

Ezekiel 9: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Ezekiel chapter 9 And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist.

And the Lord said to him, Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it. And to the others he said in my hearing, Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eyes shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark, and begin at my sanctuary.

So they began with the elders who were before the house. Then he said to them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out. So they went out and struck in the city.

And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face and cried, Our Lord God, will you destroy all the remnant of Israel? In the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem.

[1 : 30] Then he said to me, The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see.

As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will bring their deeds upon their heads. And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back words, saying, I have done as you commanded me.

In Ezekiel chapter 8, the prophet was transported in a vision to Jerusalem. There he saw idolatrous abominations being performed in the temple and in its courts, abominations that gave grounds for the Lord's imminent abandonment of his defiled sanctuary, and destruction of Jerusalem and its leaders.

This vision was received a little over a year after Ezekiel's first vision, presumably while he was still performing the prophetic sign act described in chapter 4. The elders of the Judahite exiles were with Ezekiel in his house, while the hand of the Lord came upon him, and he received this vision.

The vision proceeds as a narrative through chapters 9, 10, and 11, and in chapter 9, the Lord sends a destroying force through the city. The causes for the Lord's abandonment of his temple and judgment of the city were seen in the preceding chapter, in the four scenes of the abominations.

[2 : 51] Ezekiel was the witness to all of this. Chapter 9 begins with executioners being sent out to carry out the sentence that was cast at the end of the preceding chapter. Six armed figures come forward in verse 2, along with a man clothed in linen, with a writing case.

Presumably a scribe, along with the warriors. The six warriors and the scribe might be associated with the archangels. In Revelation chapter 8 verse 2, for instance, we read of the seven angels that stand before the Lord.

We might also consider here the Talmudic identification of the scribal figure with the archangel Gabriel. The scribe is dressed in linen, which would have been associated with the priests, and also with the angels, and I think for similar reasons.

Priests play something of an angelic role, and angels play something of a priestly role. The seven figures enter through the upper gate and stand beside the bronze altar, ready to serve.

Ezekiel at this point sees that the glory of God has gone up from the cherub. It has now moved to the entrance of the temple. The Lord's glory was understood to be enthroned above the cherubim, between the two cherubs on the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant.

[4 : 01] The fact that the Lord has gotten up from his throne and is moving towards the threshold of the temple is a sign that he is about to leave the house. He is abandoning his earthly palace and throne room.

The scribal figure is addressed first. He is instructed to go through the whole of the city of Jerusalem and put a mark, or a towel, the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet, upon the foreheads of all of those who sigh and groan over all of the sins committed in the place, the sins we saw in the preceding chapter.

The mark to be placed upon their foreheads within the script of the time would have been like an X. Later it would become a T. Perhaps with marking their foreheads with the final letter of the alphabet, we are seeing something of the finality of the judgment that is about to come upon the place.

Other possible aspects of its meaning would be as a mark of ownership and a signature. Daniel Block and others recognise a parallel between the mark placed upon the foreheads here and the mark placed upon Cain back in Genesis chapter 4 after he killed Abel and was saved from being killed himself as the Lord placed a mark of ownership and protection upon him.

Peter Lightheart speculates about the possible significance of the fact that the word for sign back in Genesis chapter 4 verse 15 has its final two letters reversed for the Tao mentioned in this chapter.

[5 : 19] He writes, Those who mourn over the sins of Jerusalem are not marked Cains, but anti-Cains. In such a manner they are associated more with Abel. The themes of this chapter would invite comparisons with the events of the Passover, where blood was placed upon the lintel and the doorpost, so that the destroying angel would not kill the people within the house.

We might also recall the two angels inspecting the city of Sodom and delivering the family of Lot before the whole city was destroyed. Also the scarlet cord that Rahab displayed in order to protect her and her family from being destroyed in the overthrow of Jericho.

In Revelation chapter 7 verses 1 to 3, we have a very similar account in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem there. After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

In that chapter, 144,000 of the tribes of Israel are sealed. The weak and the vulnerable people who are left in the city are marked out for destruction. Old men, young men and maidens, little children and women.

[6 : 48] This sort of universal judgment is associated with harem warfare. We witness this in the most signal events of God's judgment, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain, the land of Egypt, where all the firstborn were killed, Jericho and the cities of Canaan.

When God's holiness breaks forth, no flesh is safe. All human beings that aren't explicitly marked out or atoned for are cut off as sinful flesh. This was one of the purposes of circumcision.

It was a mark upon the body, symbolically cutting off the flesh in the organ with which it was most associated, so that the person bearing that mark would not be cut off with all flesh when judgment came upon them.

No one is to be spared, and the judgment must begin at the sanctuary, the place where the holy presence of God is most focused. The angels begin their judgment with the elders who were before the house, whether these are the 70 elders within the room that Ezekiel saw, or the 25 men who were outside, or old men just in the precincts of the temple.

It's a matter debated by commentators. There seems to be a fusion of two sets of men here, the men who are inside the building who make the statement that we see in verse 9, and then the 25 men who are outside.

[8 : 01] The six men are explicitly commanded to defile the house. The house is going to be abandoned by the Lord, and the great temple of Solomon that was once holy to the Lord would be defiled by the bodies of the slain.

As the angels depart, Ezekiel falls on his face and laments the seeming destruction of all of the remnant of Israel. Perhaps the hearer might hear some sort of echo here of the story of chapter 18 of Genesis, as the two angels leave for the judgment of Sodom, and Abraham is left with the Lord interceding for the place.

However, no pity will be shown by the Lord to the city of Jerusalem. Four reasons are given. The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah, the land being full of blood, defiled by the slain, the city being full of injustice, its leaders corrupt and oppressive, something that we see also in the book of

