

JESUS THE JEALOUS HUSBAND

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The proclamation of Ezekiel's message causes the slow, sad departure of the glory of God. As if God Himself were loath to leave His people to their awful state, the glory departs.

In chapter 4 Ezekiel begins his ministry to Israel. He is to use various visual aids, symbols, and parables in his proclamation of the divine message.

He is first to take a tile. This would be a clay tablet, still soft, undried in the sun, and upon it with a stylus, he is to portray a map of the city of Jerusalem. He is to depict a siege. Forts built against it. Mounds raised up high so that catapults can throw rocks; and archers can shoot their arrows into it. He is to show the camp of the besieging armies. Set up battering rams about its walls.

Then he is to take an iron pan, or a plate, or a slice; and roll it up as a wall between him and the city, and set thy face against it when it is to be besieged, "and thou shalt lay siege against it." This [Ezekiel is told] is to "be a sign to the house of Israel." (Eze. 4:3). Now the city is to be surrounded by the Babylonish forces. The walls, the mounds, the battering rams, are to throb in terror and destruction against its walls. Ezekiel is to be separated from the city of Jerusalem. As if to say, his healing, comforting, power-bringing message is to be kept away from it.

Next the prophet is to lie upon his left side for three hundred ninety days. (vss. 4, 5). And then he is to lie upon his right side (vs. 6) for forty days. And suddenly the Lord says, at the end of verse 6, "I have appointed thee each day for a year." Here is the day for a year principle and its application when the Lord wills it. He had done that earlier to Israel when they rebelled against Him after the Exodus from Egypt. Now He has done it against Judah with the prophet, when they are continually rebelling against Him. For three hundred ninety days, Ezekiel is to lie upon his left side. And you say to yourself, How could somebody stay on one side all that length of time without moving?

And so the Lord tells him (vs. 8), "And, behold, I will lay bands upon thee, and thou shalt not turn thee from one side to another, till thou hast ended the days of thy siege." So this was supernatural strength to enable Ezekiel to carry out an unnatural activity.

What do these numbers mean? The three hundred ninety days of verse 5 for the house of Israel, the northern kingdom, began with the revolt of Jeroboam in 975 B.C. and ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 585 B.C.—three hundred and ninety years later.

The forty days for the house of Judah (vs. 6), might begin with Jeremiah's appealing ministry in 625, and end with the fall of Jerusalem in 585. Both periods indicate a prolonged rebellion, idolatry, revolt against the purposes of God.

And as the people looked at Ezekiel carrying out the divine mandate in public, he was to be a sign to the house of Israel. "This shall be a sign to the house of Israel." Eze. 4:3. When he had laid that iron plate as a wall, when he had himself carried this out, he was to be a sign to Israel.

So the first contact that Ezekiel had with his people, he was to demonstrate the irrevocable judgment that would come upon God's people because they revolted. The siege would take place. The people would be destroyed. They would be bound in chains.

And Jeremiah had been doing this for almost forty years in Jerusalem. Over and over again he had appealed to them. Accept God. Confess your sins. Turn from your iniquities. Judgments are inevitable. Do not fight Nebuchadnezzar. They thought the city, the people, and the government would last forever, so they didn't listen.

And by the River Chebar, the prophet Ezekiel takes up the same theme. God sustains Jeremiah in Jerusalem. God promises to sustain Ezekiel by the River Chebar. And just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel were sustained when they obeyed the divine mandate, the inference is that if Judah will only listen, if they would only yield to the divine will, God would carry out His purpose for them too.

Then the prophet was bidden, vs. 9, to take all kinds of food: wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, fitches. Those were the dried, portable foods, grains, that the people ate. They were to be put into one vessel. They were to be made into food. "According to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof." Well over a year he was to eat this kind of food. He is not allowed to eat it as liberally as he might wish. "Thou shalt eat . . . by weight, twenty shekels a day" (Eze. 4:10). This was carefully rationed. This was famine fare. In verse 11, "Thou shalt drink also water by measure, the sixth part of an hin: from time to time shalt thou drink." The quantity was to be carefully regulated.

Further, this food was to be prepared quite different from what the prophet was used to. He normally used dried patties dropped by the cattle as fuel. In other words, you will not be able to find cattle fuel. You will have to use human fuel (vs. 12). This shocked the prophet. "Then said I, Ah Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted: for from my youth up even till now have I not eaten of that which dieth of itself, or is torn in pieces; neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. Then he said unto me, Lo, I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith" (vss. 14, 15).

Now here, again, the seriousness of the situation was to be underlined. Not only are the rations to be characterized by an intense famine, but circumstances were to become very primitive. Substitutions that would revolt the soul of man were to be made. Conditions were to be terrible.

"Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem: and they shall eat bread by weight, and with care; and they shall drink water by measure, and with astonishment: that they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity" (Eze. 3:16, 17).

Far away in the land of captivity, Ezekiel was to send this message to Jerusalem. I can imagine he was sitting down writing it out carefully. Writing out on a clay tablet on which he had made a map of Jerusalem depicting battering rams, mounds, and camps against it, an iron plate. He is to report that he is to lie on his side for forty days representing the conditions of Judah. Three hundred and ninety days underlying the state of Israel. Eating his food on thin rations. Cooking it in the most primitive, revolting conditions. All of this was written out and sent to Jerusalem. This was to underline what Jeremiah was saying. And the people were refusing to believe what the prophet in Jerusalem had said. Now in the mouth of two prophets the word was to be sent.

They were to be astonished one with another. But God adds, they shall "consume away for their iniquity" (4:17).

Now Ezekiel carries out his next symbolic, prophetic, representation. "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor, and cause it to pass upon thine head and upon thy beard: then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a

knife: and a third part thou shalt scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them.” Eze. 5:1, 2. But of these he is to take a few hairs, a remnant sort of speak, “Thou shalt also take thereof a few in number, and bind them in thy skirts. Then take of them again, and cast them into the midst of the fire.” Ezekiel 5:3, 4.

Now what does this mean? “Thus saith the Lord God; This is Jerusalem.” Eze. 5:5. While Ezekiel is in faraway Babylon he is to send a second vision to Jerusalem.

“I have set thee” (vs. 5) the Lord reminds them, “in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her.” He had made her to be the object lesson, the example of what God wanted all the world to become. But, what did Jerusalem do? Jerusalem changed God’s laws. They refused to listen to God’s messages and statutes to walk in them.

They “multiplied more than the nations” (vs. 7), but for all their prosperity, they did not keep God’s law. They did not according to God’s judgments. “Therefore. . . I am against thee” (vs. 7) the Lord says. “I will do in thee that which I have not done” (vs. 9). “The fathers shall eat the sons” (vs. 10). Ezekiel saw it coming. The tragic part of it is these words of Ezekiel were exactly fulfilled. “The sons shall eat their fathers . . . and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds” (vs. 10).

Why? Because “thou hast defiled my sanctuary” (vs. 11). Now this expression is found many times in Ezekiel. “Thou has defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things. . . therefore will I also diminish thee” nor “spare” thee.

In chapter 8 God is sending His specific messages just when His people need them. We have seen the seriousness of God’s warning against Israel’s condition. The mood is somber. The future seems dark, indeed. Yet, the only reason the Lord is telling His people the true facts of life is that He might work for their salvation. He wishes to shake them away from their complacency and lethargy, to awaken them from their dreadful sleep, to quicken their perceptions, and to make them sensitive to the dangers that lie ahead of them.

Their conditions in the long-ago, were exactly the same as the church of Laodicea. Neither hot, nor cold; but lukewarm, indifferent, thinking themselves rich and increased in goods and needing nothing. And yet, miserable, poor, and blind, and naked, and doomed, in facing the future without any guard. God seeks to appeal and break through this barrier of impenetrable indifference. And so

He uses the most strong language and the most penetrating analysis of their sins.

In the eighth chapter five sins of ancient Israel that are paralleled exactly in modern Israel, are brought to the attention of God's people. Verse one tells us that as he sat in his house, the elders of Judah came and sat before him. Everyone was aware that problems existed. Unless God intervened something dreadful and even worse might take place. And, yet, while unwilling to change from within, they look for counsel from without. And so we have a picture of the elders of Israel coming to the spirit of prophecy to see if there was a testimony, a special revelation, for that specific moment. And Ezekiel tells us, the hand of the Lord fell there upon him. He was taken off in vision (vs. 8:1).

And the vision he beheld was the vision of the man on the throne. First of all he sees, in vs. 2, the likeness of fire. From his loins downward, fire. From his loins upward, brightness, the color of amber. Here is the man, the Son of man. We see him in chapter one upon the throne of omnipotence, high and lifted up. We watch His hand guiding the affairs of men (Eze. 1:26). His color was the color of amber. There again, from his loins upward and his loins downward he was the color of fire.

Let's pause a moment and consider the word "loins." As the apostle tells us we should gird up the loins of our mind. 1 Peter 1:13. We should be sober and vigilant. Paul, discussing the relationship of Levi and his priesthood through Aaron to Abraham and the Melchisedek priesthood, informs us that Levi, although he was in the loins of his father Abraham yet through Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedek. Loins, there, is the term for the procreative faculty of man. The loins of the mind would then be the creative, generative, power of the intellect.

And so, here is a being clothed in fire and the center of attraction is His loins. This is the area in which the seeds of future planning, of future creation, of future restoration rests. It's full of luminous flame—the color of amber.

There is an interesting term. It describes the resinous remains of conifers that existed before the flood. A piece of amber takes us back across the millennia. Fragile, easy to be fractured, simple to be crushed. It has nevertheless survived where the great men of the earth have been laid to rest in their last resting places. As I think of

the word “amber” I think of more than its color. I think of its durability. It’s simple, quiet existence through the millennia.

And here is a picture of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, clothed in radiance, with light streaming from Him. His creative, generative, designing faculties, sharpened. And the whole impression is that He is preserved through the ages. He lives from epoch to epoch.

And this being put forth the form of a hand. The hands of Jesus Christ are very fascinating. Harry Anderson has depicted the question of Zechariah: What happened to thy hands? in his moving illustration. Christ bears upon His hands the scars of Calvary. One holds a blacksmith’s calloused hand in His and can feel the toil that has gone into his hands that has made them so hard. One sees the hand of a carpenter, sees the stress through which that hand has passed.

Christ’s creative hands that formed Adam and Eve in the beginning, that touched the sick and healed the dumb, that restored the dead, guides the destiny of man.

And this hand took Ezekiel by the lock of his head “and the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem” (Eze. 8:3). Now he was there sitting before the elders in the land of Mesopotamia, but in vision he was in Jerusalem. The elders have come to him in captivity with the question, What can be done? What is the need? And in vision he is taken to faraway Jerusalem.

And there he sees “the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north” (Eze. 8:3). Right there in the temple he sees the gate. And in this position of sacred importance he sees an “image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy” (Eze. 8:3). The idol of cherished thoughts and conserved feelings of the worshipers is jealousy. And at the same time he beholds the glory of the God of Israel that he saw at the beginning. Two visions: the vision of God’s glory and the vision of man’s jealousy, set side by side in that flash of inspiration.

Now the glory of God in the book of Ezekiel might be likened to the hero in the book. The whole movement of the prophecy of Ezekiel revolved about the glory of God. We see the glory, first, in chapter one. The glory, as we have seen from John 1:14, is the incarnation, the Word becoming flesh—full of grace, full of truth—the glory of God. God’s glory is focused on the incarnation that brings about the salvation of man.

We saw the glory, again, in chapter three. Guiding, inspiring, infusing, enthusing the prophet of Israel. Now we see the glory of

God here in chapter eight, by the side of the image of jealousy. In contrast here is God's sacrificial gift in Christ for man's redemption. And man in the temple of God who would redeem him is indulging in thoughts of jealousy.

The picture is one of God's people, and in particular, the leaders of worship in the temple, bringing in strange gods, Baal, and calling him their lord and husband. It is a breaking of covenant with God, who had taken people in to be his, as a husband does a wife; and when she breaks covenant, forsakes the guide of her youth, and is for others, this provokes the husband more than any thing. They provoke God, who is patient, to jealousy. No sins provoke God more than idolatry and false worship. God will "stir up jealousy, and prevail against His enemies" (Isa. 42:13).

An idol, or an image, is that thing or concept that produces within man's personality, the major dynamic of his activities. What is it that makes me tick? Is it my love for God and God's love for me and my submission to God's eternal purpose? Or is it some person or some thing or some ideal? My desire for power, for position, for prestige, for money, for social acceptance, for a house that is impressive, for an airplane, to write many books, to be accepted as a lecturer, author? What is it that makes me tick? Do I do all the things that I do because in the back of my mind, God, through His Holy Spirit, as revealed in His word, focusing on Jesus Christ, has shown me my place in the redemption story; and has broken my heart; accepted my life; now regulates within my soul my every activity? What do I have there?

Now God will put His glory, His loveliness in Jesus Christ, as the focal dynamic in the Christian's personality. Instead, here is an image of jealousy. The worshipers in the temple were looking away from God to their fellow men.

Then the Lord said to him, "Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north" (8:5). When he did this, there was the altar. The altar is where Jesus Christ died, Calvary. There in its place is this "image of jealousy in the entry" (Eze. 8:5). As a deflection from the sacrifice from the Lamb slain in the midst of the altar, is the image of jealousy. At the entry to the altar in the north. As we have been the north is the place from which the adversary comes. There stands as a guardian, as a guide, as a mentor, jealousy.

And the Lord said, "Seest thou what they do? even the great abominations" they commit here? "That I should go far off from my sanctuary . . . thou shalt see greater abominations" (Eze. 8:6).

And “He brought me to the door” (Eze. 8:7). There evidently was a little peep hole through the door. And he looked through. And the Lord said to him, dig now in the wall. And so he dug in the wall and behold, another door—a secret door—that was not visible immediately.

And the Lord said to him, Pass through this door. See what wickedness is done here. And so he went in to the secret chamber and there he saw portrayed around the walls of this secret chamber “every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about” (Eze. 8:10).

Here is a second vision. First, a vision of sin—jealousy. Second vision, in the minds, in the hearts, in the souls within the personalities of those who claimed to be worshiping God are all kinds of evil things portrayed.

Now what does this mean? The worshipers have their minds filled with abominable things. What is portrayed? The pictures that they form in their imagery, in their souls, are only evil and filthy continually.

And as he watched there were “seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel” (Eze. 8:11). These weren’t the young and the inexperienced. These were the gray-heads. In the midst of them stood their leader. Every man had his censer in their hand—a symbol of prayer, of mediation. A thick cloud of incense went up. The picture is one of devotion.

But the Lord says to him, “Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth” (Eze. 8:11). The picture of the second vision is of what those who should be leading in worship, worshiping God in the temple of God, who claim to be praying to God are doing in the dark. Every man in the chambers of his imagery.

Now our Lord, Himself, looked forward to the time when that which was spoken in secret would be proclaimed on the housetops. And that which was done in the secrecy of the closet would be depicted for all to see. Now Ezekiel is given the picture of just such a scene. God knows what men do in the dark. God knows how they live in the secret, in the chamber of their imaginations.

Then he said “unto me . . . thou shalt see greater abominations” (Eze. 8:13). “He brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s

house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz” (Eze. 8:14).

Now Tammuz was the male equivalent of the female Venus or Aphrodite. Tammuz was the masculine god. The feminine god was Venus. It is interesting that in all forms of pagan religion the gods are divided up into males and females. And in the countries where idols are more purely found, such as India, the details of anatomy suggested by these gods are very clearly demarcated. Tammuz was the man-god. And in the imagination of the women worshiping there the male image with its sex overtones, with its fleshly lusts stimulating their thinking—their imaginations—there they were emotionally overcome by Tammuz.

Then the Lord says to him, Son of man, have you seen this? Let me show you even “greater abominations.” And so he brought the prophet into the inner court of the Lord’s house and behold at the door of the temple “between the porch and the altar” (Eze. 8:16). Now between the porch and the altar was where the laver was located. This was the fountain for cleansing for sin and for uncleanness.

There he sees about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of God, worshiping “the sun toward the east.” Amazing picture.

They look away from the jealousy of their own hearts; through the imagination of their secret thoughts that they do in the dark; through the sex overtones of their inner workings; they now turn their backs to the temple of God; and their faces are towards the sun. They are worshiping the sun towards the east.

And now, for the fifth time, the son of man is asked, Have you seen this? (Eze. 8:17). “Is it a light thing” that they do? “They have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger” and now they “put the branch to their nose” (Eze. 8:17).

Now this figure of speech is believed to point to an aromatic twig that is put to the nose at certain acts of worship when perhaps the sacrifice was burning, the terrible stench, or perhaps the babes that were used in human sacrifice were screaming; generally drums were played then to drown it. But anything that offended the senses was camouflaged by this branch to the nose.

And it gives the picture of worshipers indulging in activities that went against their senses, but making special means to overcome their revulsion.

Let me illustrate that just for a moment. I have talked to many people who drink beer. I have yet to find one person who said he

liked beer or liquor or smoking the first time he tried it. He had to work at cultivating a taste for beer or wine or alcohol or cigarettes. He had to make an effort to put down his inner feelings of revulsion. He had consciously to put the branch to his nose so that distraction from the bitterness or the biting, burning effect could help him overcome his revulsion.

Now as we think of these five sins let see them again. Verse 5, jealousy; verse 12, what one does in the dark in the chambers of the imagery; verse 14, emotionally involved with sex symbols; verse 15, turning the back on God's worship and substituting another kind of worship; verse 17, putting the branch to the nose in a special effort, deliberately to overcome feelings of revulsion.

We have a classic case of God who has given His only begotten Son to die for the sins of the world. God has pledged His own life to save His people. He has given them special truth in His everlasting covenant that will preserve them from outside influences. And they have imbibed and incorporated ideas from the religions around them, and consequently their faith in Him alone has become perverted, manifesting itself in all kinds of gross sins and licentiousness. And this has been brought into His temple of worship. God has and does bear all the sin of the world. He takes the responsibility upon Himself, but His patience has a limit. And His jealousy for his wife has been provoked because of His great love for her. So He makes His loud and vociferous protest in order to shake her loose from her fascination with these interlopers who have come in with whom she is prostituting herself. It is a story of God's great love for His people.