

EZEKIEL

Chapter 9

Idolaters Killed

Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, “Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” 2 And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. 3 Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. 4 And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.” 5 And to the others he said in my hearing, “Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. 6 Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. 7 Then he said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.” So they went out and struck in the city. 8 And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah, Lord GOD! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” 9 Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, ‘The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.’ 10 As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads.” 11 And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back word, saying, “I have done as you commanded me.”

Ch 9 Begins with nearly the same phrase that ends ch 8, but with radically different applications. (TLSB)

9:1 *He.* God, in His earthly manifestation as the “glory.” (TLSB)

loud voice. The thunderous voice of God. (CSB)

executioners. Unspecified attendants, probably angels, are sent by God to those who are going to punish the city. (TLSB)

destroying weapon. Typically used for executions. (TLSB)

The vision hastens toward the final judgment of God’s apostate people. In this chapter, the judgment begins to fall upon the unfaithful people in the city and ultimately upon the city itself. This chapter is closely connected to chapter 8. (CC)

9:2 *six men came from the direction of the upper gate.* These six guardian angels of the city, plus the seventh clothed in linen (cf. the seven angels of the judgment in Rev 8:2, 6), came from the place where the idol that provoked to jealousy stood. (CSB)

At the command, a total of seven “men” (probably angels, cf Rv 8:2, 6) entered the city. Six are equipped to execute the judgment, while a seventh is prepared to write. (TLSB)

weapon for slaughter. Probably a war club or a battle-ax. (CSB)

a writing case at his waist. Often pictured in Egyptian paintings: a board with a slot for a pen and hollowed places for ink. (TLSB)

beside the bronze altar. Traditionally, in the center of the temple courtyard, although Ahaz had once shoved it into a corner and replaced it with a pagan altar (2Ki 16:14). It was the location of most sacrificial activity. (TLSB)

The “bronze altar” (Ezek 9:2) by which the men stand must be the Solomonic altar (1 Ki 8:64), which Ahaz had removed and placed north of the new altar he installed. His innovative, but apostate, altar was modeled after one he saw in Damascus (2 Ki 16:10–14). The fate of the true altar after the demise of Ahaz is uncertain. Perhaps the reformations of Hezekiah and Josiah did (at least temporarily) restore it to its rightful place in divine worship. However, one would not be surprised if the apostate kings that followed each of those reforming kings countermanded their efforts. The remark in this verse suggests that such was indeed the case. The “men” are taking their stand with orthodoxy, embodied by the true altar, which had been moved (once again) to the north of its ordained location in the temple court. (CC)

9:3 *the glory ... went up.* God began to vacate the temple, his glory moving to the door. (CSB)

Interrupts the narrative flow. The glory can be identified with God, who will begin to abandon the temple (cf 11:23). (TLSB)

It seems clear that the movement described here (and again in 10:4) represents the first stage of his ultimate abandonment of the temple. It will no longer be his house, which was protected from destruction by his presence. The vacated temple will be only another human structure, as vulnerable as any other building made of stone and wood. (CC)

threshold. Previously the glory had sat enthroned on the cherubim in the Most Holy Place, but now He has moved to the threshold of the temple structure, poised to move still further away. (TLSB)

9:4 The scribe mentioned in v 2 receives different instructions from the Lord. (TLSB)

mark. A *taw*, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which originally looked like an “x” (cf. Rev 7:2–4; 13:16; 14:9, 11; 20:4; 22:4). (CSB)

Lit, “make a *tau*,” the last letter in the Hbr alphabet. Its shape in the ancient script was that of an Eng “X” or a cross. Cypr: “The sign pertains to the passion and blood of Christ, and that whoever is found in this sign is kept safe and unharmed.... When Egypt was smitten, the Jewish people could not escape except by the blood and the sign of the lamb; so also, when the world shall begin to be desolated and smitten, whoever is found in the blood and the sign of Christ alone shall escape” (ANF 5:464). (TLSB)

Clear Christian echoes of Ezek 9:4–6 appear in Rev 7:1–8; 9:4. Four angels are ready to unleash destructive winds, but another angel comes and tells them not to do so until he puts a seal on the foreheads (as in Ezek 9:4) of the servants of God. A total of 144,000 faithful from the twelve tribes of Israel are sealed—a symbolic number representing the entire church militant on earth, since God’s Israel consists of all Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ (Romans 9–11; Gal 6:16). The sealed believers in Christ are then spared when the demonic forces arise from hell to torment humanity (Rev 9:4). The mark put on their foreheads is “the seal of the living God” (Rev 7:2), which would be a stamp having God’s name or signature. In Rev 14:1 the 144,000 are about to join the church triumphant, and there they are described as having “his [the Lamb’s] name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.” By

analogy, that may suggest that the *taw* in Ezek 9:4–6 represents Yahweh’s name or signature, designating the marked people as his very own. (CC)

The church’s traditional practice is to make the sign of the cross upon the baptized, and Christians in the worshipping congregation likewise make the sign of the cross at the Invocation and other parts of the service in remembrance of their Baptism. For the last time, the sign of the cross is made upon the body of the baptized Christian in the funeral and interment in anticipation of the resurrection, which is the greatest act of divine preservation and deliverance from judgment and destruction. (CC)

who sigh and groan. † The penitent remnant (see Ex 12:23; 1Ki 19:18). (CSB)

9:5 The other six men are to slaughter pitilessly and spare no one (cf 9:10). God’s desire is that all shall be saved (e.g., 18:32), but His justice requires that unrepentant sinners must die. A one-sided emphasis that “God is love” dare not eclipse the severity of His wrath. Christ’s cross is the maximal expression of both. (TLSB)

9:6 *old men ... little children and women.* In the horror of war, innocent civilians commonly suffer as much as the combatants. God is not indifferent, even if it seems so to the human eye (cf the Book of Job). In any case, God knows those who are His, as the rest of the verse indicates. The faithful have received the saving mark on their foreheads. Christians still make the sign of the cross upon those being baptized and may cross themselves. (TLSB)

Begin at my sanctuary. Judgment begins with God’s people (see 1Pe 4:17). (CSB)

God’s command for them to “begin from my sanctuary” (Ezek 9:6) is programmatic. As virtually an antitype to the scene here, this clause is echoed in 1 Pet 4:17, speaking of the final judgment:

For it is the time for judgment to begin from the house of God. And if it is first from us, what will be the end of those who are disbelieving the Gospel of God? (CC)

In OT times, the temple could be used for asylum (e.g., by Adonijah in 1 Ki 1:50–51; cf. 2 Ki 11:14–15). Sometimes this is imitated in modern times (usually when those under judgment by the state seek refuge in a church or mosque out of secular motives). But the main point in Ezekiel 9 is that the structure that had been God’s earthly residence could no longer be that because of the persistent “abominations” (8:6, 9, 13, 15, 17; 9:4) perpetrated in and around the temple. (CC)

9:7 *Defile ... with the slain.* Idolatrous worship had already made the temple unclean, but the dead would defile the sanctuary (lit, “a holy place”) even more. (TLSB)

9:8 *Ah, LORD GOD!* † One of the few times Ezekiel remonstrates with the Lord (see 4:14; 11:13). (CSB)

Ezekiel’s intercession is striking because it follows God’s declaration that he would not heed the prayers of Israel (8:18). Perhaps Ezekiel clings to the hope that even if God is deaf to the other Israelites, possibly he will listen to his prophet. In more general terms, St. Paul urges that intercessions be made for all people (e.g., 1 Tim 2:1). The pastor in particular carries out the intercessory role, both in publicly leading intercessory prayer in the Divine Service and in his private prayers for his church members. The NT picture is that the imminence of the final judgment is all the more reason to pray (cf. Mt 24:44; 25:13; Lk 21:28). (CC)

Remnant. of Israel. A remainder is faithful. Ezekiel does not challenge God's right to do as He pleases, but intercedes with God to remember His promises. In his excited frame of mind, Ezekiel seems to have momentarily forgotten that a remnant had already been marked and thus saved (v 4). (TLSB)

Nevertheless, both "Israel" and Ezekiel's reference to a "remnant" point in a transnational direction. From the time when God called Abraham, the subsequent history of the patriarchs and the later people clearly showed that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom 9:6), although it took a long time for God's chosen people to grasp the implications of that fact. The OT history of Israel is full of examples where unfaithful Israelites were cut off from the people and promises of God despite their lineage, and of still other examples where non-Israelites were fully incorporated into the covenant people by grace. (CC)

9:9 *full of blood ... injustice.* People operated by a code of ethics at total variance with Yahweh's. (TLSB)

The LORD has forsaken ... does not see. God quotes their own words. (TLSB)

9:10 *bring their deeds upon their heads.* Pervasive evil requires pervasive punishment (cf v 5; Gal 6:7). (TLSB)

Yahweh continues with a reiteration of his mercilessness in the present context. The judgment will be commensurate with the crime. "Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap" (Gal 6:7). It is too late for any possible reprieve. Reference to God's "eye" is an ironic reply to the people's arrogant assertion that he does not "see" (9:9). (CC)

9:11 Scribe's report will also remind Ezekiel that some were marked with the cross and had, indeed, been spared. (TLSB)

This episode comes to a conclusion with the scribe's report that he has obeyed God's instructions. Since this scribe has been commissioned as an agent of protection for the penitent, this final note assures Ezekiel that a remnant will indeed be spared, even though Yahweh's immediate answer (9:9-10) to his plea (9:8) might have left the impression that none would escape. (CC)

Ch 9 The vision vividly describes God's final judgment on His disobedient people. But a remnant, bearing a mark of salvation on their foreheads, will escape. The road to perdition is broad, but God does not fail to place His mark of salvation on all who repent, "who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed" in the holy city (v 4). • Lord, by Your grace, keep our eyes fixed on the cross of salvation and with Your Holy Spirit help us ward off the temptations to follow the heedless masses who ignore and reject Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)