

August 16

Ezekiel 8-11

Have you ever received news that just crushed your heart? I have... And I'll tell you about that in a minute, but for now, we see with Ezekiel, visions that must have crushed him...

In chapters 8 and 9, we enter with Ezekiel into the second vision of the Book. He is lifted up by "the spirit" and he sees the temple in Jerusalem. Remember now, physically Ezekiel is in Babylon with the captives but he is shown the temple. God shows him the abominations going on there.

First he sees "the idol that provokes to jealousy" at the north gate. The north gate was considered the most important gate into the temple because it was the closest one to the king's palace and therefore was the gate the king used whenever he was coming to worship. The kings of Judah were not only practicing idolatry but they were doing it in the temple of the Lord!

Then, encouraged by the Spirit of the Lord, Ezekiel digs through a wall to discover the elders of Israel worshipping snakes and detestable animals whose images had been placed on the inner walls of Jehovah's temple. The elders of Judah are secretly worshipping demons both at the temple and in their own homes!

Third the women at the entrance to the north gate are weeping for Tammuz a Samarian 'god' of vegetation. The worship of Tammuz involved fertility rites.

Finally in the courtyard of the temple there are men praying with their backs to the temple -- and faces toward the sun which they are worshipping! I think that God showed Ezekiel the things that were actually happening in the temple and why he was so angry with his chosen people.

In chapter 9, an angel is sent to mark the foreheads of the faithful. The ones with the angel's mark will be spared; the ones without the mark are to be judged for their sin. The word for "mark" is the Hebrew letter Taw -- the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the scripture of Ezekiel's day that mark was written as X -- a cross. The early Christian commentators took special note of that linking it back in time with the Passover and forward with the cross of Christ.

To Ezekiel, the most terrifying thing of all is what he saw at the end of chapter 10, for it is here that Ezekiel watches the Shekinah glory of God lift, hover and then depart from the temple in Jerusalem. But if the presence of the Shekinah Glory sent a clear and unmistakable message, then so did its departure and the message was chilling: the Lord God of hosts was abandoning His temple, He was not any longer with His people and from this point on if they cried out, He might not hear and respond. When Ezekiel saw the Shekinah cloud depart, he knew the complete destruction of Israel was a real possibility.

You know, this must have broken his heart... To see his hometown building of worship desecrated.

I grew up attending Countryside Chapel 2-3 times per week from 1972-1986. It was my hometown place of worship. After I graduated, the church merged, and they sold the building. I have only been back twice because it is so painful. I never go in. Outside the building is a sign that says Islamic Studies Center. The place where I grew up worshipping Jesus is now set up to worship a false God.

In the U. S., church attendance is in decline by 7% per 10 years. That is a steep decline. What is happening today is just like the time of Ezekiel. False Gods are replacing true worship.

Friends, I don't know where this intersects your present, but I know where your future is. Protect the places set aside for worship... More than that, honor God in your worship. Show up every week with a heart bent toward him...pray heartily, love deeply, give generously, serve wholeheartedly and the church of the future will thrive, not decline.

We must invest heavily in the emerging generation and young leaders. The future of the church hangs in the balance....