

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"The Departed"

10:1-22

God had departed from the Holy of Holies but came back for a short while:

- Back in verse three of chapter nine His glory "had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple."
- In verse three of chapter ten God's glory comes back a little and "filled the inner court."
- He lingered there until verses 18 and 19.
- Finally, in chapter eleven, in verses twenty-two and twenty-three, He has departed the city.

God lingered in and around the Sanctuary for a time. I think we are being shown that God was reluctant to depart. It was His will and desire to dwell among His people. He had been at work ever since the Garden of Eden to make the way back into His presence for the human race. His glory dwelt in the Holy of Holies over the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

But His people had forsaken Him for other gods. They had set up idols in the Temple itself. So God must depart.

But He lingered, reluctant to do so.

It takes nothing away from the deity or majesty of God to say He was reluctant. In fact, it magnifies His longsuffering and grace and mercy. It reminds us that we were created for the express purpose of having fellowship with God. Everything else ought to be subordinate to our having a relationship with Him.

We are describing God departing His Sanctuary on the earth. What application might this have to us?

Since each individual believer is now the temple of God we can safely say He will not depart from us.

But as we are also corporately the temple of God on the earth, there is a sense in which we might say God is no longer among us. The most primary warning of just such a condition was issued by Jesus Himself when, in His letter to the church at Ephesus, He said He would remove their lampstand if they failed to repent and return to their first love for Him.

Since a lampstand gives off light, we can loosely interpret Jesus to mean that such a church would lose its light, or its 'glow,' of the glory of the Lord. They would be going through the motions but without the love.

So once again, as we work through God's presence departing from Israel, we are concerned with keeping our own fellowship with Him - both personal and corporate - vibrant and radiant.

Ezekiel 10:1 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.

Ezekiel 10:2 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.

The "man clothed with linen" had first been charged with marking the righteous Jews so they would be spared the coming judgment. Now He was to take coals and "scatter them over the city."

From an earthly perspective, Babylon would come and burn the city. From Heaven's perspective it was a judgment by God.

Ezekiel 10:3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court.

Ezekiel 10:4 Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory.

Ezekiel 10:5 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.

Once more there was a fullness of God's glory in the Sanctuary. The court was full of His brightness. There was a mighty sound in the outer court.

The people couldn't see it; they didn't hear it. Their spiritual senses had been dulled.

In their case, their spiritual senses had been dulled by idolatry. They were going after the gods of the surrounding nations.

And their spiritual senses had been dulled by worldliness because the practices accompanying their idolatry were worldly, carnal, and fleshly.

Idolatry and worldliness abound more than ever! Advances in technology and travel have made the world a much smaller place. We can experience a worldliness unknown to previous generations. Idols are all the more prevalent.

If we are not ever so careful we will try to mingle idols and worldliness with our walk with the Lord. The result will be a dullness to the things of the Lord. He is still there, still speaking, still glorious; but we can't sense it. Our walk seems dull because we have become dull!

Ezekiel 10:6 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.

Ezekiel 10:7 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.

Ezekiel 10:8 The cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

Ezekiel 10:9 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.

Ezekiel 10:10 As for their appearance, all four looked alike - as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

Ezekiel 10:11 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.

Ezekiel 10:12 And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around.

Ezekiel 10:13 As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, "Wheel."

Ezekiel provides another fantastic description of these cherubim and their movements.

Why does he emphasize that the "wheels" were called "Wheel?" It does seem to keep us grounded in the fact that this was something he could describe using his normal language. It is common to say that these prophets may have seen machines from the future, or even alien spacecraft, and were struggling to describe them using terms familiar to them in their own respective century. But Ezekiel said that the "wheels" he saw were called - not by him but by someone in the vision - "wheel," as if to answer the question, 'Were these really wheels or something he was struggling to describe?'

They were wheels. Heavenly, for sure; but wheels nonetheless. This was not a close encounter with a visitor from outer space. It wasn't a futuristic flying machine. It was the chariot of God.

Ezekiel 10:14 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.

Ezekiel 10:15 And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar.

Ezekiel 10:16 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.

Ezekiel 10:17 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.

Ezekiel makes it clear these are the same cherubim he saw in chapter one. Some of the detail he gives is different but that is to be expected.

One of the things Pam likes to do is make up photo-scavenger hunts for Disneyland. There is so much detail there that you can overlook. So she finds obvious but obscure objects, photographs them with no background reference, and asks you to find them. It's actually a lot of fun. It shows you that there is more there than you initially realized.

When you compare Ezekiel's two descriptions, there are some differences. No problem! He saw more, or from a different perspective.

Critics try to say the differences prove the Bible was not inspired. They're dumb - it proves just the opposite! Someone trying to fool you wouldn't be so stupid. He'd just cut-and-paste his descriptions.

We saw in chapter one that the cherubim formed a kind of chariot throne for God. The emphasis here is the presence and the glory of God in His sanctuary, among His people.

But it was departing!

Ezekiel 10:18 Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

Ezekiel 10:19 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.

Ezekiel 10:20 This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim.

Ezekiel 10:21 Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings.

Ezekiel 10:22 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.

Ezekiel keeps hammering his point that these were the same cherubim from chapter one. Why the repetition?

Here is what this repetition reminds me of. When Elijah was about to be taken to Heaven he told Elisha that a double portion of God's Spirit would indeed be granted to him if Elisha saw Elijah taken away. It involved Elisha spending a long and difficult day with Elijah, ending up in the wilderness. At one point Elijah miraculously parted the Jordan River to get to a solitary

spot. Once he was taken, how would Elisha get back? He was believing by faith that God would fulfill Elijah's word to him.

When the chariot came for Elijah, Elisha was indeed there and exclaimed, "The chariot of the Lord!"

Who was Elisha talking to? No one was there besides he and Elijah. Why exclaim what he saw?

He was letting God know that he was expecting to receive the double portion promised and to go forward in serving the Lord.

Ezekiel was expecting to go forward serving the Lord.

- Regardless the grim prospects because Jerusalem would fall, he would go forward serving the Lord.
- Regardless the fact God's visible, physical, glorious presence would depart, he would go forward serving the Lord.

Think of it. God's city would burn. His Temple would burn. His very presence would depart. ***But His prophet would take it all in stride and go forward serving the Lord.***

There would be no visible reason to serve the Lord. No city; no sanctuary; no glory cloud. It would all be by faith in His Word that He would return.

But the return of His glory wouldn't be for hundreds of years. It wouldn't be until Jesus came as God in human flesh - and it would be a veiled glory, only momentarily revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration and again for forty days after the resurrection and then at His ascension.

For the Jews the return of His glory is still future - at His Second Coming.

Can I go forward serving the Lord with no visible reason? Am I willing to walk by faith? The more that is taken away from me, am I drawn closer to the Lord or am I driven further away?

Job had practically everything taken from him. Yet he could say, “though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

Habakkuk would experience terrible political and economic woe. But he declared,

Habakkuk 3:17 Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls -

Habakkuk 3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

If we grow dull because we keep adding things, then God will strip them away so our senses for Him can be heightened again.

He thus lingers over us, reluctant to let us depart from His glory.

