EZEKIEL 8

Behind the Wall: Abominations in God's House

> *“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? For they say, ‘The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.’”*
> EZEKIEL 8:12

Where Ezekiel has brought us

1. Chapter 8 opens with a date: “in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month” (v1), about September 592 BC, some fourteen months after Ezekiel's call.

2. In the vision he is carried to Jerusalem while his body stays in Babylon (11:24).

Carried to Jerusalem

The hand of the Lord GOD falls, and the Spirit lifts Ezekiel between earth and heaven.

EZEKIEL 8:1

It came about in the sixth year, on the fifth day of the sixth month, as I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell on me there.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik cites Feinberg: 'That he did not actually leave Babylon is clear from Ezekiel 11:24.'

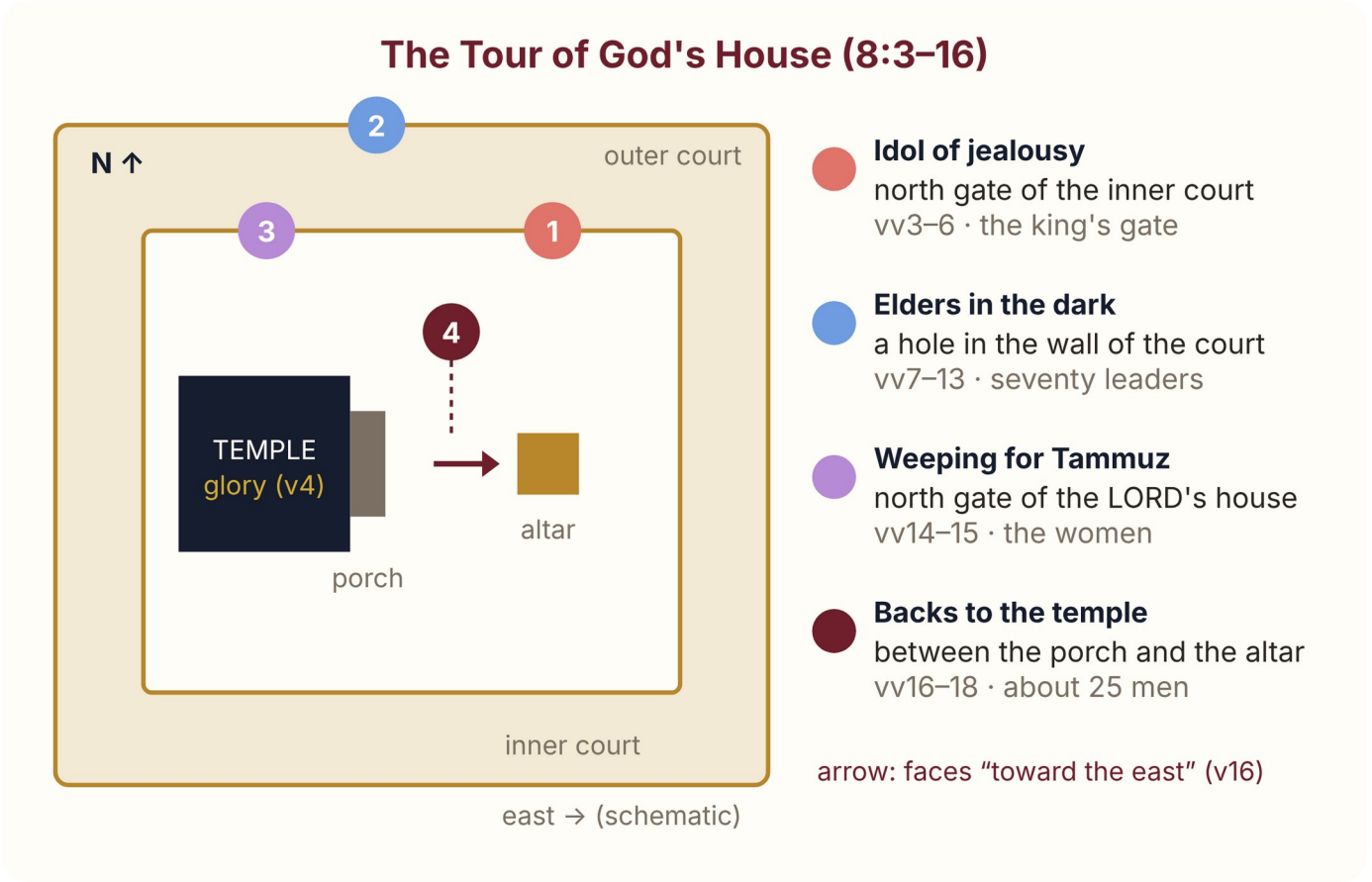
WHAT IT MEANS

Notice the contrast in verse 1. In Babylon, the elders of Judah are sitting before God's prophet, waiting for a word.

glory (כָּבוֹד)
KABOD · "WEIGHT, GLORY"

Kabod means weight, honor, splendor. God's glory is His heaviness, the weight of who He really is.

The Tour of God's House



A schematic, not-to-scale plan of the four stops on Ezekiel's tour, moving ever closer to the sanctuary (8:3–16).

The Idol of Jealousy

An idol stands at the gate, driving God far from His sanctuary.

EZEKIEL 8:6

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? But yet you will see still greater abominations."

DAVID GUZIK

Wright, in Guzik, connects this idol with Manasseh, who set a carved image in the temple (2 Kgs 21:7; 2 Chr 33:7, 15), and with Josiah's later cleansing (2 Kgs 23:6); the sin had crept back.

WHAT IT MEANS

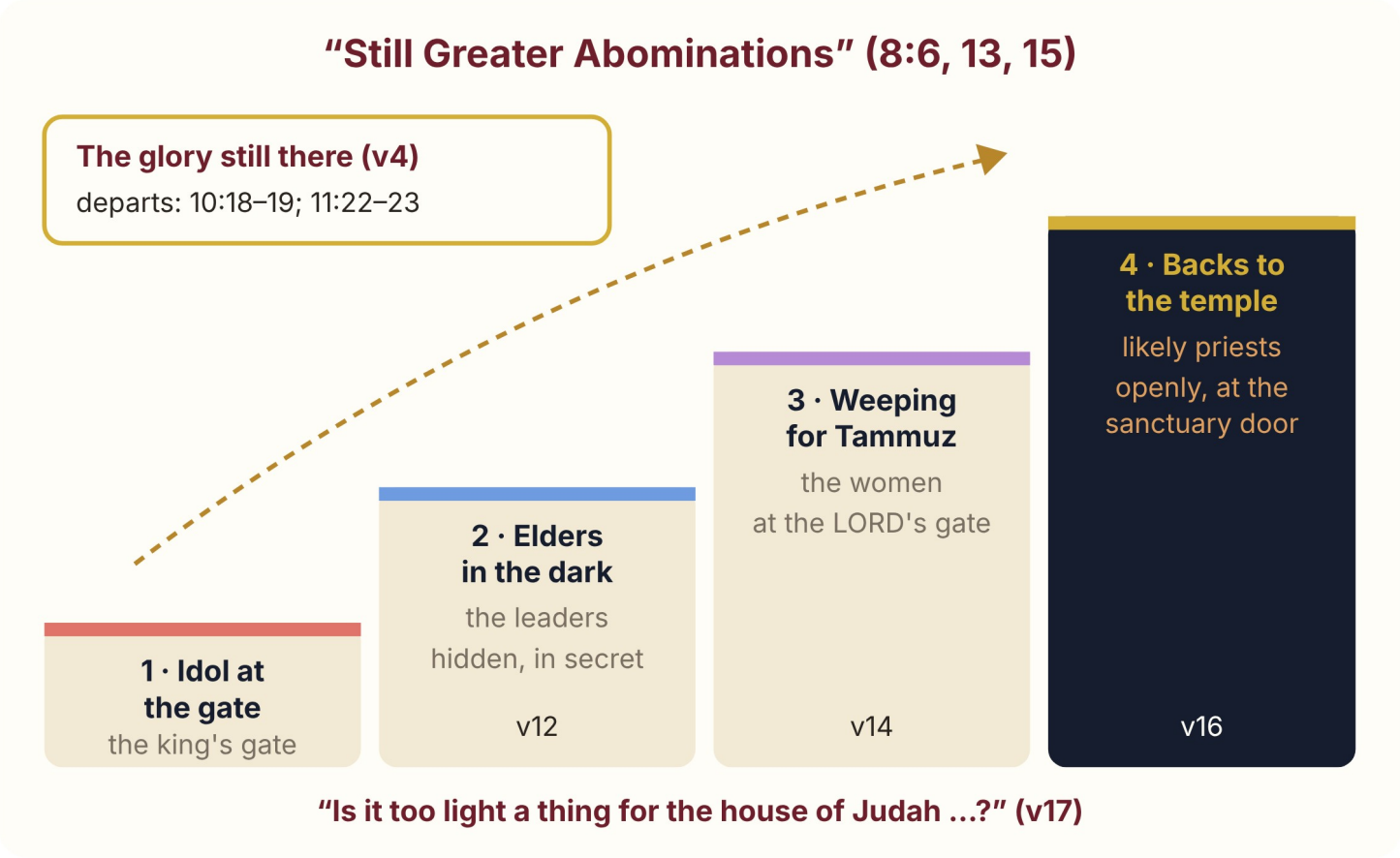
The first thing Ezekiel sees is an idol standing right at the entrance, "to the north of the altar gate" (v5). Josiah had cleaned this kind of thing out a generation earlier, and it had crept back.

idol (סֶמֶל)

SEMEL · "IMAGE, STATUE"

Semel is a rare word for an image or statue. This one is called "the idol of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy" (v3).

Still Greater Abominations



Each scene is worse than the last, while the glory still waits in the house before it departs in chapters 10–11.

The Elders in the Dark

Through a hole in the wall, seventy elders burn incense to carved images.

EZEKIEL 8:7

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

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes that seeing the true state of things can take real effort; Ezekiel has to dig.

WHAT IT MEANS

Ezekiel has to dig through a wall to see this one. Behind it, the walls are carved with creeping things and beasts, and seventy elders, the number Moses appointed to lead Israel (Num 11:16), are burning incense to them.

carved images (מַשְׂכִּית)
MASKITH · "CARVED IMAGE"

Maskith is an image or carved figure, and it can also mean imagination. That double sense fits verse 12 exactly: each elder stands "in the room of his carved images," and the room is also the inside of his own mind.

Weeping for Tammuz

At the north gate of the LORD's house, women mourn a foreign god.

EZEKIEL 8:14

Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the LORD'S house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik writes: 'This is the only mention of Tammuz in Ezekiel and the Old Testament,' and he describes Tammuz as 'a deity worshipped by many in neighboring nations, often with immoral or impure rites.'

WHAT IT MEANS

This scene needs care. What the text says is plain: women of Judah are sitting at the gate of the LORD's own house, pouring out their tears for a pagan god. That is the abomination. What the text does not say also matters.

Tammuz (תַּמּוּז)

TAMMUZ · "A MESOPOTAMIAN GOD"

Tammuz (H8542) is the name of a Mesopotamian god, the Sumerian Dumuzi. In the ancient texts he is a shepherd god and the lover of the goddess Inanna (Ishtar).

Backs to the Temple

At the door of the sanctuary, men turn from the LORD and bow to the sun.

EZEKIEL 8:16

Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house. 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.

DAVID GUZIK

Guzik notes Alexander's suggestion that the twenty-five men are the twenty-four priestly courses plus the high priest.

WHAT IT MEANS

The worst scene is at the very door of the sanctuary, “between the porch and the altar” (v16), the place where priests should weep before the LORD (Joel 2:17).

prostrating (שָׁחָה)
SHACHAH · “BOW DOWN, WORSHIP”

Shachah means to bow down, to worship, to lay oneself flat before someone greater. It is the ordinary Old Testament word for worship.

What to carry from this chapter

1

Two sets of elders.

In Babylon the elders sit before God's prophet; in Jerusalem the elders hide with their idols.

2

The glory had not left yet.

Even with idols in every corner, the glory of the God of Israel was still there (v4).

3

Idols push God out.

The abominations were done “so that I would be far from My sanctuary” (v6).

4

A black sheep.

Jaazaniah came from Shaphan's faithful family, yet stood with the idolaters.

More to carry

5

The rooms of the mind.

Maskith means carved image and also imagination; private pictures shape worship.

6

False of God, true of idols.

“The LORD does not see us” is false of Him but true of the idols they served.

7

Careful with Tammuz.

The text condemns weeping for a pagan god; later theories like Hislop's go beyond the evidence.

8

Worship facing the wrong way.

Shachah is the ordinary word for worship; these men bowed with their backs to God.

Talk it through

1. What is the difference between the elders in Babylon (v1) and the elders in Jerusalem (vv11–12)? Which group are you more like this week?

2. God made Ezekiel dig through a wall to see what was behind it. What would it look like to let God and a brother into the back rooms of your life?

3. The elders said, “The LORD does not see us.” Why does every secret sin rest on that lie?

4. What is the real abomination in the Tammuz scene, and why is it wise not to build on claims the evidence can't support?

5. God asks, “Is it too light a thing?” Where have you treated a compromise as small that God calls serious?

CLOSING

God sees every room, including the ones we wall off and the ones we think no one will ever dig into. His glory was still in His house, patient and warning, but the people had turned their backs. Turn your face toward Him while He is near.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

O·I·A study, slides and reflection journal: see the Ezekiel study page.