

God has left the Temple

(9) Ezekiel 10

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Ezekiel 8-11 is an extended description of the prophet's vision of corruption and judgment at the temple in Jerusalem. Another important part of this vision is the glory of God, described in the same terms as what Ezekiel saw in the vision of his calling in Ezekiel 1-3. Here is the description of a **firmament** that was **above the head of the cherubim**.

- From the association with other passages, we understood that the *living creatures* of Ezekiel 1 were cherubim, but they were not given that specific name in Ezekiel 1. Now at the temple they are more properly titled **cherubim**, because there were artistic depictions of **cherubim** all over the temple, including the large statues set up by Solomon (1 Kings 6:23).
- These cherubim are the living heavenly realities that the static sculptures in the inner sanctum symbolize! They have come to earth from the heavenly throne room to transport the *kabod*, the visible sign of God's presence, out of his earthly dwelling place.

Ezekiel 10:1-5 – The cloud of God's Glory

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. 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. 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. 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. 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.

v1 – What did Ezekiel see above the cherubim?

The firmament: As with the vision in Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel saw something above the **cherubim** surrounding God's throne, something like a sky or space. As we discussed, the **cherubim** are the mighty angels associated with God's presence and throne.

The likeness of a throne: Ezekiel describes throne just as in Ezekiel 1:26, but here he did not mention *the appearance of a man high above it*. Yet the person on the throne is *implied*, from the **He who spoke to the man clothed with linen**.

v2 – What did God tell the linen-clad angel to do?

Fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim: This was the command directed to **the man clothed with linen**, who marked the few faithful in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8). God commanded this angel to take the burning coals **and scatter them over the city**.

- Previously we read that Jerusalem would be judged by siege, slaughter, famine, and disease. Now we learn that Jerusalem will also be burnt, and the fire comes *from the throne and glory of God itself*; the **coals of fire** come **from among the cherubim**.

He went in as I watched: The angel was quick to obey, even as he was in Ezekiel 9:11.

v3 – What did the cherubim do as the angel executed God's command?

The cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple: This was the opposite side from where the angels of judgment started their work (Ezekiel 9:1-2).

What is this cloud that filled the inner court?

This was the cloud of glory, seen often in the Old and New Testaments, sometimes called the cloud of *Shekinah* glory. It is hard to *define* the glory of God; we could call it the radiant outshining of His character and presence. Here it was given some visible representation in **the cloud**.

Where else in Scripture do we see this cloud of God's glory?

- This is the cloud that stood by Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).
- This is the cloud of glory that God spoke to Israel from (Exodus 16:10).
- This is the cloud from which God met with Moses and others (Exodus 19:9, 24:15-18, Numbers 11:25, 12:5, 16:42).
- This is the cloud that stood by the door of the Tabernacle (Exodus 33:9-10).

- This is the cloud from which God appeared to the High Priest in the Holy Place inside the veil (Leviticus 16:2).
- This is the cloud that so filled the temple when Solomon dedicated it that the priests could not continue to serve (1 Kings 8:1-11).
- of Ezekiel's vision, filling the temple of God with the brightness of His glory (Ezekiel 10:4).
- This is the cloud of glory that overshadowed Mary when she conceived Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35).
- This is the cloud present at the transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:34-35).
- This is the cloud of glory that received Jesus into heaven at His ascension (Acts 1:9).
- This is the cloud that will display the glory of Jesus Christ when He returns in triumph to this earth (Luke 21:27, Revelation 1:7).

v4 – What did the cloud of the glory of the Lord do?

The glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple: In Ezekiel's vision, the glory of the Lord shined brightly and the **cloud** of His glory filled the temple. Yet, it was on the move (as also seen in Ezekiel 9:3), pausing as it was about to leave **the temple**.

Why did the cloud pausing over the threshold of the temple represent?

Showing both his unwillingness to leave, and giving them time to bethink themselves, and return by repentance; and he stands where he might be seen both by priests and people, that both might be moved to repentance.

v5 – What did Ezekiel hear as the cloud of God's glory moved?

The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard: As this visible representation of God's glory was moving, the **wings of the cherubim** were active and noisy, with a sound as loud and as striking as **the voice of Almighty God when He speaks**.

- The sound of the cherubim's wings reverberates throughout the temple complex and creates an impression of restlessness, an eagerness to be off.

Ezek 10:6-8 – The fire from among the wheels

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. 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. ⁸ The

cherubim appeared to have the form of a man's hand under their wings.

From where was the fire to be gathered?

Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim: Again we note the emphasis that the fire of judgment upon Jerusalem comes *from the throne and glory of God itself*.

- In addition to bringing the *kabod* of Yahweh down to him, the heavenly chariot now arrives with the coals of divine judgment for Jerusalem, and will depart bearing the glory out of the temple and away from the city.
- The stage was now set for the fiery destruction of Jerusalem which here is symbolically represented as coming from the Lord himself.

How did the cherubim help the angel collecting the fire?

The cherub stretched out his hand: The man clothed in linen did not take the fire directly, but received it from a cherub. Ezekiel explained that the cherub was able to do this because he **appeared to have the form of a man's hand under his wings**.

- Possibly it was meant to show that even an angelic messenger like the man clothed in linen had to keep his distance from the awful throne of God.

Put it into the hands of the man clothed with linen: Now this angel (angels are sometimes described as men in the Bible) could fulfill the command to scatter the coals of fire over the city (Ezekiel 10:2).

Why is fire often associated with the judgment of God?

Deuteronomy 4:24 – *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire*

God's holiness is the reason for His being a consuming fire, and it burns up anything unholy. The holiness of God is that part of His nature that most separates Him from sinful man.

Why is fire associated with the eternal destiny of those without Christ?

Isaiah 33:14 – *Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

The godless tremble before God. Only the righteous can withstand the consuming fire of God's wrath against sin, because sin is an offense to God's holiness. But Isaiah also assures us that no amount of our own righteousness is sufficient...

Isaiah 64:6 – *we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags*

Ezek 10:9-13 – The wheels of the cherubim.

⁹And 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. ¹⁰As for their appearance, all four looked alike—as it were, a wheel in the middle of a wheel. ¹¹When 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. ¹²And their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around. ¹³As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, “Wheel.”

What do we remember about cherubim wheels?

There were four wheels by the cherubim: Ezekiel 1:15-21 described these wheels in some detail. The general impression is of constant activity and motion, and free movement with no chaos or disorder (**they did not turn aside when they went, but followed in the direction the head was facing**).

- These wheels are in ceaseless activity and speak of the fact that God is busy.
- If the wheels and the cherubim represent God’s chariot or chariot-throne, then it is clear that Ezekiel was to understand that it was *on the move*. It was in Babylon, now it is in Jerusalem at the temple.

The color of a beryl stone: The mineral **beryl** can come in many different colors, but one of the more notable and precious is the emerald. This may mean that the wheels and their workings gave off a green color.

Their whole body, with their back, their hands, their wings, and the wheels that the four had, were full of eyes all around: Ezekiel 1:18 described **eyes** in connection with the **wheels**. Here we learn that the cherubim themselves were **full of eyes all around**. This matches the later description of cherubim found in Revelation 4:6.

- The image seems bizarre to the modern reader, but one must remember that this is a visionary experience, and surrealistic features may overwhelm realism.

Ezekiel 10:14-22 – Glory of the Lord Departs

¹⁴Each 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. ¹⁵And the cherubim were lifted up. This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar. ¹⁶When 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. ¹⁷When 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. ¹⁸Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. ¹⁹And 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.

²⁰This is the living creature I saw under the God of Israel by the River Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim. ²¹Each one had four faces and each one four wings, and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. ²²And 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.

What do we remember about cherubim faces?

Each one had four faces: This is almost the same description of the cherubim found in Ezekiel 1:10-14. Here Ezekiel didn’t describe four faces on each cherub, just the one face turned toward him. Another difference lies in that in the previous passage the faces were listed as *a man*, a *lion*, an *ox*, and an *eagle*. Here they are listed as **a cherub**, a **man**, a **lion**, and an **eagle**. For some reason Ezekiel chose to use the word **cherub** to describe the face associated with the *ox*.

- *This was the living creature I saw by the River Chebar:* This is a direct reference to the vision of Ezekiel 1:1.

The same wheels also did not turn: This is the same description of the wheels and their association with the cherubim as described in Ezekiel 1:17, 1:20-21. The idea is that the cherubim and the wheels are perfectly coordinated in their motions together. They were so closely connected that Ezekiel could write, **the spirit of the living creatures was in them**.

v18 – What happened to the glory of the Lord?

Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim: Earlier in Ezekiel 10 the glory of the Lord was described as moving to the threshold of the temple (Ezekiel 10:4). Here it continued to move, and **departed from the threshold of the temple**.

Why did the Jews think the glory of the Lord could not depart from the temple?

The Jews could not imagine God departing from His temple; indeed, while it was His, and used as His, He did not, nor would He depart, but He will abandon it when profaned making it not His.

What is the temple of the Church Age?

1 Corinthians 6:19 – *do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

The Holy Spirit in us makes our bodies the temple of God.

Can God depart the temple of the Church Age?

No, Jesus promised that once installed in us, the Holy Spirit would never leave...

John 14:16-17 – *I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

How was the promise of the Holy Spirit different from the time before the cross?

The Old Testament relates occasions in which the Spirit left someone, such as King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14) or Samson (Judges 16:20). Indeed, David prayed, “*do not take Your Holy Spirit from me*” (Psalm 51:11).

- In those days the Holy Spirit worked differently in that He is never said to “indwell” anyone; rather, He “came upon” people for a time to accomplish specific purposes (Judges 3:10; 1 Chronicles 12:18).
- The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to proclaim truth to the people (Ezekiel 11:1–2).
- He instructed the leaders of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13).
- He inspired the writing of Scripture (2 Peter 1:21).

Were people born again in Old Testament times?

Yes, people were saved the same way in Old Testament times as they are today...

Hebrews 13:8 – *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Those who inherit salvation must be born again as Jesus told Nicodemus.

Ezekiel 11:19 – *I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh*

While this passage talks about when God saves all Israel during the Tribulation, the principle here applies to individual pre-cross believers.

Can a person lose their salvation?

God wants us to have eternal security. To lose salvation would be to lose the Holy Spirit who provides it. In fact, Scripture says that the Holy Spirit “seals” our salvation until we experience its completion in the presence of God...

Ephesians 4:30 – *do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*

Ephesians 4:30 warns us not to “grieve the Holy Spirit.” And 1 Thessalonians 5:19 says that we can “quench the Spirit.” These passages do not imply that the Holy Spirit has left us, only that He is sorrowful because of our sinful actions. The grieving and quenching of the Spirit hinders our fellowship with Him but does not nullify our salvation, in much the same way that a rebellious child may lose the fellowship of a parent but is not kicked out of the family.

What did the departure of the cherubim from the earth represent?

The cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth: The cherubim were something like guardians or attendants to this visible representation of the glory of God. Ezekiel noted in his vision that as the glory moved, so did the cherubim.

- The chariot not only serves as a vehicle to proclaim Yahweh’s glory and his sovereignty but also provides the means whereby he will abandon his temple, by which he declares the termination of his special relationship with Jerusalem and with his covenant people.

They stood at the door of the east gate of the Lord’s house: The sense seems to be that the glory of God travelled from the holy of holies to the threshold of the temple building, to across the court of the temple, and now **stood at the door of the east gate**. It was moving *away* from the temple and about the leave the temple courts.

What is the significance of the East Gate of the temple?

The last mention of the east in this vision goes back to Ezekiel 8:16, where 25 priestly men faced east and worshipped the sun. “But the men who faced east worshipping the sun must have looked through the vision at the gate: their eyes were so dazzled by the created ball of light that they could not see the True Light.”

- When the Lord does finally return, He is seen coming back through the East Gate in the Millennial Kingdom temple (Ezekiel 43:4).

Where did the glory of God go after leaving the temple?

Ezekiel 11:23 – *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.*

The East Gate of Jerusalem... The Eastern Gate of Jerusalem is also called the Golden Gate or the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:2). It is currently the oldest gate in the Old City, having been constructed in the 6th or 7th century AD. Also, it is the gate that gives the most direct access to the temple mount—if a person could pass through the arches of the Eastern Gate, he would be very close to where the Jewish temple used to stand.

- The Eastern Gate was sealed shut in AD 1540–41 by Suleiman the Magnificent, a sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He closed the Eastern Gate to prevent the Jewish Messiah from entering Jerusalem. Jewish tradition states that the Messiah will pass through the Eastern Gate when He comes to rule (as if 16 feet of concrete could do that).

What will happen to this east gate of Jerusalem that was sealed?

The gate will be opened by Christ Himself at the second coming—the Prince of Peace will return to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4) and enter Jerusalem by way of the re-opened Eastern Gate.

v20-21 – Why did Ezekiel state he had seen these living creatures before?

Ezekiel again connected what he saw in this vision with what he saw in a vision at the **River Chebar**, recorded in Ezekiel 1.

v22 – What is the significance of the cherubim going straight forward?

This proclaims the impossibility of thwarting or frustrating the plans of God. They kept their object and mission undeviatingly before them at all times.

What applications do we see in what we discussed today?

- While God's Spirit will not leave the temple of the Church Age, we can grieve Him and fall out of fellowship with Him.
- All will be judged by fire... for the Christian, our motivations will be exposed for why we do what we do.
- You don't want to come to an end of your mortal life without Christ... eternal fire awaits those who do.