

# EZEKIEL

## *Cry Me a River*

*By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down,  
yea, we wept When we remembered Zion  
Psalm 137:1*

Text

Ezekiel 8:1-18

Topic

The LORD tells Ezekiel to “dig into the wall”; and when he dug into the wall, there was a door

Title

**DIG DUG**

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**I don't feel any less masculine in telling you that I once binge-watched all six hours of the 1995 BBC version of *Pride & Prejudice*.**

Jane Austin masterfully portrayed a noble, almost pure, form of jealousy. Mr. Darcy exhibits it towards Elizabeth Bennet, not in a possessive sense, but in a way that motivates him to protect her from unworthy suitors.

**Do you ever think of God as being jealous?**

In the Book of Exodus God told His people, “Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, **whose name is Jealous**, is a jealous God)” (34:12-14).

**God is so jealous for believers. He says it is His name.**

His jealousy for His people is prominent in our text:

- In verse three He describes “the seat of the image of **jealousy...** which provokes [Him] to **jealousy.**”
- In verse five, “north of the altar gate, was this image of **jealousy** in the entrance.”

We were created to worship Him, with eternity in our hearts. Nothing & no one else can ever satisfy us. Everything else we gravitate towards is a form of idolatry and will only, ultimately, destroy us.

Among the many names for God, don't overlook “Jealous.” I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Jealous Is Determined In His Jealousy For You,** and **#2 Jealous Is Devoted In His Jealously For You.**

### **#1 - Jealous Is Determined In His Jealousy For You (v1-16)**

One of the commentators I read used this illustration:

*God is jealous like a powerful and merciful king who takes a peasant girl from a life of shame, forgives her, marries her, and gives her not the chores of a slave, but the privileges of a wife. His jealousy does not rise from fear or weakness but from a holy indignation at having His honor and power and mercy scorned by the faithlessness of a fickle spouse.*

Ezk 8:1 And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, 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.

### **Where were you on 9/11?**

You remember precisely where you were on account of its national significance. The vision that spans the next several chapters had 9-11 national significance to Ezekiel. In it he would witness one of the most lamentable events in Jewish history. He was shown the departure of the glory of the LORD from the Temple.

The exiled Jews were not put to slave labor. Ezekiel had his own house. Don't get me wrong: They were captives. But they were comfortable captives, so much so that when Persia liberated them to return home, most stayed put in Babylon.

The “elders of Judah” were the layman appointed to serve as the leaders among the exiles. It goes back to Moses being told to choose 70 elders to help govern the Jews in their Exodus.

I would like to think that they met often to discuss their situation.

Tomorrow when you go to work and someone asks, "How was your weekend?" I dare you to say, "I went to church and the hand of the Lord GOD fell upon me there."

We struggle to express exactly how God 'speaks' to us because, after all, it is supernatural. It's OK.

Ezk 8:2 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.

We call this Person a Theophany. It is an OT appearance of the Second Person of the tri-une God. It is Jesus.

Why "fire" & "amber?" Don't know. We can say that the Lord is *always* dressed for the part.

Ezk 8:3 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...

I want you to picture John the Baptist. As a life-long member of the Nazarite Vow club, *his hair had **never** been cut.*

Picture him again. Is it far-fetched to suggest that he braided his hair? Did he have dreadlocks?

Samson was a life-long Nazarite. He told Delilah, "weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom..." He came to her **already** with seven locks of braided hair that she wove together into one.

Ezekiel wasn't grabbed by the hair & dragged up & off. This Person, for some reason, simply took hold of Ezekiel's hair. Then the Holy Spirit "lifted him." (Can we say he was hair-lifted to the Temple?).

It is unclear if Ezekiel was removed bodily, or if he saw all this in his mind. It was not uncommon for OT prophets to be removed bodily from one location to another.

Ezk 8:3 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.

There is no information about this "image." It was an idol or statue or object of some kind that represented a pagan god or goddess. It was so-called because its presence in God's house provoked Him.

Ezk 8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain.

At its dedication, the LORD put His presence in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple. He was there as Shekinah - a shining cloud of glory.

How can a person see Shekinah, recall all the history & miracles related to it, but turn from it to worship a lifeless object made by his/her hands?

Here is a more pressing question: How can you and I, who have God the Holy Spirit indwelling us, ***sin as if He isn't present?***

Ezk 8:5 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.

The "altar gate" most likely refers to the aforementioned North Gate. It provided access to the area near the altar of burnt offering, where priests performed sacrifices.

Ezk 8:6 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."

Did you catch what He said? "To make Me go far away from My sanctuary?" This is a build-up to the LORD leaving the Holy of Holies for good. From the destruction of the Temple in 586BC until the arrival of Jesus on Earth in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the glory of the LORD departed from Earth. When the Lord Jesus departed, ascending to Heaven, His Church on Earth became the Temple. We have in us, indwelling us, God the Holy Spirit. **We** reveal the glory of God until He comes for us, to snatch us home to Heaven.

We are shown expressions of idolatry among three groups of Jews: Elders, women, and priests.

Ezk 8:7 So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall.

Ezk 8:8 Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall"; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door.

Ezk 8:9 And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there."

Ezekiel was shown a hidden entrance to a secret room. You might say he "did a little digging" to discover it.

Ezk 8:10 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.

Most commentators see this as Egyptian art. That makes sense because the political leaders in Jerusalem were making an alliance with Egypt to overthrow Babylon. It would fail, and was a reason why Nebuchadnezzar made a third siege on Jerusalem, destroying it.

Ezk 8:11 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.

There was no Sanhedrin at that time in Israel's history. These 70 were lay-leaders, just like the guys at Ezekiel's house in Babylon. In their case they were leading in abominations.

Shaphan was the scribe who read God's Law to King Josiah when it was rediscovered in the Temple. It incited one of the greatest revivals in Israel's history. Yet here Shaphan was, just a few years after, incensing-up with a secret room full of idolaters.

They were a secret society. Archaeologists have recently discovered their title - The Hole-in-the-Wall Gang.

Ezk 8:12 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.' "

Instead of understanding their plight as their own choosing, they Jerusalem Jews blamed God. For such destruction to occur must mean God had withdrawn from them.

What about you & I? Since we have received the promise of the permanent indwelling of God the Holy Spirit, we cannot ever be forsaken, and the Spirit is in us wherever we go, whatever we do.

One thing we do is reduce the Spirit to an influence or an ability. We know the doctrine - that He is a Person. But when we sin, we are not behaving according to our beliefs.

Think of it this way:

- If God the Holy Spirit is an influence and an ability, then I can draw from it anytime I want. *When I want to sin, I simply ignore my ability to not sin.*
- If God the Holy Spirit is a Person - which He is - *I cannot sin without defying Him and grieving Him.*

We really must have a more robust understanding of the Personhood of the Spirit;

- Pentecostals tend to treat the Spirit as a force.
- Cessationists tend to equate Him with the Bible. Their critics say they worship God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible.

One reformed theologian said this: "Do you know who the Holy Spirit is? Do you understand the Holy Spirit in terms of a personal relationship? Or does the Spirit remain for you a vague, misty, abstract concept or an illusive, amorphous force? Forces in and of themselves are impersonal. But the Holy Spirit is not simply an abstract force. He is a person."

Ezk 8:13 And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing."

Ezk 8:14 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.

Tammuz spent part of the year in the underworld and part on earth. It 'explained' the seasonal cycle, with winter representing his death and spring his return to life.

In addition to idol worship, the Jewish women were in a part of the Temple God had made 'off limits' for them. Pagan gods afforded opportunity for women to ignore their biblical roles & responsibilities. It all seemed so modern, so progressive.

The roles & responsibilities of men & women in the home, in the church, in public, are set by God. The roles of women are subordinate to men. It doesn't make women inferior. It establishes an order that best communicates the Gospel.

Ezk 8:15 Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations than these."

Ezk 8:16 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.

These are the priests. They literally turned their backs on the LORD to worship the sun itself, or a sun god.

The Jews didn't start with abominations everywhere. It crept in. The old illustration is this: If an airplane is off course by just 1° after an hour of flying it will be about 1 mile off course. The further it flies, the more that small error compounds. Over the span of a 60-mile journey, it would be a mile off course, but over thousands of miles, that minor deviation would lead the plane hundreds of miles away from its intended destination.

**Stay on course...Or make the necessary course corrections.**

## **#2 - Jealous Is Devoted In His Jealously For You (v17-18)**

**Sorry, but the word "devoted" in a romantic context takes me to the musical, *Grease*, and Sandy singing, *Hopelessly Devoted to You*.**

OK; I'm over it!

Ezk 8:17 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.

Ezk 8:18 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 “returned” from the short-lived reforms under King Josiah. Revival is great; but often it proves fleeting. It must take root in a pursuit of holiness and, especially, the prominence of the Bible.

Are you wondering about the phrase, “they put the branch to their nose?” It is believed to be a derogatory gesture. They gave God the bird!

These last two verses make God out to be more of a *destroyer* than *devoted*. Take into mind the whole context of Ezekiel. Yes Jerusalem and the Temple were to be looted and leveled. Many Jews would die violent deaths. Their captivity would last for 70 years in Babylon. But all of this is in the context of bringing His people to repent, rebuilding their Temple, and returning to his steadfast love for them. Israel is the apple of God’s eye.

Despite their almost constant failure through history, Paul the apostle can declare, “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew... All Israel will be saved... They are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

God is every bit as jealous for **you**. He loves the church and gave Himself for us, that He might sanctify and cleanse us with the washing of water by the word, that He might present us to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that we should be holy and without blemish. He is able to keep us from stumbling, And to present *us* faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.