

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## EZEKIEL 8-11

Farewells are no fun! Since my wife and her mom live 2500 miles apart, I've witnessed my share of teary farewells. It doesn't matter the length of the visit when the time comes to say "*good-bye*" there's a sadness.

It's tough to say *good-bye* to someone you love.

*Perhaps you can recall a painful good-bye?*

Yet there's never been a more heart-breaking, gut-wrenching, tear-inducing goodbye than the one we'll study tonight. For 853 years - almost a millennium - the glory of God dwelt among His people, Israel.

*God's glory - the khabod - the Shekinah* resided in the Temple. The visible manifestation of God's presence hovered over the Ark in the Holy of Holies.

But the day came when the glory departed. It was a grim, fateful, devastating day for God *and* His people.

**God said good-bye!** Because of Israel's idolatry the glory cloud moved *slowly... reluctantly... lingeringly... yet decisively...* from the Temple's inner sanctum.

God's glory moved from His Temple, outside the city, and ultimately ascended back to heaven. God lifted His presence, and thus His protection; to set the stage of the invasion that was to come. Just six years later the Babylonians destroyed the city and burned the Temple.

When the infant nation left Egypt we're told in Exodus 13:21, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people."

This fiery cloud was a tangible token of God's presence. It was a combination of wind and fire, both biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew word for glory is "khabod." It means *weighty*. God's glory is the aura surrounding His presence. It was also called the "Shekinah" which means "*the glory of glories.*"

In the wilderness this glory-cloud apparently covered the whole camp, and offered the people supernatural protection. Psalm 105:39 reads, "He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light in the night."

The Sinai Peninsula is one the harshest, most volatile ecosystems on Earth. The daytime temps can soar to 120 degrees. At night it drops near freezing.

In addition, there's no shade, no food, no protection from sudden winds and devastating sandstorms.

A conservative estimate of the size of the nation of Israel when they exited Egypt was two million. That's about two-thirds the population of metro Atlanta. The nation's camp had to have covered a number of square miles. Apparently the Shekinah acted as a huge tent.

Picture a mushroom cloud. Its epicenter was the Holy of Holies. Its canopy protected the entire camp.

Apparently, once the people settled into the land of Canaan the fiery cloud was limited to the Temple.

In Leviticus 16 God instructs the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies with the sacrifice, and He says, “For I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.”

When the mercy seat and sacred Ark were captured in battle by the Philistines, it so upset the pregnant granddaughter of the High Priest it threw her into labor.

She named her son, “Ichabod,” or “no glory.” In 1 Samuel 4 she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured.” The Ark and its lid, or mercy seat, were home for God’s glory.

Later when Solomon dedicates his Temple, the glory of God is so thick the priests can no longer function.

Solomon says in 2 Chronicles 6:1, “The LORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud. But I have built You an exalted house, and a place for you to dwell forever.”

Yet the glory didn’t rest in the Temple forever. The glory-cloud would only reside there for three centuries.

And Ezekiel was on hand to report the glory’s departure. He describes the glory’s exodus in tonight’s chapters, 8-11. Chapters 8 and 11 tell us WHY the glory departed. Chapters 9 and 10 tell us HOW...

Chapter 8 begins, “And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month (on our calendar, September 17, 592 BC). It had been thirteen years

since the first exiles were brought to Babylon. Seven years since Ezekiel was taken captive.

“As I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.” Ezekiel was warning the exiles that the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed, but since they were on the other side of Mesopotamia, they wondered why...

God shows them *why*, by transporting Ezekiel to Jerusalem to show him firsthand how wicked the Jews had become. *God's throne-chariot revs up in verse 2...*

“Then I looked, and there was a likeness, like the appearance of fire - from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, like the appearance of brightness, like the color of amber.” This description fits the person Ezekiel saw previously in 1:27. Sitting on God's throne-chariot was a person with the “appearance of a man.”

The only person allowed to sit on the throne of God - who appears as a man - is His Son, Jesus Christ.

Here's another pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

Verse 3, “He stretched out the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my hair; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven, and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the north gate of the inner court, where the seat of the image of jealousy was, which provokes to jealousy.” God puts Ezekiel in a hair lock. Lifted him off the ground and whisked him away 600 miles from Babel to the city of Jerusalem.

There're three explanations... **First**, he was bodily transported. **Second**, Ezekiel simply sees a vision.

Or **third**, he was literally taken away, but he was transported spiritually not physically. His body stayed in Babylon, while his spirit was transported to Jerusalem.

This is similar to what happened to Paul when he was “**caught up**” to the third heaven. He told the Corinthians he didn't know if he was in the body or out of the body... Ultimately, I'm not sure it matters. What's important is *what he saw*, not *how it happened*.

Verse 4, “**And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain.**”

Ezekiel is referring to the vision he saw in Chapter 1, where the cherubs and wings under God's throne-chariot rev up... You might have a *mobile phone*, but God has a *mobile throne*. It's angel-powered.

And here God takes Ezekiel back to Jerusalem.

He takes him on a Temple tour, and shows him how wicked the people had become. How deserving they were of judgment. It was like a “**tour of homes.**” Welcome to the “**Lifestyles of the rank and wicked!**”

“**Then He said to me, “Son of man, lift your eyes now toward the north.” So I lifted my eyes toward the north, and there, north of the altar gate, was this image of jealousy in the entrance.**” Here at the heart - in the midst of God's Temple - the people had erected an idol.

God calls it the “**image of jealousy... that provokes to jealousy.**” Realize, God desires our allegiance, and it hurts

Him when we direct it elsewhere. God says in Exodus 34:14, “For you shall worship no other God, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

God loves us unreservedly, whole-heartedly - but He expects the same kind of love from His people.

Our God doesn't tolerate being second fiddle. He refuses to share His people's affections. He wants to be *our loudest yearning* and *our deepest longing*.

Think of it this way, God owns no timeshares. Everything He owns He holds exclusive rights.

And this is what He expects from us. If we're in Christ we've been bought at a price, and God gets angry when what He owns is given to someone else.

This happens when people follow idols... When the Hebrews of old worshipped carved images - or when Christians today allow a career, or house, or hobby to crowd God out of their lives - it becomes idolatry.

Around the altar of your life are there any “*images* that *provoke* (God) *to jealousy*?” Is there anything in your life that gives God reason to question your love?

In verse 6 God tells Ezekiel, “Furthermore He said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations.”

God's people have run Him out of His own house!

A jealous God can no more coexist with “*great abominations*” than a faithful spouse can live with an

adulterer... And God is telling Ezekiel what he's seen is just the tip of the iceberg. God has more to show him.

“So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, “Son of man, dig into the wall”; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me, “Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.” God shows Ezekiel a secret chamber.

“So I went in and saw, and there - every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls.

And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up.” The elders - men who were suppose to help God lead His people - were serving as priests to idols.

Verse 12, “Then He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, ‘The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.’” This was shocking, Israel’s elders were secretly worshipping idols - offering sacrifices to *the beasts of the field*, rather than to *the God of heaven*.

As Paul observed in Romans 1:25 the Gentile world worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. Yet these idolaters weren’t Gentiles, but Jews - and not just Jews, but elders... Even Jaazaniah was guilty...

*Jaazaniah* was *the son of Shaphan*, a leader in King Josiah's revival some forty years earlier. Here a man with a godly heritage, and a priestly position, was involved with idols... On the surface these elders were probably claiming to serve the Lord. But in the secret chambers they were offering sacrifices to false gods.

And here's the question for us, **what's going on in the secret chambers of our heart?** *Are we guilty of secret sins?* What do you watch after the kids go to bed? What do we do with our free time when we're out of town? *How do we live when no one else is looking?*

Even if our hands are clean, what goes on in the secret chambers of our mind? What kinds of lust do we nurture there? If Jesus is Lord there'll be no secrets!

God directs Ezekiel back to his tour. Verse 13, **"And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing." So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the Lord's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz."** This was the Babylonian fertility god.

Supposedly, Tammuz was the supernatural offspring of the evil Nimrod, and his wife Semiramis. His evil worship was accompanied by lust and sexual orgies.

Verse 15, **"Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these." So He brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the Lord,**



between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east.” Ezekiel sees in the midst of the Holy Place, near the altar of incense a hellish crime being committed.

Twenty-five men - probably one from each of the twenty-four priestly divisions, plus the High Priest, were on their knees worshipping the rising sun in the eastern sky. *This meant their backs were to the one true God!*

*How's that for poetic justice.*

“And He said to me, “Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here?

For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose.” We're not really sure the meaning of this expression... It could be a ceremonial gesture involved in nature worship. Perhaps, praying into a bouquet of flowers - putting a branch to the nose.

Or this could also be a way of saying, “they thumbed their nose at God..” They ignored the Lord.

God replies with a stern promise. “Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.” They were past the point of repentance. They can cry out to God all they like, but the Lord has already decided to punish their idolatry!

Chapter 9, “Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, “Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.” And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer’s inkhorn at his side.

**They went in and stood beside the bronze altar.”**

Often in Scripture angels are referred to as men, for they materialize in human form. Here we see seven angels - **angels with an ax-to-grind**. We know these are guardian angels for they have charge over the city.

Six of these angels have battle-axes. The seventh angel is ready to write. He has an inkhorn, or a pouch worn by a scribe where he keeps his pen and ink.

In the book of Revelation seven angels also play a prominent role. Angels pour out seven bowls of judgment, and they blow seven trumpets of judgment.

In both instance, the seven angels mete out justice.

Verse 3, “**Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer’s inkhorn at his side; and the Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.”**

Everyone who's heart was right - who grieved over the city's idolatry - received a mark on their foreheads. This protects them from God's judgment on Jerusalem.

This also happens in Revelation 7, at the end of time, 144,000 witnesses will receive a seal in their foreheads. And it's this seal that protects the righteous from the dire, dreadful plagues of the Great Tribulation.

Apparently, Satan isn't very creative; for the mark the Antichrist will use to blackmail the world into worshipping him is also a mark on the forehead.

He counterfeits what God uses to mark His people.

It's interesting, the word "*mark*" here, is the Hebrew letter "*taw*" - or the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and it's in the shape of a "*T*" or *cross*. Perhaps the mark God places on the foreheads of the 144,000, and the citizens of the New Jerusalem, is Calvary's cross.

Verse 5, "*To the others* (the angels with the battle-ax) *He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity.*

*Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple."*

Notice, judgment begins at the house of God! This is what Peter wrote to the Church, 1 Peter 4:17, "*The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...*" Before God judges a lost world, He purifies the Church. He always gets His own house in order first!

“Then He said to them, “Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!” And they went out and killed in the city.” In 7:9 God revealed to Ezekiel a name for Himself, "Jehovah-Naka" - “God who strikes.”

He is Jehovah-Jireh, God who provides. Jehovah-Rapha, who heals, but He is also the God who strikes.

*The God of grace is also the God of fury.* God isn't squeamish. He doesn't faint at the sight of blood. He sees to it that justice is served and sin is punished. He has no problem judging the wicked when it's time.

“So it was, that while they were killing them (as the angels with the battle-ax go to work), I (Ezekiel) was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, “Ah, Lord God! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?” Ezekiel is stunned. He wonders how far will God go...

Then He said to me, (He justifies the severity of His actions) “The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see!’

Verse 10, “And as for Me also, My eye will neither spare, nor will I have pity, but I will recompense their deeds on their own head.” Just then, the man clothed with linen, who had the inkhorn at his side, reported back and said, “I have done as You commanded me.”

Chapter 10, “And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne.”

Again, this is the vision Ezekiel saw in chapter 1. He saw a colossal fireball that turned out to be God’s throne-chariot. It sat on top of wheels - actually wheels within the wheels. They looked like gyroscopes.

It was propelled by wings of cherubim. You’ve heard of *horsepower*, but God’s chariot runs on *angel-power*.

“Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, “Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city.” And he went in as I watched.” *Fiery coals* are another idiom of judgment.

“Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple...” Remember, God’s glory had remained stationary for 853 years. Since Israel came out of the Egypt, the glory rested over the Ark of the Covenant.

Now *the khabod, the Shekinah*, begins to move.

Suddenly, the glory-cloud rises up from the mercy seat, and moves to the threshold of the Holy of Holies, which is the door that leads to the outer courts. *The glory of God is beginning it’s slow, painful evacuation...*

“And the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord’s glory.”

This is interesting when you read the NT book of Hebrews, 1:1-3, “God... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.” Notice the writer calls Jesus, “*the brightness of the Lord’s glory.*”

He makes a direct reference to Ezekiel. As a flash of a camera is to the room light, so is Jesus to the glory of God. He’s the *full blaze* or *concentration* of God’s glory.

And this is what Ezekiel saw in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. I believe the glory that rested in the Temple all those years was really the presence of the second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ.

Imagine, day in, day out, over eight centuries, Jesus was in the Temple, watching the animal sacrifices that foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of His own body.

But notice what happens next. “And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks.”

This is sad news, the sound of angel’s wings was an indication that God’s throne-chariot was cranking up.

The glory of God is about to move again!

Verse 6, “Then it happened, when He commanded the man clothed in linen, saying, “Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim,” that he went in and stood beside the wheels. And the cherub stretched out his hand from

among the cherubim to the fire that was among the cherubim, and took some of it and put it into the hands of the man clothed with linen, who took it and went out. The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

And when I looked, there were four wheels by the cherubim, one wheel by one cherub and another wheel by each other cherub; the wheels appeared to have the color of a beryl stone." The color "*beryl*" is a sea-green.

"As for their appearance, all four looked alike - as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went toward any of their four directions; they did not turn aside when they went, but followed in the direction the head was facing. They did not turn aside when they went. And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around." The throne is omni-directional. It has no turning radius. It spins on a dime.

It's like the new suitcases with the swivel wheels.

When we discussed God's throne-chariot in Chapter 1, we delved into the possibility that what people have referred to as UFO sightings might be nothing more than the appearance of demons - or fallen cherubim.

There's great similarities in appearance and mobility.

Some UFO aficionados have said Ezekiel saw an alien aircraft, but Ezekiel didn't see an *unidentified* flying object, he clearly identified what he saw as God's throne-chariot, and its angels. *It could be that UFO sightings are actually the activity of fallen cherubs.*

Verse 13, “As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, “Wheel.” It was a cherub, but it was called a wheel. God’s throne-chariot moved on angel’s wings.

“Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, the second face the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.” There’s one difference between here and Chapter 1 - here the face of a cherub takes the place of the face of an ox. *Could it be the two look similar?*

The classical depiction of a cherub’s face with rosy, plump cheeks, and a pug nose is actually wrong. The cherubim’s face may’ve actually resembled an ox.

Verse 15, “And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar.

When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also did not turn from beside them. When the cherubim stood still, the wheels stood still, and when one was lifted up, the other lifted itself up, for the spirit of the living creature was in them. Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.” Here the Shekinah glory is hitching a ride on God’s throne-chariot and it’s empowering cherubim.

“And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.” The glory moved from the Ark to the Temple’s



threshold, now to its east gate. God is slowly and painfully saying good-bye.

“This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. And the likeness of their faces was the same as the faces which I had seen by the River Chebar, their appearance and their persons.

They each went straight forward.”

Remember, Solomon’s Temple had three courts - the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and an outer court.

God’s glory has left the inner court - moved past the threshold - through the outer court - and now is at the east gate... the gate to both the Temple and the city.

For eight-and-a-half centuries God’s glory filled the Temple - now it’s moving from the Ark, to the Temple’s threshold, to the city’s gate... In Chapter 11 the Shekinah will move to the top of the mountain outside Jerusalem where it ascends back to heaven.

Today, a Temple no longer stands in Jerusalem. God is no longer dwelling in temples made with hands.

1 Corinthians 6 tells us that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. But like in the Temple of old, God doesn’t tolerate spiritual infidelity. If we allow other loves and secret sins to rival our devotion to God, we’ll grieve His Spirit and His glory will leave. He’ll remove His glory, *His anointing from our lives*, and no longer use us.

And it begins in the inner court. God evacuates from a person's private life. He gets tired of being neglected or relegated to second. He lingers at the threshold. He doesn't want to leave. He hopes for repentance.

And the public doesn't know what's happening...

On the outside of the man's life all looks well. His ministry is still blessed. Folks get saved. God still uses the fellow for a season. But in his inner life something sad has happened. God has removed His glory.

Eventually the glory exits even the outer court. The man's sin is seen. He's exposed for his compromise.

Chapter 11, "Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the East Gate of the Lord's house, which faces eastward; and there at the door of the gate were twenty-five men among whom I saw Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people." These were not the 25 priests we saw in Chapter 8. These are "*princes*" or secular leaders.

"And He said to me: "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and give wicked counsel in this city, who say, 'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the meat.'" Jeremiah had told the exiles to settle down in Babel - *build a home, sign a mortgage* - you're going to be there for a while.

But false prophets in Jerusalem were saying that the exiles would be brought back soon. Jerusalem was the pot and they were the stew. As meat belongs on the stove, the exiled Jews belonged in Jerusalem.

But Ezekiel has a different message, “Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man!”

Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and said to me, “Speak! ‘Thus says the Lord: “Thus you have said, O house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind.”

Notice, God has the ability to read minds!

This is why there are no secrets before God!

Verse 6, “You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain.” Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are the meat, and this city is the caldron; but I shall bring you out of the midst of it.”

The meat in the pot will be the slain in Jerusalem.

Those who stay in Jerusalem are not the stew - they are in a stew. God is about to judge the Jewish city.

“You have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you,” says the Lord God. “And I will bring you out of its midst, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and execute judgments on you. You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord.”

And this is exactly how it played out. The Babylonian general Nebuchadnezzar set up his field headquarters in the town of Riblah, on the border between Syria and Israel. It was there he judged King Zedekiah. He killed his sons; then plucked out his eyes with a hot poker.

Verse 11, “This city shall not be your caldron, nor shall you be the meat in its midst. I will judge you at the border of

Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord; for you have not walked in My statutes nor executed My judgments, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you.”””

“Now it happened, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, “Ah, Lord God! Will You make a complete end of the remnant of Israel?” It’s one thing to hear of God’s judgment and the death of your countrymen, it’s another to see it.

While Ezekiel is speaking he sees two men die.

Verse 14, “Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, are those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Get far away from the Lord; this land has been given to us as a possession.’” Jews like Ezekiel who had already been taken to Babylon were looked down on by those who had remained in Jerusalem.

God chose the Jerusalem Jews to possess the land.

Yet God tells Ezekiel, “Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.’” God had not forsaken the exiled Jews. He would still be with them.

Perhaps the biggest tragedy for the faithful Jews living in exile was their separation from the Temple.

Suddenly, they had nowhere to worship God or study the Scriptures. And as a substitute, it was in Babylon that the Jews first built synagogues or assemblies.

In the Middle Ages the word the Jews used for synagogue meant “**little sanctuary**” - in reference to this promise to Ezekiel. *But that wasn't the idea here...*

God says to Ezekiel that He Himself will be their place of worship. In exile, He'll be “**a little Temple**” to them. He'll be present. They can go to Him directly. He won't forsake them... As Jesus told His disciples, “**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**”

And God had a new covenant for His people. Even in their death throes, He gave them hope for their future.

Verse 17, “**Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'"** Remember the three parts to the New Covenant - **regathering, regeneration, and a reestablishment of the kingdom.** Here He promises the fulfillment of the first two clauses of the covenant.

After the seventy years God will reassemble them to the land. Israel will once again be Jewish homeland.

**“And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there.”**

When the Jews return they'll be a different people. They'll cast down the idols they once worshipped.

The Babylonian captivity did cure the Jews of their idolatry. Even today, the Jews refuse to worship idols.

It was *a cure*, but it wasn't *a cure-all*. Sin still lurked in the hearts of the people. Self-righteousness and legalism took the place of idolatry. **They cleared the land of idols, but they didn't clear their hearts of sin.**

**“Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.”** This is a beautiful promise. Here an OT prophet describes a NT experience. Remember, *the New Testament* is just another name for *New Covenant*.

And the second clause of the NC is a new heart.

Jesus described it to Nicodemus as being **“born again.”** It's a spiritual birth. God changes me - not by rehabilitating the old, but by providing me a new heart - a new nature - a new love and set of desires.

The new birth isn't a reformation. It's a regeneration.

A miracle occurs in a person who repents of his sin and believes in Jesus. God cuts out the stony heart, the nature that's hard and resistant to God - and replaces it with a heart of a flesh - what's more like a spongy heart - a softness toward God, a compliance.

Under the old covenant the Jews tried to clean up their act, and reform the old nature, but to no avail.

It would be like asking me to sing. If I'm tone deaf, it doesn't matter how much I try, it won't be good enough. I need an ear for the music and new vocal cords... And under the NC this is God's answer for sin.

Rather than command us to try harder, God gives us a new ear and a new voice, so we can sing on-key!

This is what Jesus paid for on the cross. At His Last Supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood, which is shed for you."

Having this new nature doesn't always mean I'll hit every note, but now I can hear what the music is suppose to sound like. My heart is in tune. *The spirit is willing, even if at times the flesh is weak...* We'll talk a lot more about the NC when we get to Chapter 36.

Verse 21, "But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord God." Those who aren't willing to receive this new birth, their sin will be judged.

And the glory-cloud makes one more move, "So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city." If you're familiar with the geography of Jerusalem you realize just beyond the east gate there is a valley and a mountain on the other side. God's glory moves again to the Mount of Olives.

The glory-cloud has gone from the Ark, to the threshold, to the east gate, now to the mountain top.

Rabbinical writings say the Glory sat atop the Mount of Olives for three-and-a-half years before returning to heaven. The rabbis said the glory withdrew in ten stages. God was demonstrating how hard it was to say good-bye. He left reluctantly, hoping they would repent.

And 600 years later when the glory of God returns to Israel He appears in the exact same spot where He departed... Matthew 21 tells us, “When they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus...” And Matthew describes His Triumphant Entry. Jesus descended from the Mount of Olives, and entered the Temple through the east gate.

Remember the expression Ezekiel used for the fiery cloud “*the brightness of the Lord’s glory*” it’s the same term used by the writer of Hebrews to describe Jesus.

God’s glory will return to Jerusalem’s Temple, the same way it left, but in the person of Jesus. John 1:14 says of Jesus, “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

*And how long did that glory linger?* Jesus’ ministry lasted three-and-a-half years. The same length of time the rabbis said the glory-cloud rested on the Mount of Olives... Yet again, Israel refused to repent and believe.

And the glory departed once more... *the same path as before...* Jesus ascended to heaven from atop the Mount of Olives - from the exact same launching point.



*Yet that's not all!* He'll come again one day. The glory will return in His tangible presence, and where do you think Jesus will touch down when He comes to set up His kingdom? Zechariah 14:4 tells us, **"In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives."** He'll return to the exact same mountain where His glory ascended, and according to Ezekiel 44 He'll enter through the exact same gate where He departed - *the east gate*.

From past to future, Jesus has come and gone from Jerusalem along the same path. And He'll come again.

*And this gives us hope.* If God's glory has departed from your life. If compromise has grieved the Holy Spirit and you feel as if God has withdrawn His glory, He can restore it! The glory will return the same way it left, if you repent of your sin and humble your heart.

In verse 24 Ezekiel's vision ends. **"Then the Spirit took me up and brought me in a vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to those in captivity. And the vision that I had seen went up from me. So I spoke to those in captivity of all the things the Lord had shown me."**

His visionary voyage returns him Babylon. And now his job now is to instruct the exiles in all that he saw...