

The Visions of Ezekiel

Lesson 6

At this point in the story, the first set of visions was complete. In that set, the LORD had appeared to Ezekiel four times and each time He gave the prophet an assignment. One of those assignments took Ezekiel 430 days to complete. We were able to track the LORD's interaction with Ezekiel to the very day that long assignment was over but it was impossible to calculate the timing of the last two assignments. But with the next passage, Ezekiel once again provided the year, day and month of the beginning of the vision - *Vision Two*.

STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURE

B. Vision Two – (Eze 8:1 – 19:14) 6th Year, 5th Day, 6th Month **1. Ezekiel's Second Vision of the LORD**

Eze 8:1a **It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth *day* of the sixth month,**

Six years had passed since the LORD approached Ezekiel for the first time. The New Year had also passed and Ezekiel tells us here that it was the sixth month and the fifth day. This vision was given in the year 591 BC.

a) The Place

Eze 8:1b **as I was sitting in my house**

The LORD found Ezekiel in his house. In our introduction we discussed that when Ezekiel said "my house" he meant *the tent he called home*. More than likely, the tent was in Tel-abib where he had enacted the war games against Jerusalem in the sight of the *exiles of the house of Israel*.

b) The Audience

Eze 8:1c **with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the **hand of the LORD GOD** fell on me there.**

Not all of the people in Ezekiel's village, or in the area for that matter, were part of the *house of Israel* from the old Northern Kingdom. Many of those living around Ezekiel had been exiled from the Southern Kingdom with him in 597 BC. Here, Ezekiel revealed that the "elders of Judah" had joined him in his home. What was so special about Ezekiel that the *elders of Judah* were meeting with him in his house? Ezekiel 2:5 may have revealed the reason when it said, "**they will know that a prophet has been among them.**" With just the first four assignments, the LORD must have established Ezekiel's place and position in the area as the *prophet of the LORD*. No doubt the elders were there to seek wisdom from Ezekiel. But there was a problem, Ezekiel could not speak. He was still mute and would remain that way until Vision Twelve. We must wonder how they were communicating with each other. Nevertheless, the elders were there and suddenly, the "hand of the LORD" fell on Ezekiel. It was time for another vision.

2. Ezekiel's Second Description of the LORD

Eze 8:2 Then I looked, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of a man; from His loins and downward *there was the appearance of fire, and from His loins and upward the appearance of brightness, like the appearance of glowing metal.*

Ezekiel's description of the LORD was exactly as he described Him before (See notes Ezekiel 1:27).

3. Ezekiel's Flight to Jerusalem with the LORD

Eze 8:3 He stretched out the form of a hand and caught me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner *court*, where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy, was *located*.

The LORD grabbed Ezekiel by a lock of his hair. Six years before, the LORD had Ezekiel shave his head and beard. By this time, his hair had grown and Ezekiel was no longer bald. The hand of the LORD took hold of his hair and the Spirit levitated him and placed him at the "entrance of the north gate of the inner *court*" in Jerusalem. Notice that Ezekiel had not left his house; he was taken to Jerusalem "in the visions of God." In other words, Ezekiel saw himself taken to Jerusalem in his mind, but his body was still in his tent sitting in front of the *elders of Judah*.

We do not know how much Ezekiel knew about the Temple or the inner court, but because he was from the Southern Kingdom, surely, he must have visited it several times in his life.

In this vision, the LORD placed Ezekiel on the north side of the main Temple building. The main building was surrounded by two walls. The first wall from the main Temple building created the *inner court*. The second wall that surrounded the entire complex created the *outer court*. Legally, only certain Jews could enter the *inner court*, but every human on earth could enter the *outer court*. The issue for the LORD is found in the last part of this verse, "**where the seat of the idol of jealousy, which provokes jealousy, was *located*.**" If only certain Jews were allowed in the *inner court*, how in the world did an idol find its permanent home at the entrance to this special place?

4. Ezekiel's Fifth Assignment from the LORD

Eze 8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel *was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.*

"... the glory of the God of Israel ... like ... I saw in the plain ..." was Ezekiel's way of taking the listener back to the full description of the LORD that he saw in the first vision with the whirlwind, four headed cherubim, four wheels, the flaming LORD on His throne, the sea of glass and the rainbow all around (Ezekiel 1). Ezekiel was seeing the same "glory" of God in this vision of Jerusalem that he saw by the *Chebar River*.

a) Look to the North of the Altar Gate

Eze 8:5 Then He said to me, "Son of man, raise your eyes now toward the north." So I raised my eyes toward the north, and behold, to the north of the altar gate *was this idol of jealousy at the entrance.*

Coming out of the Temple entrance, Ezekiel turned to his left to see the "altar gate." We use the word "north" in English, but in Hebrew it is the word that means *left*. The Hebrew tongue used the words *left, right, forward and backward* for our words *north, south, east and*

west. In the wall surrounding the Temple building there were three gates to the north and three gates to the south. These gates were fairly close together. Each gate had a name. On the north side, the middle gate was called the “**altar gate**.” This gate led directly to the back of the seven-foot-high *brazen altar*. Most scholars believe that the firewood used with the altar was brought through this gate to stoke the fire from the rear. On the south side of the altar were the steps that led to the grate on top of the altar where the sacrifices would be placed above the fire. Somehow and at some time, the “**idol of jealousy**” had been placed at the “**altar gate**.” Idols should not have been found anywhere in the Southern Kingdom, but this one found its place within 60 feet of the door to the *Holy Place* which led to the *Holy of Holies*. An abomination! A great abomination!

(1) See the Great Abominations

Eze 8:6a **And He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, so that I would be far from My sanctuary?"**

The “**idol of jealousy**” was addressed by Jeremiah two times. We must remember, Jeremiah was the true prophet inside the walls of Jerusalem while Ezekiel held that position with the *exiles* at the *Chebar River* and Daniel represented the LORD and controlled all the events from within the government of the Babylonian Empire, second only to Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah said the following about this idol.

Jeremiah 7:30 "For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight," declares the LORD, "they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. (Also see Jeremiah 32:34 for the same thought.)

Our English translators could have inserted into Jeremiah’s testimony the word *abominations* for words “**detestable things**” because both mean the same thing. For Jeremiah, this idol was too close to the *house of the LORD*, the place where the *Shekinah Glory of the LORD* still hovered over the *Ark of the Covenant*. Unless the Jews removed this idol, the LORD would depart from the Temple and leave the Southern Kingdom. Not to get too far ahead in the story, the Jews would not remove the idol and the LORD would depart from the Temple. Ezekiel recorded that event soon in the story – at the beginning of the next chapter.

(2) See the Greater Abominations

Eze 8:6a **But yet you will see still greater abominations."**

The LORD told Ezekiel that the “**great abominations**” of verse 6 would be minimized by even “**greater abominations**.” What could the Jews do that was worse than idol worship 60 feet from the *Holy of Holies*?

b) Look to the Entrance of the Court

Eze 8:7 **Then He brought me to the entrance of the court, and when I looked, behold, a hole in the wall.**

The main “**entrance of the court**” was to the east in the inner wall that led from the *outer court to the inner court*. In that wall not in the door/gate, Ezekiel saw a hole.

(1) See the Wicked Abominations

Eze 8:8 He said to me, "Son of man, now dig through the wall." So I dug through the wall, and behold, an entrance. Eze 8:9 And He said to me, "Go in and see the wicked abominations that they are committing here."

The LORD had shown Ezekiel a hole in the wall by the main door to the *inner court*; however, the hole was not really there – Ezekiel was instructed to dig the hole where he was shown. Ezekiel was not to go through the door of that wall; that entrance would not let him see what the LORD wanted him to see. Through the door, Ezekiel would see only the external acts of the Jews in the courtyard, the things they did out in the open. But the LORD wanted Ezekiel to see the hidden things of the Jews, the things they did in secret. Ezekiel mentally dug the hole to see the detested abominations.

(2) See the Detested Abominations

Eze 8:10a So I entered and looked, and behold, every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things,

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of those who profess to be holy? Who possesses the credentials that will lead them into the holiest of places? Jews could go to the *inner court* where no one else in the world could go. Through the hole, Ezekiel was shown the true nature of these Jews; their natures were filled with “**every form of creeping things and beasts and detestable things.**” The *greater abominations* were being shown to Ezekiel. Detested abominations! But there was more!

(a) The Idols of the House of Israel

Eze 8:10b with all the idols of the house of Israel, were carved on the wall all around.

The one “**idol of jealousy**” that proudly stood at the *altar gate* was nothing compared to what Ezekiel was looking at through the hole. On the visible walls around the Temple all looked fine except for the presence of that one idol. But through the hole, on the inner walls, abominable graffiti scarred the surfaces “**all around.**” That which looked pure and holy on the outside was detestable on the inside, filled with cancer of the soul. He saw “**all the idols of the house of Israel.**” The Jews were bowing not to just one idol, but to many.

(b) The Elders of the House of Israel

Eze 8:11 Standing in front of them were seventy elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan standing among them, each man with his censer in his hand and the fragrance of the cloud of incense rising.

Through the hole, Ezekiel saw the abominable idols, but he saw an even greater abomination when he discovered the whole sin of the Jews against the LORD was being led by the “**seventy elders of the house of Israel.**” These were the religious leaders of the Jews, the Sanhedrin of the people, the law makers, the law enforcers, the law representatives of the LORD. There, Ezekiel recognized “**Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan,**” one of the seventy. The name “**Jaazaniah**” in Hebrew means *Yahweh hears*. It was a fitting name! *Yahweh hears* everything! Nothing escapes His ears. He is all-hearing, all-seeing and all-knowing! That which a person says in public is heard by all, but that which a person says in his mind is heard only by the person and the LORD. We know nothing else about this man save that Ezekiel recognized him. Ezekiel’s mention of him by name must have meant that the prophet was shocked when he saw “**Jaazaniah**” among the idolaters of the *house of Israel*. In this modern age, the public media report quite quickly to

the whole world when the sins of a well-respected outwardly righteous person come to light. No matter how repentant the person is, the reputation for the LORD is never fully restored to any true degree of influence. The secret, inward thoughts are judged by the LORD more than the outward expressions. In this case, each of the seventy men has censers, also called fire pans, filled with burning coals, covered with flavored incense, causing streams of smoke to fill the air with various aromas. But were the seventy men all in one accord committing this abomination openly together? No.

(c) The Sins of the House of Israel

Eze 8:12a Then He said to me, "Son of man, do you see what the elders of the house of Israel are committing in the dark, each man in the room of his carved images?"

Through the hole, Ezekiel saw each of the seventy men in his own home, in his own secret place, committing his own abomination against the LORD. In public, these men put on the exhibition of holiness to the LORD; in private, these men held allegiance to gods other than the true LORD.

(d) The Excuse of the House of Israel

Eze 8:12b For they say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'"

How silly! If these seventy men were true scholars of the Law of the LORD, they would have known better. Had they forgotten they were the servants of the all-seeing Creator. No man can hide anything from the eyes of the LORD that roam to and fro throughout the whole earth!

(3) See the Greater Abominations

Eze 8:13 And He said to me, "Yet you will see still greater abominations which they are committing."

The LORD had shown Ezekiel the progression of the sins of the Jewish people. As great as the abomination of the idol within 60 feet of the *Holy of Holies* was, it was overshadowed by the abomination of the seventy elders. Their abomination would be overshadowed by a **“still greater abomination.”**

c) Look at the Entrance of the LORD's House

Eze 8:14a Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold,

The **“entrance of the gate of the LORD's house”** was located next to the *altar gate* mentioned and described previously. Three doors/gates were on the inner wall with the middle gate being the *altar gate* and to the west of that gate just a few feet was the **“entrance of the gate of the LORD's house.”** This gate was used by the priest. By walking through this gate just a few feet the priest could ascend the steps to the porch and enter the Temple. **“Behold,”** the LORD said to Ezekiel, which means *pay attention to this!*

(1) See the Weeping for Tammuz

Eze 8:14 women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

Women were sitting at the priest's entry gate **“weeping for Tammuz.”** What were they doing there? That location was forbidden to women. In addition, they were **“weeping for Tammuz.”**

According to *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, "**Tammuz**" was the Assyrian sun-god, the husband of the goddess Ishtar. Easton says the following about this god.

In the Chaldean calendar there was a month set apart in honor of this god, the month of ... the beginning of the summer solstice. At this festival, which lasted six days, the worshippers, with loud lamentations, bewailed the funeral of the god, they sat "weeping for Tammuz."

According to *Holman's Bible Dictionary*, "**Tammuz**" was also the god of vegetation. Holman says the following about this god.

According to the pagan religion, Tammuz was betrayed by his lover, Ishtar, and as a result dies each autumn. The wilting of the vegetation at that time of year is seen as a sign of his death. This caused great mourning in the ancient world, and was why the women in Jerusalem wept.

For the LORD, it was an abomination for the women to be where they were in reference to the Temple; it was also an abomination for them to be *weeping for the death of Tammuz*. We must remember that even in those days, wives were wives, had opinions and expressed those opinions to their husbands. For proof of that fact, review the life of Abraham and Sarah, especially her influence in compelling her husband to sin with Hagar and later expel her from the family home. These women at the entrance to the gate of the Temple were influential in the lives of their husbands. They were worshipping a false god and so were their husbands. The LORD was showing Ezekiel the breadth of the abomination in the Southern Kingdom. It was in every part of almost every home, practiced by husbands and wives. But the women's "**weeping for Tammuz**" was still not the worst of the worst abominations that the LORD would show Ezekiel that day.

(2) See the Greater Abominations

Eze 8:15 **He said to me, "Do you see *this*, son of man? Yet you will see still greater abominations than these."**

How bad could it get? The idol at the *altar gate*, the idols in the homes of the *seventy elders*, the *weeping of the women at the entrance to the Temple!* What could be worse? The LORD was not finished showing Ezekiel the depth of the sin of the Jews in the Southern Kingdom. There was a "**still greater abomination than these.**"

d) Look at the Inner Court of the LORD's House

Eze 8:16a **Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house.**

Ezekiel entered the "**inner court of the LORD's house.**" From there, Ezekiel could see the porch of the Temple. From there he could see the *greater abomination of the Jews*.

(1) See the Prostrating Away from the LORD

Eze 8:16b **And behold, at the entrance to the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.**

The LORD showed Ezekiel the area between the "**porch and the altar,**" the *brazen altar* where the sacrifices were made to the LORD. It was a sacred place open solely to priests. The

common Jew could approach this place only when accompanied by a priest and then only on certain occasions for certain purposes. Stepping on the “**porch**” was strictly for the priests alone. Between the “**porch and the altar**” Ezekiel saw “**twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east.**” Ezekiel went on to say, “**and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun.**” What does all that mean?

Plainly and simply, these twenty-five men were priests. They had turned their backs to the LORD Who was still showing His presence in the *Holy of Holies* behind them in His *Shekinah Glory* hovering over the *Ark of the Covenant* behind the veil in the Temple. Instead of prostrating themselves in worship before the presence of the LORD as they should have done as priests of the Holy God, they were bowing to the rising sun in the east in worship of the sun-god, “**Tammuz.**” The ordained ministers of the LORD were traitors. Nothing in the world was a greater abomination than having ministers forego the Law of the LORD in favor of the fabrications of man’s imagination. “**Tammuz**” did not exist. He was a fabrication of man’s imagination. He was not real! The ones responsible for leading and teaching the common man in the ways of true worship of the true God were off track, leading and teaching the common man in the ways of the world, sin and wickedness.

(2) See the Provoking of the LORD

Eze 8:17 He said to me, "Do you see *this*, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting the twig to their nose.

“**Is it too light a thing... ?**” The word for “**light**” in Hebrew is *qalal* and it means *trifle*. The LORD was asking Ezekiel if the actions of the priest were trifles –*little things* concerning this sin that they were doing. But then He expressed to Ezekiel that the sin of these priests had influenced all of the Jews in the Promised Land. Over and over, more and more, Jews were abandoning their allegiance to the LORD and looking to the east to the rising of Tammuz. In the worship of this god, aromatic branches were carried by men and used as elements of worship. The esteemed Adam Clarke, a great Methodist Bible scholar of the past said the following about “**putting the twig to their nose.**”

They put the twig to their nose—This is supposed to mean some branch or branches, which they carried in succession in honor of the idol, and with which they covered their faces, or from which they inhaled a pleasant smell, the branches being odoriferous. That the heathens carried branches of trees in their sacred ceremonies is well known to all persons acquainted with classic antiquity; and it is probable that the heathen borrowed those from the use of such branches in the Jewish feast of tabernacles. There are many strange, and some filthy, interpretations given of this clause; but the former are not worth repeating, and I abominate the latter too much to submit to defile my paper with them.

It really seems that at this time the Jews had incorporated every species of idolatry in their impure worship — Phoenician, Egyptian, and Persian. I might add that some imagine the image of jealousy to be personification of idolatry itself.²⁹

²⁹ Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary*

(3) See the Wrath of the LORD

Eze 8:18 **"Therefore, I indeed will deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor will I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I will not listen to them."**

The LORD had had enough! The sin was too great. He had allowed Ezekiel to dig through the wall to see the hidden hearts of the Jews of the Southern Kingdom. In spite of the divine presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, He was so close to the Jews that they had become so accustomed to Him that they ignored Him. He said, I have "... **no pity nor will I spare;**" not even if they cried to Him as loudly as they could. The record of their deeds and their determination was set in stone. The LORD, the all-knowing Creator and God, knew the truth of the secrets in their hearts and He knew their hearts would not change.

e) The Cry for the Executioners

Eze 9:1 **Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, "Draw near, O executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand."**

"Draw near, O executioners of the city ... !" The LORD called for His men to come, weapons in hand, to execute His judgment on the Jewish sinners of the Southern Kingdom. The Hebrew word for **"executioners"** means *those who have the oversight and authority to punish*. Here we must pause for a moment and contemplate the scene. Ezekiel was seeing a vision of the future. He saw the sin of the Southern Kingdom and the people responsible. The sin was not relegated to the men of the kingdom alone but was also identified in the women who lived there. The **"executioners" would enter the city**, sent by the LORD with the task of killing the idolaters. Who were these **"executioners?"**

f) The Arrival of the Executioners

Eze 9:2a **Behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate which faces north, each with his shattering weapon in his hand;**

Ezekiel said in his record concerning the **"executioners," "Behold,"** or *pay attention to this*. He saw six men enter the scene from the **"upper gate which faces the north."** In his vision, Ezekiel was still standing in the *inner court*. He could see past the wall that separated the *inner court* from the *outer court* all the way to the middle of the outer north wall of the Temple complex where the **"upper gate"** was located. Through that gate marched the six men with a **"shattering weapon"** in their hands.

We know from the history of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC that the LORD sent Nebuchadnezzar to do the work and kill all the idolaters. Here we have a conundrum. The statements in this verse are true because the LORD's words are true; however, nothing found to date in Scripture or archeology proves or supports this verse save for one fact – Nebuchadnezzar broke through the northern wall first when he entered the city. With no proof except this recorded by Ezekiel, the **"six men"** might have been the leaders or generals of six bands of soldiers that entered from the north and began the slaughter inside the walls of the city. What would we call these bands of soldiers? Battalions? Squadrons? We do not know and Babylonian history does not reveal the exact words we are looking for to help with this passage. Nevertheless, the LORD would not have included it if it did not mean something, but what, we do not know.

g) The Man with His Case by the Altar

Eze 9:2a **and among them was a certain man clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.**

The six “executioners” were accompanied by a “certain man ... with a writing case.” All seven men entered through the *upper gate* and marched across the *outer court*, through the *altar gate*, into the *inner court* and arrived to stand by the *bronze or brazen altar*. The LORD would give these seven men specific instructions in verse.

h) The Movement of the Glory of God

Eze 9:3a **Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple.**

With the arrival of the seven men at the *bronze altar*, the “**glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple.**” Here we meet another conundrum in interpretation of the Scripture. First, the “**threshold of the temple**” means the *door that leads into the Holy Place of the Temple*. From east to west, the threshold door of the Temple led to the *Holy Place* where the Menorah, table of show bread, altar of incense and other utensils of worship were used by the priests each day. Moving on, the veil hung just past the *altar of incense* and behind it was the *Ark of the Covenant* in the room called the *Holy of Holies*. The *Mercy Seat*, which was the top of the *Ark of the Covenant*, was adorned with two cherubs with their wings pointing inward to the middle of the *Ark*. Above those wings, the *Shekinah Glory* of the LORD hovered over the *Ark*. Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted that it was the *Shekinah Glory of the LORD* that moved from the *Ark of the Covenant* to the *threshold of the Temple door*. That interpretation might well be correct; however, seven times in Ezekiel the “**glory of the God of Israel**” is mentioned. In this lesson, in Ezekiel 8:4, Ezekiel said, “**And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the appearance which I saw in the plain.**” Here is the problem. Ezekiel knew what the *glory of the God of Israel* looked like because he described it in detail in chapter 1 just as he saw that *glory* out on the plain near the *Chebar River*. There, the *glory of the God of Israel* looked like a flaming man of metal seated on a throne sitting on a glass platform supported by four cherubs and four wheels. Now we must ask the question based on the foregoing context of the book of Ezekiel, “*Was it the Shekinah Glory of the LORD that resided above the gold carved cherubs on the Ark of the Covenant that moved to the door of the Temple or did the LORD step off His throne supported by the four living cherubs to move to the threshold of the Temple?*” As we reason through this we must admit that the *glory of the LORD* seen by Ezekiel on the throne was the *actual living LORD*; the *cloud of the Shekinah glory of the LORD* was a representation of the LORD that hovered over the *Ark of the Covenant*. The cloud did not look like the LORD – it was a glowing cloud. The Man described by Ezekiel Whom he met on the plain by the *Chebar River* was the LORD. Therefore, in the context of Ezekiel, it seems that the prophet saw the LORD move from the throne on the crystal platform above the four living cherubs to the door of the Temple in this verse. That does not mean that the *Shekinah glory of the LORD* did not leave the *Ark of the Covenant* and move unnoticed to the door of the Temple and then away from the complex – it would, five years later, but not in this passage. In this passage, Ezekiel saw the LORD in the vision as a representation of what would happen when the city of Jerusalem was actually defeated in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. He would not be able to tear the Temple apart while the LORD still resided there. Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the Temple after the LORD’s departure and after Jeremiah removed the *Ark of the Covenant* and hide it in a cave. To this day, the *Ark* has not been found – hidden by the LORD.

i) The Instructions to the Man with His Case

Eze 9:3b And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case.

At the door of the Temple, the LORD began to give instructions to the man with the writing case. It would be his job to mark or not mark all the people in Jerusalem.

(1) Mark the Innocent

Eze 9:4 The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst."

Unlike in the Revelation where the sinners would take upon themselves the mark of 666, here, in Ezekiel, the LORD would have all the saints clearly marked on their foreheads.

(2) Slay the Guilty

Eze 9:5 But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. ^{Eze 9:6a} "Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary."

The LORD instructed the six executioners to kill every man, woman and child who did not receive the mark from the man with the writing case. Then the LORD told the man with the writing case where to begin his work; **"you shall start from My sanctuary."** What is the LORD saying to these six men? The LORD was saying, *"Executioners! Start at the Temple and kill the twenty-five priests and then go throughout the city."*

(3) Start with the Elders

Eze 9:6a So they started with the elders who *were* before the temple. ^{Eze 9:7} And He said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" Thus they went out and struck down *the people* in the city.

From the *twenty-five priests* to the *seventy elders* to the *women weeping for Tammuz*, the executioners were to follow the man and kill those he passed by without marking. The Temple was not a place designed for the killing of humans; such actions would **"defile"** the complex. It would not be pure and holy any longer. That did not matter to the LORD; it was already defiled by the same humans who worshipped idols where they should have been worshipping the LORD.

5. Ezekiel's Realization for the LORD

Eze 9:8a As they were striking *the people* and I alone was left, I fell on my face

Needless to say, Ezekiel was horrified. In the vision, people were dying all around him and no one survived the task given to the executioners. All Ezekiel could do in at that moment in that vision was to fall on his face before the LORD.

a) Ezekiel's Question for the LORD

Eze 9:8b and cried out saying, "Alas, Lord GOD! Are You destroying the whole remnant of Israel by pouring out Your wrath on Jerusalem?"

"Will everyone in Jerusalem die?" was Ezekiel's cry to the LORD. He had heard the promise of the LORD concerning a *remnant* in the past visions but in the wrath of these executioners he has not seen even one of the *remnant* saved. The LORD would answer Ezekiel directly.

b) LORD's Answer for Ezekiel

(1) The Greatness of Their Sin

Eze 9:9a **Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is very, very great, and the land is filled with blood and the city is full of perversion;**

The LORD told Ezekiel that the sin of the people of the Southern Kingdom, steeped and steadfast in their idolatry, was more than He would allow any longer. It was too great!

(2) The Excuse for Their Sin

Eze 9:9b **for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!'**

Eze 9:10 **"But as for Me, My eye will have no pity nor will I spare, but I will bring their conduct upon their heads."**

Why were the people entering into idolatry? They blamed it on the LORD. They said He had forsaken them – but He had not. That was a lousy excuse; they knew better. They had left the LORD and it was not the other way around.

c) The Report from the Man with the Writing Case

Eze 9:11 **Then behold, the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case reported, saying, "I have done just as You have commanded me."**

When the LORD had concluded speaking to Ezekiel, he lay on his face in the vision while the man with the writing case brought his report to the LORD. **"I have done just as You have commanded me."** Had the man marked a single soul? Yes. As we will see, a remnant was marked, a small number. If the man with the writing case had completed his task in the vision, so, too, had the six executioners. However, this was just a vision of the future. But, to this point in the story, we are only half way through this vision. For the rest of the vision we must wait patiently for the next lesson.