

Message #11**Ezekiel 8:1-18**

There is a threat that is very real to the people of God at any time and in any dispensation. It is the threat of secret idolatry. This threat was not only true in Ezekiel's time, but Paul warned against it for the church (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). One of the last things the last Apostle John wrote was "Little children guard yourselves from idols" (I John 5:21). So this can be a real threat to any of us.

An idol is anything that dominates your life. An idol is the most important thing to you. It is, as one theologian said, the "ruling passion" of one's life.

Idolatry is not just worshipping something made of wood or stone; it is putting something as more important than God. Idolatry is very serious business because it will lead us away from a focus on God and His Word and will lead us to please ourselves and not Him. God never takes idolatry lightly.

It had been over a year, 14 months to be exact (1:1/**8:1**), since Ezekiel received that first vision back in chapter 1. We may remember that God gave him a heavenly vision in the 5th year of Jehoiakin, which was 593 B.C. According to **verse 1**, it is now year six, which means it is 592 B.C..

We learn that Ezekiel was sitting in his house with the elders of Judah. Probably they were discussing what had gone wrong so that they ended up in Babylon. Certainly they would have wondered about the strange things Ezekiel had done and said. They probably were wondering in view of all of this negative data, what we need to do in order to have God bless us again. More than likely they were waiting for God to give them His Word.

In that context of being in his house sitting with the elders, **verse 1** says the hand of the Lord God fell on Ezekiel. It was an "overpowering force" of God that came upon Ezekiel.

What actually happens here is that Ezekiel is transported by God to the Temple in Jerusalem to actually see the evil idolatry that would cause God to remove Himself from His own temple. What Ezekiel is permitted to see is unbelievable. In a modern dispensation we would say he was permitted to see what was really happening behind scenes in Church. What we learn here is this:

GOD WILL REMOVE HIS PRESENCE AND POWER AND BLESSINGS AND WILL POUR OUT SEVERE JUDGMENT ON HIS IDOLATROUS PEOPLE, BUT HE WILL PROTECT AND RESTORE AND BLESS THOSE WHO TURN FROM THEIR SIN AND ARE FAITHFUL TO HIM.

I am sure that Ezekiel and some of the Elders were wondering where they went wrong. God says I will show you.

According to **verse 2**, Ezekiel saw one who appeared in the likeness of a man. He had the appearance of fire which speaks of Divine judgment; he was bright and shining with the glory of heaven. The brief description of this man is very similar in some respects to the description of Jesus Christ, whom John saw in Revelation. **The Holy God monitors what happens in the Temple and He monitors what happens in the Church and since we are the Temple, He monitors what is happening in us.**

According to **verse 3**, this man caught him by a lock of hair and lifted him up between earth and heaven and brought him to the visions of God and transported him to Jerusalem at the north gate of the Temple. The visions of God are the things God sees. Ezekiel won't be brought back home from this vision until Ezekiel 11:24.

Now according to verse 3, the first thing that Ezekiel was shown was an idol that provoked the jealousy of God.

The noun "idol" (semel) used here is a rare Hebrew noun. It is only used here and in Deuteronomy 4:16 and II Chron. 33:7, 15. This was a tangible sculptured idol that apparently was sitting at the entrance of the north gate of the Temple. This is what so angered and outraged God. Right in His temple was this idol.

According to **verse 4**, Ezekiel saw the glory of God there at the Temple, like he had seen before in the plain. We may remember that in the plain Ezekiel literally saw God in Person standing in human form (Ezek. 3:23). So Ezekiel is looking at the Temple and sees the actual presence and glory of God there, but in that Temple was an idol so God's presence is removed.

What God does is give Ezekiel the ability to see the evil He sees in His own sacred Temple. There are four evil things that He lets Ezekiel see:

HORRIBLE EVIL #1 – Ezekiel sees a specific hand-carved idol sitting to the north of the altar Gate. **8:5-6**

The text does not say what idol he saw, but many believe that this was one of the Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility that was set up in the Temple by Manasseh (II Kings 21:7; II Chron. 33:7, 15).

Now because of this, God was keeping "far from My sanctuary." Those words "far from" are words that imply more than just physical distance. It refers to a total alienation. Because of Israel's idolatry, God must alienate Himself from His people and His own place of worship.

Now God says to Ezekiel that this is abominable. God considered this to be a "great abomination." But then at the end of **verse 6**, he says, "you will see greater abominations."

Having an idol in the Temple of God is about as bad as it can get, but it gets even worse.

HORRIBLE EVIL #2 – Ezekiel sees the leaders of the Temple actually participating in evil, idolatrous ceremonies. **8:7-13**

God brought Ezekiel to the entrance of the court and he saw a hole in the wall (**8:7**). God told Ezekiel to dig through it and when he did he came to some secret entrance of some secret place of evil worship (**8:8**). These were places the average person did not see.

In **verse 9**, God told him to go in and take a look at the wicked abominations that he would see. So Ezekiel did and he saw the following sights:

(Reality #1) - He saw every form of creeping things and beast and detestable things that were carved as Idols all over the walls. **8:10**

There were figures of detestable animals like that mentioned in Leviticus 11:10-42 and apparently these idolatrous figurines were viewed as some deity.

(Reality #2) - He saw 70 elders of the House of Israel with Jaazaniah and all of them had censers of incense and they were raising it in some form of worship to these idols. **8:11**

When he went in behind these closed doors, he saw an idolatrous worship right in progress. He saw 70 elders whom he knew, who were the religious leaders of Israel, and they were participating in an idolatrous worship that was leading Israel into this corrupt system of religion. These leaders were responsible for God's judgment upon His own people.

This horrible idolatry was specifically forbidden by God in Deuteronomy 4:17-18. God said it was a corrupt and detestable thing to do to worship these false deities.

(Reality #3) - He saw each elder worshipping carved idols and blaming it on God. **8:12**

Apparently each elder had his own idolatrous little room. They had their own little private chamber where they could indulge themselves in idolatrous, evil, abominable worship.

The leaders were not blaming their evil sin as the problem, they were basically arrogantly saying God does not see us anymore and God has forsaken us so we will worship these idols.

Well it is obvious that God does see what is happening and Ezekiel is there seeing it, too.

These leaders should have been telling the people to humble themselves before God and He will once again restore them. But instead they are worshipping idols.

But if that is not enough, in **verse 13** God says I will show you worse evil than even this. It must be bad to be worse than religious leaders worshipping idols.

HORRIBLE EVIL #3 – Ezekiel sees the women sitting at the Temple weeping over Tammuz.
8:14-15

Tammuz, the Babylonian “Dumuzi,” was a mythological god of spring vegetation. In the mythological story, Tammuz dies and goes to Hades and revives again and comes back every spring. This crazy false religious cult eventually went to Greece and was given a new name “Adonis.”

Wailing for Tammuz was a Babylonian ritual that actually mourned over a supposed mythological deity Tammuz, who had died and gone to the underworld. The weeping was so that he would return from the dead and cause the vegetation to grow again. Along with this wailing were immoral, vile, licentious and lude conduct. God’s women were doing this.

So here were supposedly the Hebrew women of God sitting at the entrance to the Temple of God and they were weeping and wanting a mythological deity to return from the dead. These are the women of God who are slapping God in His face right at His Temple.

This was a horrible thing for Ezekiel to see, but in **verse 15** God says you will see worse than this. In fact, the activity described in the next verse is the worst of all the abominations.

HORRIBLE EVIL #4 – Ezekiel sees 25 men in the inner court bowing down and worshipping facing east. **8:16**

Ezekiel is now brought to a place “between the porch and the altar.” This was a special area where the priests went to pray to God on a fast day and it was a special, sanctified place within the inner court.

In this final vision, Ezekiel saw 25 men with their backs turned away from the Temple and almost an Islamic idolatry they were prostrate on the ground facing east, which is the direction of the sun.

Sun worship ceremonies are still in existence. People sing hymns to the sun; they dance to the sun; and at night they are immoral in honor of the sun. Sun worship is still practiced by heathens, but here it was being practiced by the leaders of Israel.

They were so corrupt that they would not even bow before the True God of Israel. Twenty-five is a favorite number seen by Ezekiel—**8:16**; 11:1; 40:1, 13, 29.

If you are going to worship some idol, you will have to turn your back to God. The moment you do that, you are in serious trouble.

The point here is that you have 70 elders secretly inside privately involved in idol worship and you have 25 more men outside openly involved in idol worship. What a disgrace. What a disgrace.

What even makes this ever more shameful is that Ezekiel knew many of these guys by name. In fact, one of them is executed and Ezekiel names him in Ezekiel 11:13.

These were people in the sacred places physically worshipping false gods. These were people that Ezekiel thought were really right with God and really concerned about true worship. He had no idea that these men were involved in such evil.

I would be willing to say that if God were to permit us to see what is really going on behind the scenes in some people's lives, it would make us sick. They really aren't dedicated to God and His Word. They do not care at all what God's Word says. That is what Ezekiel saw.

In **verses 17-18**, God says because of their evil there will be the following results:

Result #1 - Their evil is what is causing Me to fill their land with violence. **8:17a**

Result #2 - Their evil is repeatedly provoking and angering God. **8:17b**

The idea of putting a twig to their nose is the idea of turning up their nose to the Word of God.

Result #3 - Their evil will cause God to pour out His wrath. **8:18a**

Result #4 - Their evil will cause God to show no pity. **8:18b**

God will not look favorably on them with His eyes and He will not listen to their prayers with His ears.

If God's people pursue idolatry, it will not end well. God will allow horrible things to happen to His own people.