a minute, but very real glimmer of hope amidst the coming devastation; God will leave a remnant alive (grace); He will allow a few to escape from His sword though they will be scattered among the nations. Those who escape will learn that God is God; ironically, they must learn this on foreign soil, which most Israelites considered unclean or defiled (Block, 231). Although many Israelites thought that contact with God was dependent upon being in the land, they would come to learn that this was not the case (Block, 231).

The transformation of the survivors is described in a number of ways:

1. They will remember Yahweh (6:9). To "remember" means that they will take to heart who God is and pay attention to what He has said.
2. They will loathe themselves (6:9). Whenever the words, "loathe themselves," occur in Ezekiel, they describe the feeling that arises when people remember Yahweh. The people remember their evil because they "remember" God. When we see our own conduct and the faithfulness of God at the same

time, we also see our own worthlessness before Him. Compare the following verses regarding this connection.

Ezekiel 6:9: "Then those of you who escape will remember Me among the nations to which they will be carried captive, how I have been hurt by their adulterous hearts which turned away from Me, and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols; and they will loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed, for all their abominations."

Ezekiel 20:42-43: "And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. There you will remember your ways and all your deeds with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done."

Ezekiel 36:31: "Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations."

3. Thirdly, they will know that God's actions were not in vain (6:10). Israel will be forced to recognize God through judgment.

**6:11 "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Clap your hand, stamp your foot and say, "Alas, because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, which will fall by sword, famine and plague!**

**6:12 "He who is far off will die by the plague, and he who is near will fall by the sword, and he who remains and is besieged will die by the famine. Thus will I spend My wrath on them.**

**6:13 "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when their slain are among their idols around their altars, on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains, under every green tree and under every leafy oak-- the places where they offered soothing aroma to all their idols.**

**6:14 "So throughout all their habitations I will stretch out My hand against them and make the land more desolate and waste than the wilderness toward Diblah; thus they will know that I am the LORD."**

Clapping the hands and stamping the feet are non-verbal exclamation marks (Block, 234). The judgment will take place in three forms (sword, famine, and plague), and will occur in three concentric circles. Those in the city would die of starvation, those on the outskirts of Jerusalem would die by the sword, and those scattered abroad would die by plague (6:12; 7:15; see notes on Ezek. 5:1-4, 12).

All throughout the Book of Ezekiel, God is the primary actor; if anything happens to His people, good or bad, He is the one responsible for it. Verses 13 and 14 enforce the idea that nothing is outside of God's reach.

Daniel Block (239-240) comments on the theological implications of the passage:

First, this oracle offers vivid evidence of the impassioned side of God's character. Twice this lengthy recitation of divine activity refers explicitly to Yahweh's emotional state. On the one hand, He is heartbroken over the infidelity of His covenant people (v.9); on the other, the fury of His judgment arises out of the depths of His anger over covenantal treachery. Yahweh is El Qanna, "Impassioned God." He will not stand idly by while other gods vie for His people's devotion and they in turn spurn His grace.

Second, it is possible to be sincere in one's religious commitment, but to be sincerely in error. The investment of the Israelites in their cult (high places, altars, incense altars, idols, sacrifices) attests to the depths of their commitment to false gods. But idolatry is more than spiritual adultery; it represents devotion to futility. Other gods are but excrement, the figments of depraved human imagination. Anything, any ideology, that minimizes Yahweh's claim on his people stands condemned. The course of human history is strewn with the shattered remains of human imagination, and the corpses of deluded idolaters.

Third, the Lord is faithful to His covenant, to the letter! Far from responding to human rebellion impulsively or arbitrarily, He reacts predictably, in accordance with His righteous character, and in keeping with the terms of the covenant. For Him to exercise judgment on his church or on humanity is not to betray His character, but to affirm His unchanging nature. He is Yahweh; He has spoken; He acts accordingly.

Fourth, the Lord's wrath is never so hot that it cancels out His grace. He may sweep across the landscape with His sword and visit the earth with manifold judgments, but He has always preserved for Himself a remnant of those who would serve Him. By His sovereign will and His eternal covenant He stops short of total annihilation.

Fifth, the oracle reminds all readers to look on themselves as God sees them. Despite our elevated status within creation as images of God (Gen. 1:26-30; Ps. 8), nothing within us warrants God's love. The focus of some on innate human goodness and on the development of positive self-images is delusionary. To be chosen as an object of divine grace does not reflect on the goodness of the individual but on the character of the living God, and nothing will provide more realism to one's self-understanding than an encounter with Him. In the face of His unblemished purity and holiness, His unswerving faithfulness, and His immeasurable grace, sinners begin to see sin for what it really is, an abominable evil that defiles their entire being. Apart from the recognition of our depravity, mercy has no room to work.

## **Ezekiel 7**

***7:1 Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying,***

***7:2 "And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel, 'An end! The end is coming on the four corners of the land.'***

**7:3 'Now the end is upon you, and I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways and bring all your abominations upon you.**

**7:4 'For My eye will have no pity on you, nor will I spare you, but I will bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the LORD!**

Chapter 7 is another warning passage. It continues to have a geocentric focus, a perspective from Jerusalem. The expression “land of Israel” is a distinctively Ezekielian expression. This term used for land (אֲדָמָה *adamah*) is “a warmer, less formal designation for national territory” (Block, 248) than the more commonly used expression (i.e. אֶרֶץ *erets*). The word by itself emphasizes the ground from which one gets his subsistence; thus, to be driven from one’s land is to be removed from the source of life and economic well-being.

“The end” is the time when God’s patience and grace toward Israel runs out; nothing is left but to impose the curses of the covenant. “He declares initially that the end encompasses *the four corners of the land*, a literary figure derived from the workshop of the clothier who spreads out his rectangular piece of cloth (cf. Deut. 22:12). In Job 38:13 the earth is poetically compared to a sheet that the dawn takes hold of by the ‘corners’ in order to shake out the wicked, like crumbs from a tablecloth” (Block, 249).

Verses 3-4 describe the principle by which God will deal with the land of Israel. First, He will execute His sentence against her in accordance with her conduct (“I will judge you according to your ways”). Secondly, He will bring all her abominations upon her. And thirdly, He will have no pity upon her.

**7:5 "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'A disaster, unique disaster, behold it is coming!**

**7:6 'An end is coming; the end has come! It has awakened against you; behold, it has come!**

**7:7 'Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near - tumult rather than joyful shouting on the mountains.**

**7:8 'Now I will shortly pour out My wrath on you and spend My anger against you; judge you according to your ways and bring on you all your abominations.**

**7:9 'My eye will show no pity nor will I spare. I will repay you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst; then you will know that I, the LORD, do the smiting.**

Verses 5-7 form the second section of Chapter 7, again emphasizing the nearness of the coming doom. The repetition of thought with the preceding verses is to stress that there is no further hope.

**7:10 'Behold, the day! Behold, it is coming! Your doom has gone forth; the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed.**

**7:11 'Violence has grown into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, none of their people, none of their wealth, nor anything eminent among them.**

**7:12 'The time has come, the day has arrived. Let not the buyer rejoice nor the seller mourn; for wrath is against all their multitude.**

**7:13 'Indeed, the seller will not regain what he sold as long as they both live; for the vision regarding all their multitude will not be averted, nor will any of them maintain his life by his iniquity.**

**7:14 'They have blown the trumpet and made everything ready, but no one is going to the battle, for My wrath is against all their multitude.**

The expressions, “the rod that budded” and “the rod of wickedness,” in verses 10 and 11 are difficult to understand. In verse 10, the rod that buds and blossoms could be the coming of maturity of Babylon in its execution of judgment upon Israel, while the rod of wickedness in verse 11 is a reference to the sins of the leaders of Israel or the wicked people there; as for them, “none of them shall remain.”

With the time of judgment coming when all will be taken away, what is the use of buying or selling? The buyer will have no time to rejoice over what he has purchased and the seller no time to regret parting with his treasured possession, for all will be lost (vv. 12-13).

The people will be immobilized when wrath comes. Though they have prepared for battle and hear the trumpet sounding the alarm, they will be so stunned that no one will go to war.

**7:15 'The sword is outside and the plague and the famine are within. He who is in the field will die by the sword; famine and the plague will also consume those in the city.**

**7:16 'Even when their survivors escape, they will be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, each over his own iniquity.**

**7:17 'All hands will hang limp and all knees will become like water.**

**7:18 'They will gird themselves with sackcloth and shuddering will overwhelm them; and shame will be on all faces and baldness on all their heads.**

**7:19 'They will fling their silver into the streets and their gold will become an abhorrent thing; their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD. They cannot satisfy their appetite nor can they fill their stomachs, for their iniquity has become an occasion of stumbling.**

Devastation will strike all (7:15). Mourning will fill the land (7:16). Their strength will fail (their hands hang limp and their knees will be weak -7:17), and they will wear sackcloth and shave their heads – both expressions of mourning (1 Ki. 21:21; Neh. 9:1; Jon. 3:5; Matt.11:21).

The throwing of silver and gold in the streets (7:19) represents the disparaging of life. God had said that He would break the staff of bread in Jerusalem (Ezek. 4:16-17; 5:16); money will be useless, for there is nothing that they can buy to eat and sustain their lives (“They cannot satisfy their appetite, nor can they fill their stomachs”). Furthermore, their money does nothing to deliver them from the wrath of God (“their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD”). They will recognize the uselessness of that in which they trusted; their money will not meet their spiritual or physical needs, so they dispose of it with the rest of their rubbish (Block, 264).

As Job says in Job 31:

24 If I have put my confidence in gold, and called fine gold my trust,  
 25 If I have gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much;  
 26 If I have looked at the sun when it shone or the moon going in splendor,  
 27 And my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,  
 28 That too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above.

Nevertheless, some will survive the onslaught (v.16), though they will be forced to seek refuge in the hills like the doves where they will mourn over their iniquity that brought this wrath upon them.

***7:20a,b 'They transformed the beauty of His ornaments into pride, and they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things with it;***

Verse 20 describes the peoples' offense against God. Judah had profaned the sanctuary of God. They had taken jewels and ornaments from the temple ("the beauty of His ornaments" which could also be translated as "the glory of its ornament" -Block, 265), and desecrated His city and temple with abominable things (8:3-17). This foreshadows Ezekiel 16:17: "You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them" (which is in the context of the abominations performed with Yahweh's sacred treasures).

***7:20c therefore I will make it an abhorrent thing to them.***

***7:21 'I will give it into the hands of the foreigners as plunder and to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they will profane it.***

***7:22 'I will also turn My face from them, and they will profane My secret place; then robbers will enter and profane it.***

***7:23 'Make the chain, for the land is full of bloody crimes and the city is full of violence.***

***7:24 'Therefore, I will bring the worst of the nations, and they will possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong ones cease, and their holy places will be profaned.***

Since the temple was profaned, God saw no further reason to keep it (Feinberg, 47). Verses 20c-24 describe God's response to Israel's actions:

1. God will make their silver and gold an abhorrent thing to them (7:20c).
2. God will personally deliver their valuables and property into the hands of their enemies (7:21).
3. God will allow Babylon to desecrate the land and God's secret place (the temple; 7:22).
4. God will allow the enemy to take Jerusalem's inhabitants away as captives (7:23).
5. God will break the power of those who have strength, and destroy their pagan places of worship (7:24).

**7:25** *'When anguish comes, they will seek peace, but there will be none.*

**7:26** *'Disaster will come upon disaster and rumor will be added to rumor; then they will seek a vision from a prophet, but the law will be lost from the priest and counsel from the elders.*

**7:27** *'The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I will deal with them, and by their judgments I will judge them. And they will know that I am the LORD.'"*

Verses 25-27 show that there will be no reprieve from effects of God's judgment. Men will not find peace though they seek it (7:25); they will experience disaster after disaster and hear of the stories of horror to no end (7:26a). In their misery they will seek God through the prophets, priests and elders, but the word of God will not be found (7:26b).

The people, from the religious leaders and kings down to the average citizen, will all experience the same thing – all will be judged according to their deeds and it is through the wrath of God that the people will know that He is God (7:27).

## Ezekiel 8

Ezekiel 8-11 constitutes one long vision bookended with a chiasm (see below, Block, 272).

A 8:1a	the context of the vision
B 8:1b	the beginning of the vision
C 8:3	the transportation <i>to</i> Jerusalem in the visions
D 8:4	the appearance of the divine glory
D' 11:22-23	the appearance of the divine glory
C' 11:24a	the transportation <i>from</i> Jerusalem in the visions
B' 11:24b	the end of the vision
A' 11:25	the response to the vision

**8:1** *It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there.*

The opening verse of Ezekiel 8 establishes the time at exactly fourteen months after the prophet's inaugural vision [Aug/ Sept 592 – Alexander, 781], and therefore, after the 390 days when he was lying for some part of each day on his left side denouncing the northern tribes already taken into captivity, and during the 40 days when he was lying on his right side denouncing the sins of Judah and Jerusalem. By this point, he has established his credentials as a prophet, so the elders of the exilic community come and consult him (8:1). Probably they are

troubled by his symbol-laden actions, and are asking him what will happen to Jerusalem, and if and when they will get home.

Ezekiel does not respond off the top of his head. Rather, he waits and is granted another vision, the content of which he ultimately transmits to the exiles (11:25). (Carson, For the Love of God)

***8:2 Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal.***

***8:3 He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was located.***

***8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.***

In this vision, Ezekiel sees God in similar ways to which he had seen Him in the first vision in Chapter 1. Within the visionary world, Ezekiel is transported by the Spirit to Jerusalem, near the north gate. He is shown several horrible examples of idolatry and syncretism. Ezekiel is no longer just a spectator of the vision; he becomes a participant in it.

Ezekiel is taken to the north gate of the inner court. "Like the temple that the prophet envisions in chapters 40-48, the Solomonic Temple had two courts inside the inner and outer walls, respectively. 'The gate of the inner court' denotes the gateway through the inner wall by which access is gained to the courtyard surrounding the temple building itself. The court will figure again in verse 16 and 10:35. In verse 5 the gate in question is identified as the altar gate, presumably because the great altar of sacrifice was visible through the gate from this outer court" (Block, 280).

When Ezekiel arrives at the gate, two sights grab his attention. He first sees a statue called (literally in Hebrew) "the jealousy that provokes jealousy." This is an emphatic title that describes an object that ignites the passion of Yahweh (8:3). "The phrase is deliberately chosen, alluding to the covenant bond between Yahweh and Israel and the absolute claim He has on their devotion. According to Deuteronomy 4:15-24, which prohibits all forms of idolatry, this claim is based among other considerations on Yahweh's character as 'the Impassioned God.' Positioned at the gate to the inner court, the outrageous statue guards the entrance to the inner sanctum" (Block, 282).

The second object that catches Ezekiel's eye is "the glory of the God of Israel" (8:4) which is in sharp contrast to the idol.

“Yahweh is the divine patron of the nation; Israel has no business whoring after other gods. Furthermore, this temple is his residence exclusively; to introduce other deities constitutes a violation of sacred space” (Block).

Note: The word for jealousy is used of God 10 times in the book of Ezekiel, and expresses an important characteristic of God in relation to His people. To call God "jealous" is not only inadequate but also misleading in English. When we use the word jealousy, it is commonly associated "with envy and covetousness, the desire to own what someone else possesses, or exaggerated possessiveness over what one already owns, that is, and unwillingness to share with others" (Block, 13). Ezekiel, however, uses the term of the passion of God for one whom He loves. In the Old Testament, jealousy "is aroused when a legitimate and wholesome relationship is threatened by interference from a third-party. Thus, the word expresses an entirely appropriate response by a husband or wife when another 'lover' enters the picture. Since the marriage metaphor provides the basic image for understanding Yahweh's covenant with Israel, the description of His response to infidelity as 'jealousy' is both logical and natural. . . . Yahweh has committed himself to Israel, a devotion expressed in gracious redemption of the nation from bondage; and He rightfully expects grateful and exclusive loyalty in return. The intensity of His wrath at threats to this relationship is directly proportional to the depth of His love. It arises out of the profundity of His covenant love. Because He feels so deeply He must respond vigorously. His relationship with His people has been violated, and He must defend it" (Block, 14).

***8:5 Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.***

***8:6 And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations."***

God shows Ezekiel the abominations of Israel. In the process, He is providing evidence against Israel and is forming the background explaining His wrath.

Israel has violated the most fundamental aspect in a covenant relationship: “you shall not have other gods before Me.”

Ezekiel’s “tour guide” is not specifically identified, but when He calls the Holy Place "My sanctuary" (8:6), and says that Israel "provoked Me repeatedly" (7:17), it seems obvious that Yahweh is speaking.

Verse six is probably not a question, but an exclamation. That is, God is not asking Ezekiel what he sees, but it is calling attention to the abominations that are taking place in the temple: “Son of man, see what they are doing . . . ! (Block, 287).

**8:7 Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall.**

**8:8 He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance.**

**8:9 And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here."**

**8:10 So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things, with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.**

**8:11 Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.**

**8:12 Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'"**

**8:13 And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing."**

Next, Ezekiel is taken to the entrance of the inner court. There he sees a hole in the wall which he is told to enlarge and crawl through. When he crawls through it he sees an entrance to a room. Within the room are seventy elders worshiping creatures that were unclean, according to the Mosaic covenant, even for eating and touching (8:7-13). These seventy men, the leaders of Israel, are standing before the idols each holding a censer in his hand with the smoke rising from it. The prophet does not explain why these men are burning incense to these images, but the climax of the drama is clear when the elders' thoughts are seen in verse 12, "The Lord does not see us; the Lord has forsaken the land." The nation had come to believe that Yahweh was blind to what they were doing in the dark room. They had concluded that the Lord had forsaken them so they turned to other deities for help. Although many still erroneously believed that God would never abandon Jerusalem or the land, the actions of the elders are the actions of people who have lost faith in their covenant-keeping God, and resort to desperate measures to find help.

"The irony of the people's rationalization for their actions is obvious. On the one hand, what the men in this dark room are saying about Yahweh is in fact false about Him, but it is true of the images before which they stand. What distinguishes Yahweh from all other gods is His ability to see (Deut. 4:28; Psa. 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 44:12-20), and this vision affirms that His sight penetrates the innermost recesses of the temple and the darkest corners of human hearts. On the other hand, the statement that Yahweh has abandoned His land is in fact false, but it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. He has not yet abdicated His throne in Jerusalem, but the die has been cast. Before this vision is over, the prophet will have witnessed His departure. Consequently, with their rationalization, the paganized elders have justified their behavior and have become spokesmen for the principal theme of the vision as a whole" (Block, 294).

***8:14 Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.***

***8:15 He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these."***

Ezekiel is next taken to the north gate of the inner wall so that he can see the full view of the temple front court. There he sees “women profoundly engaged with Tammuz (8:14-15). The Tammuz cult was a fertility cult, ascribing agricultural bounty to a dying and rising god” (Carson, *For the Love of God*). When Tammuz died the vegetation withered; the budding of spring and fertility on the land marked his resurrection. The date of the vision places it in the summer when Tammuz was dead, and the land was parched from the hot summer sun. The women were most likely lamenting his death and praying for his resurrection (Alexander, 784).

***8:16 Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.***

***8:17 He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.***

***8:18 Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them."***

“Finally, Ezekiel sees priests (for only they could be between the portico and the altar) with their backs to the temple, worshiping the sun—not only cherishing the created thing above the Creator (Rom. 1:25), but violating the covenant (Deut. 4:19), influenced perhaps by the Egyptian sun god Ra” (Carson, *For the Love of God*).

In verse 17, God concludes that the people themselves were committing even greater moral and ethical evils.

"The biggest threats to faith came not from foreigners who were imposing the religious ideologies on the Israelites. The spiritual disintegration grew from within, promoted by syncretists who sought the worship of new gods, and who promoted new cults when they perceived their own God and their native forms of religious expression to have failed. But this time there will be no second chance, no renaissance of relationship with Yahweh. The chapter concludes with an adamant threefold declaration of Yahweh's resolve to pour out his wrath on the nation" (Block, 300).

“Modern forms of idolatry are different, of course. Most of us have not been caught mourning for Tammuz. But do our hearts pursue things that rightly make God jealous? Do we love dirty and forbidden things? Do we ascribe success to everything but God? We may not succumb to fertility cults, but doesn't

our culture make sex itself a god? Corrupt worship invariably replaces and relativizes God and ends up dulling moral vision (8:17)" (Carson, *For the Love of God*).

***ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE HIGH PLACES*** – condensed from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia ("High Place" – for more details see the actual article)

Archaeological research, particularly at Petra and Gezer, aided by the Old Testament notices, enables us to reconstruct these sanctuaries with tolerable fullness. The cult was not limited to the summit of the hill but took place also on the slopes, and the objects of the cult might be scattered over a considerable area. The most sacred objects were the upright stone pillars (Heb: *matstsebhah*), which seem to have been indispensable. (Probably the simplest "high places" were only a single upright stone.) They were regarded as the habitation of the deity, but, none the less, were usually many in number (a fact that in no way need implicate a plurality of deities). At one time they were the only altars, and even at a later period, when the altar proper was used, libations were sometimes poured on the pillars directly. The altars were of various shapes, according to their purpose (incense, whole burnt offerings, etc.), but were always accompanied by one or more pillars. Saucer-shaped depressions, into which sacrifices could be poured, are a remnant of very primitive rites (to this day in Samaria the paschal lamb is cooked in a pit). The trees of the high place, especially the "terebinths" (oaks?), were sacred, and their number could be supplemented or their absence supplied by an artificial tree or pole ('asherah, the "grove" of the King James Version). . .

For the ritual, of course, there was no uniform rule. The gods of the different localities were different, and in Palestine a more or less thorough rededication of the high places to Yahweh had taken place. So the service might be anything from the orderly worship of Yahweh under so thoroughly an accredited leader as Samuel (1 Sam 9:11-24) to the wildest orgiastic rites. . .

The opposition to the high places had many motives. When used for the worship of other gods, their objectionable character is obvious, but even the worship of Yahweh in the high places was intermixed with heathen practices (Hos 4:14, etc.). In Am 5:21-24, etc., sacrifice in the high places is denounced because it is regarded as a substitute for righteousness in exactly the same way that sacrifice in the Temple is denounced in Jer 7:21-24. Or, sacrifice in the high places may be denounced under the best of conditions, because it is in violation of the law of the one sanctuary (2 Ch 33:17, etc.). . .

In 1 Samuel, sacrifice outside of Jerusalem is treated as an entirely normal thing, and Samuel presides in one such case (1 Sam 9:11-24). In 1 Ki the practice of using high places is treated as legitimate before the construction of the Temple (1 Ki 3:2-4), but after that it is condemned unequivocally. The primal sin of Northern Israel was the establishment of high places (1 Ki 12:31-33; 13:2,33 f), and their continuance was a chief cause of the evils that came to pass (2 Ki 17:10 f), while worship in them was a characteristic of the mongrel throng that repopulated Samaria (2 Ki 17:32). So Judah sinned in building high places (1 Ki 14:23), but the editor of Kings notes with obvious regret that even the pious kings (Asa, 1 Ki 15:14; Jehoshaphat, 22:43; Jehoash, 2 Ki 12:3; Amaziah, 14:4; Azariah, 15:4; Jotham, 15:35) did not put them

away; i.e. the editor of Kings has about the point of view of Dt 12:8-11, according to which sacrifice was not to be restricted to Jerusalem until the country should be at peace, but afterward the restriction should be absolute. The practice had been of such long standing that Hezekiah's destruction of the high places (2 Ki 18:4) could be cited by Rabshakeh as an act of apostasy from Yahweh (2 Ki 18:22; 2 Ch 32:12; Isa 36:7). Under Manasseh they were rebuilt, in connection with other idolatrous practices (2 Ki 21:3-9). This act determined the final punishment of the nation (21:10-15), and the root-and-branch reformation of Josiah (2 Ki 23) came too late. The attitude of the editor of Chronicles is still more condemnatory. He explains the sacrifice at Gibeon as justified by the presence of the Tabernacle (1 Ch 16:39; 21:29; 2 Ch 1:3,13), states that God-fearing northerners avoided the high places (2 Ch 11:16; compare 1 Ki 19:10,14), and (against Kings) credits Asa (2 Ch 14:3,5) and Jehoshaphat (2 Ch 17:6) with their removal. (This last notice is also in contradiction with 2 Ch 20:33, but 16:17a is probably meant to refer to the Northern Kingdom, despite 16:17b.) On the other hand, the construction of high places is added to the sins of Jehoram (2 Ch 21:11) and of Ahaz (2 Ch 28:4,5).

Among the prophets, Elijah felt the destruction of the many altars of God as a terrible grief (1 Ki 19:10, 14). Amos and Hosea each mention the high places by name only once (Am 7:9; Hos 10:8), but both prophets have only denunciation for the sacrificial practices of the Northern Kingdom. That, however, these sacrifices were offered in the wrong place is not said. Isa has nothing to say about the high places, except in 36:7, while Mic 1:5 equates the sins of Jerusalem with those of the high places (if the text is right), but promises the exaltation of Jerusalem (4:1 f). In the references in Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; Ezek 6:3,1; 16:16; 20:29; 43:7, idolatry or abominable practices are in point (so probably in Jer 17:3, while Jer 48:35 and Isa 16:12 refer to non-Israelites).