

## Questions about judgment. Ezekiel chapters 8-11

### Talk of judgment raises questions Ezk. 5:8-13

Talk of judgment raises questions

Ezekiel saying of Jerusalem and its inhabitants

*: Behold, I, even I, am against you. And I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations .... I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds.*

<sup>11</sup> *Therefore, as I live, declares the Lord God, surely, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will withdraw. My eye will not spare, and I will have no pity.*

Would have raised questions for the exiles sitting listening to Ezekiel beside the Chebar canal in Mesopotamia.

Why?

How have they defiled the sanctuary, and could it be that bad?

How could God act against His own city, the city He is meant to protect?

The idea is unthinkable.

And talk of judgment raises questions for us.

Where our society does not even take the life of mass murderers, how could anything be serious enough to deserve destruction?

And when God speaks of judging the whole city, the whole population, does that mean that good and bad will be swept away indiscriminately?

How can we know judgment is not just talk, will really happen?

And if it is certain, is there any hope for anyone?

In Ezekiel 8-11 the LORD will answer the questions of the first hearers and our questions, not to satisfy our curiosity but so we will find hope in the face of certain judgment.

**One vision 8:1-3, 11:24-25**

We will look at chapters 8-11 together for they are the record of the one vision given to Ezekiel about 14 months after his first vision, and just a few weeks after the prophecy of Ezekiel 5.

It starts 8:1-3 with Ezekiel, while sitting amongst the elders of Judah in his house, being transported by the Spirit in a vision to Jerusalem, v3

*Ezekiel 8: In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there. <sup>2</sup> Then I looked, and behold, a form that had the appearance of a man. Below what appeared to be his waist was fire, and above his waist was something like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming metal. <sup>3</sup> **He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. <sup>4</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.***

and it ends with Ezekiel being returned by the Spirit to those same exiles in Babylonia.

*Ezekiel 11:<sup>24</sup> And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me.*

It's a big vision and we will be taking the panoramic view, the big picture so there will be a lot of details not gone into – so feel free to ask questions afterwards

### **Are things that bad that they deserve this judgment? Ezekiel 8**

But let's start where Ezekiel starts his tour of Jerusalem, in the temple 8:3, the entrance of the north gate of the inner court of the temple. Let's remind ourselves what the temple was.

It had been built by Solomon in conformity with the plan of the tabernacle given to God by Moses.

It had a central building, the sanctuary, that was aligned West to East, with the entrance on the East, and surrounded by an inner and outer courtyard, which were entered through gates on the North, East and South sides

The sanctuary contained an inner room, the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was placed and over which Solomon had placed two large carved cherubim.

The temple was where the LORD was symbolically present amongst His people, the heart of their worship of Him as Israel's God

It was called the house of the LORD, His palace, with the holy of holies in the temple His throne room,

It was uniquely his, uniquely identified with Him

The LORD is very insistent that Ezekiel sees what is going on there

vv. 6 Son of man do you see what they are doing

9 Go in and see

, 12 – Son of man, have you seen,

15, 17 Have you seen this

And the LORD presents this evidence supporting His judgment to Ezekiel in an increasing scale of offence.

v. 6 But you will see still greater abominations, v. 13, 15

Things get worse and worse as the temple tour goes on, as Ezekiel moves closer and closer to the sanctuary, and as we see what Ezekiel sees we realise, and Ezekiel's first hearers realise, things are that bad – the LORD is not exaggerating Jerusalem's sin.

So what did Ezekiel see – four kinds of idolatry – and some more

As Ezekiel enters the temple from the North vv. 5-6 he sees the image or idol of jealousy. We are not told exactly what the idol is but most think it is a statue of Asherah, the mother of Baal, thought of as the queen of heaven.

Then v. 8-9 he is shown a room with many images and idols whom the lay leaders, the elders of the house of Israel are worshipping. The description of them as creeping things and loathsome beasts v. 10 means these men were probably worshipping the gods of Egypt who more than all the surrounding nations portrayed gods as animals, and with whom some of the people of Jerusalem were seeking to make an alliance against the Babylonians

And we hear their reasoning - *For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.'*"

This saying both justifies worshipping idols in the LORD's temple and explains why they feel safe.

They claim they have to get the help of other gods because the LORD has left, he is unavailable to help. They are comparing the LORD to their own idols, and say he is in a kind of impotent retirement. For them, like the nations around them, god and land were tied together. A god was a god of a certain territory. But in recent history the gods of the Babylonians, especially Marduk, have been more powerful, and so the LORD has left, given up his land, retired somewhere to lick his wounds. And being absent, he is also indifferent and uninvolved – he does not see, so they have to seek aid, help against the Babylonians elsewhere – from the gods of Egypt.

But there is more vv. 14-15

*Ezekiel 8:*<sup>14</sup> *Then he brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD, and **behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz.***<sup>15</sup> *Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? You will see still greater abominations than these."*

There are women weeping for Tammuz. In the temple of the living god, in whose law death makes unclean, we have a cult of the dead, the cult of Tammuz. The women are taking up a Babylonian ritual that remembered a long dead and since deified king.

*Ezekiel 8:*<sup>16</sup> *And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD. And behold, at the entrance of 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, worshipping the sun toward the east.*

And then v. 16, right outside the entrance to the sanctuary we have people worshipping the sun. Think of the picture – when they bow down to the sun, what are they showing to the LORD who is resident in the temple. Their backsides.

What do these visionary pictures say of the people's attitude and relationship to the LORD their God?

Remember, these are all happening in the LORD's temple, the house of the LORD.

They express contempt.

They are thinking of Him like one of the gods of the surrounding nations, projecting on to him human needs and wants. He is incomplete in Himself, His rule needs supplementing, needing a consort - Asherah

Thinking of Him as powerless, unseeing, a little territorial deity displaced by more powerful gods

A god to whom it is useless to turn

Saying there is more power in the underworld, and he can be openly defied even in His own house. The god you can turn your back on

The God whose word can be despised and openly rejected

The LORD had said before the people entered the land

*Deuteronomy 4:*<sup>15</sup> *"Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,*<sup>16</sup> *beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,*<sup>17</sup> *the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,*<sup>18</sup> *the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.*<sup>19</sup> *And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.*

Cf. Deut 17:2-5

And the LORD had warned that such unfaithfulness would cause them to 'utterly perish from the land', to be completely destroyed Deut. 4:24-26.

This is a people who had abandoned the covenant. Not in secret, but openly.

In his house they had an object He had forbidden, were practicing an activity that repulsed Him, had more respect for the dead and were openly turning their backs on Him.

Not the occasional disobedience, but a settled and justified, a determined turning to other gods.

Perhaps you don't care much about what you or others think of God, but to get a feel for the level of contempt, and how it makes it impossible for the LORD and this rebellious people to keep living together, sharing the same space, why the LORD says their behaviour will 'drive me far from my sanctuary'

think about your own house.

Let's say you kindly let some neighbours whose house had burnt down come and stay with you.

And you said – look, to help us live together, just a few simple rules. Please don't park your car on the lawn, there's plenty of space in the driveway. And no smoking in the house.

Pretty simple, but after a week or two you noticed that they were parking their cars on the lawn, because they said it made them easier to get out. And then you noticed the smell of smoke from their bedrooms, and despite you raising it with them they kept on doing it and started smoking openly in the kitchen and dining room. And then you couldn't work out why the mail wasn't arriving and you were getting phone calls from people whose bills hadn't been paid – until you saw them writing NATA on mail addressed to you. Finally you went to raise this with them, to tell them it couldn't go on, and they just turned their backs on you and kept on with what they were doing.

An object you had forbidden on your front lawn, an activity that repulsed you, and them treating you as if you weren't there, as if you were as good as dead.

You would think – one of us has got to go

We can't keep sharing this space.

In fact you would be determined not to have anything to do with them ever again.

Their behaviour would offend you deeply

Yet is the way many treat God

We live in His world, and we treat Him as if He is not there, as if He is dead, unable to speak a word to us – and think it does not really matter, He is so impotent He can be openly despised

Way believers treat God when we say we can serve money, rely on it for our security, as well as serve God, or when we say that we can mix the worship of the LORD with the worship of other gods,

But there is more

*Ezekiel 8:<sup>17</sup> Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger? Behold, they put the branch to their nose.*

This is the climax of the revelation of Jerusalem's sin.

That they fill the land with Violence. The LORD will that charge in – 9:9, 11:6, and this violence provokes Him – it puts the branch to their nose, an insulting and provocative gesture like a two fingered salute.

Violence was the sin of the flood generation Gen. 6:11

It is the more powerful oppressing the less powerful, in whatever context, using whatever means they have to get their own way and enrich themselves – whether that is by intimidation, abuse of the court process, beatings that silence, or killing – crushing resistance to their will

Violence is saying the proud rule, not the LORD.

He does not see, He will not act, He will not defend the powerless and poor, He will not uphold His justice – so they can act according to their own wishes and interests

Where the LORD is rejected, where He is despised, His image, those made in His image, will be despised

There is always a cost to idolatry, and that cost is paid by the poor, the weak, the vulnerable who are no longer protected by the fear of the LORD

We see that in our own times, in our own society, where the lives of the unborn are no longer protected, where those eager for gain exploit those desperate for work

On seeing this sin the LORD says

*<sup>18</sup> Therefore I will act in wrath. My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."*

The LORD had always been clear with His people. Behave like the Canaanites, be treated like the Canaanites.

The LORD had said *Deut 8:*<sup>19</sup> *And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.*<sup>20</sup> *Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.*

They can have no place in the LORD's land, in the LORD's presence

It is that bad

The break in relationship is final

All Jerusalem will be caught up in the coming judgment.

And the LORD is clear with us.

Idolatry – giving our thanks, worship and loyalty to created things; proud rejection of His truth and word; the hypocrisy that claims relationship with God but does not do His will

Provoke His wrath, and all the world will be caught up in that judgment.

But is the judgment, thoroughly deserved, indiscriminate?

Does it treat the righteous and unrighteous alike?

This has been a question from the time of Abraham, but in the face of awesome judgments, judgements that carry away so many, we need reassurance.

### **Is it indiscriminate? Ezekiel 9 [Genesis 18:22-33]**

*Ezekiel 9: 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."*<sup>2</sup> *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.*

<sup>3</sup> *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.*<sup>4</sup> *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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.*

Ezekiel’s vision continues and he sees six ‘men’, the executioners of the city who are told to pass through the city and strike v. 5 the whole population without regard to age or gender.

But he also sees another man, with a writing case who is commanded to *“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.”*

These are people whom the executioners are forbidden to touch. They will be spared.

This vision interprets the event that will soon overtake Jerusalem, its siege and capture by the Babylonians. Then the sword will be in the hands of the Babylonians, but we are taught here that it will be the Lord’s sentence that will be executed.

And even in these overwhelming and violent events the LORD can spare those he wills.

#### **What spares from judgement 9:4**

But who are they who will be spared?

Those who ‘sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed’. They are grieved by the sin, not by the consequences.

This is a real and intense grief, the kind of grief we are told later Ezekiel will experience at the death his wife 24:17, grief for the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of His people, the rejection and dishonouring of the LORD, that He should be misrepresented as a dumb idol and treated with contempt.

They are informed by His truth, believe His word and so, out of step with all the other inhabitants of Jerusalem, they see what is happening from the LORD's point of view, in the light of His covenant with Israel.

These are people who see life and security in turning in repentance and faith to the LORD, nor turning from the LORD

I suspect that, like Jeremiah, they would not have been popular in their society, for they would have seen judgment as deserved, and hope in turning back to the one their neighbours thought so passe, so yesterday's god, so infuriating in demanding their exclusive loyalty.

Unpopular, but spared

Grief is not popular in our society

Especially grief about sin

And even more so grief at the dishonouring of the true and living God

We are meant to be grateful for our religious pluralism, grateful for our secular banishing of the Lord from public life. We are not meant to take God and His claims seriously, even as Christians

But the LORD said blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Do you know that blessing?

But despite the evidence of sin, of a clear repudiation of the covenant with the LORD Ezekiel's audience had trouble believing the destruction of Jerusalem could, would, actually happen

Wouldn't this be God acting against Himself, inflicting defeat on Himself.

Didn't he have to defend them for His own reputation, His own place in the world?

We have that same trouble

Doesn't God have to save everyone to be God

God gives visionary testimony to underline the certainty of the judgment they could not bring themselves to believe in. That is brought home in multiple ways

## Is it certain?

### 9:9-10, 10:2

Firstly there is the LORD's response to Ezekiel's agonised question when He sees the work of the executioners

*Ezekiel 9: <sup>8</sup> 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?"*

*<sup>9</sup> 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.' <sup>10</sup> As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads."*

### The LORD's departure from Jerusalem 8:4, 9:3, 10:4, 18-19, 11:22-23

Then the certainty of the LORD carrying out His sentence, its irreversibility, is emphasised by the movement of the glory of the LORD.

Just as the depiction of the sin of Israel in chapter 8 moved closer and closer to the sanctuary, so through these chapters the glory of the LORD moves further and further away from Jerusalem.

At the start

*Ezekiel 8: <sup>4</sup> And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the valley.*

The glory of the LORD is seen in the vision where it traditionally was understood to reside, in the holy of holies above the cherub over the ark of the covenant

But that glory moves

*9: <sup>3</sup> 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.*

First it moves from the holy of holies to the threshold of the sanctuary, looking out, as it were, on all the idolatrous activity in the temple courts.

*10: <sup>2</sup> And he said to the man clothed in linen, "Go in among the whirling wheels underneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city."<sup>3</sup> Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. <sup>4</sup> And the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD.*

The seeing of that movement is repeated in 10:4,[ to coincide with the pronouncement of the certainty of judgment on Jerusalem in the man being instructed to scatter the coals over the city.]

That repetition is a reminder that this is a visionary experience, and Ezekiel is being shown many things, some of which are happening at the same time so the events described are not in strict chronological order

But in 10:3 we also seen that the heavenly chariot is there waiting beside the temple, on the south side of the house, awaiting departure.

Ezekiel again describes that chariot in chapter 10, stressing that it is glorious and heavenly. The living creatures are identified as cherubs. The LORD loses no glory in moving from the holy of holies. And the freedom of this chariot's movements are again stressed. The glory of the LORD moves in its own time, subject to its own will and no other.

And it does move. The glory of the LORD mounts its throne chariot and moves to the east gate of the house of the LORD, poised for departure

*Ezekiel 10: <sup>18</sup> Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. <sup>19</sup> And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out, with the wheels beside them. And they stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them.*

That departure from the city, but not from the land, is then recorded at the end of the vision.

*Ezekiel 11: <sup>22</sup> Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. <sup>23</sup> And the glory of the*

*LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.*

The message is plain. They have believed lies.

The truth is the LORD does see and what He sees appals Him.

He has not left the land, but He has left a sinful Jerusalem

He is not dead, but living, and He, not the sun, occupies the east.

The LORD is not forced out by some other god. HE goes as King, in His own time, in accordance with His own will, fulfilling His own covenant word.

But Jerusalem is now left without His protection as the LORD gives them up to their own choice. They did not want to honour Him as their god, or obey Him as their King. But He still reigns, and now He is outside, against them.

And they cannot bring Him back

Judgment is certain.

And between the East gate and the LORD's departure from the city Ezekiel sees another vision, at the east gate, that reinforces the certainty of the judgment pronounced. This vision reveals the sinfulness of those now in power in Jerusalem, and at the end of it there is an event that unsettles Ezekiel further.

### **11:1-13**

*[Ezekiel 11: 11 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of the house of the LORD, which faces east. And behold, at the entrance of the gateway there were twenty-five men. And I saw among them Jaazaniah the son of Azzur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. <sup>2</sup> And he said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; <sup>3</sup> who say, 'The time is not near to build houses. This city is the cauldron, and we are the meat.' <sup>4</sup> Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, O son of man."*

These are people known by name to Ezekiel, and probably to his audience. Members of well known families. And they are now the people in positions of influence and power in the city now so many of the elite of Jerusalem have been deported, - they give counsel, they make the plans – but they are wicked. There has been no repentance. In fact their saying reveals their smug complacency, their seeing this time of crisis as a time to enrich themselves.

They don't need to build houses at the present time. It is a time to consolidate, to occupy what has been left by the exiles. And they can do that because they are the meat. This may not sound a reassuring image to us, but they are saying they are the choice parts, not the offal that has been thrown away. That is the exiles.

And between them and the fire is the cauldron, They will be protected in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel confronts their sin. They are guilty of violence, and the choice parts, those protected from the judgment coming, are those who are dead already

<sup>5</sup> *And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and he said to me, "Say, Thus says the LORD: So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind. <sup>6</sup> You have multiplied your slain in this city and have filled its streets with the slain. <sup>7</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Your slain whom you have laid in the midst of it, they are the meat, and this city is the cauldron, but you shall be brought out of the midst of it.*

They won't be protected, but what they fear will be brought upon them

<sup>8</sup> *You have feared the sword, and I will bring the sword upon you, declares the Lord GOD. <sup>9</sup> And I will bring you out of the midst of it, and give you into the hands of foreigners, and execute judgments upon you. <sup>10</sup> You shall fall by the sword. I will judge you at the border of Israel, and you shall know that I am the LORD. <sup>11</sup> This city shall not be your cauldron, nor shall you be the meat in the midst of it. I will judge you at the border of Israel, <sup>12</sup> and you shall know that I am the LORD. For you have not walked in my statutes, nor obeyed my rules, but have acted according to the rules of the nations that are around you."*

Ezekiel finished with a summary of their abandonment of the covenant – and then he sees something more, gets a glimpse in the vision of a real time event]

<sup>13</sup> *And it came to pass, while I was prophesying, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then I fell down on my face and cried out with a loud voice and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"*

Ezekiel's cry tells us he gets the point. Pelatiah's death is a down payment on the judgment pronounced. There will be no escape. IT is already in train.

And even though this death will support the truthfulness of Ezekiel's prophesying, underline to the exiles the certainty of the LORD carrying out what He is revealing through His prophet, Ezekiel wonders again if this is the end of Israel in its entirety.

*"Ah, Lord GOD! Will you make a full end of the remnant of Israel?"*

That is the question that would be on the lips of his hearers as well, for in their view hope for the continuation of Israel lay only with those who had been left in the land of Israel.

People, land and God were inseparable. TO be away from the land was to be away from the LORD, beyond His care

*Ezekiel 11: <sup>14</sup> And the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>15</sup> "Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of*

*them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, 'Go far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.'*

IN the accepted theology of the day the LORD had already finished with those in exile. Tossed out of His land, they had been tossed out of any place in His plans for His people. There was no hope for Israel there.

But unlike the time he first asked that question about whether Israel had any future in chapter 9, this time the LORD gives Ezekiel a fuller and surprising answer, an answer that says there is still hope for Israel, hope in the face of certain judgment, hope in an unexpected place.

### **Is there any hope? 9:8, 11:13, 11:14-21**

*Ezekiel 11:’<sup>16</sup> Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.’*

First of all the LORD says He is sovereign over what has happened to the exiles. IT did not happen because HE was defeated. They were not being taken beyond His power. It was His will being done. I removed, I scattered

And He has not abandoned the exiles. He is the God of the whole earth, and they can draw near to Him and enjoy His protection wherever they are for He “has been a sanctuary to them for a while’, for the limited time of their exile.

And He has great plans for them.

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’<sup>18</sup> And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations.*

As He sent them into exile, so He will gather them, and He will give them the land. More, He will make it possible for them to live in the land in His presence for ever.

*<sup>19</sup> And I will give them one heart,- undivided loyalties - and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them*

*a heart of flesh,<sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

We will hear more of this new will and mind that will want to do the LORD's will in Ezekiel 36, but when the LORD says and *they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

He is saying that it is in this despised and rejected remnant, a people they all thought had been abandoned and forsaken by the LORD, that the LORD would fulfill His great covenant purpose to have a people for His very own.

That is the promise made to Abraham [Genesis 17:7-8]

It is the promise repeated in the covenant with Moses [Ex. 6:2-7, 19:4-6, Lev. 26:12]

And the LORD says He will fulfil that promise, achieve that purpose through judgement, through the despised and rejected.

Hope in judgement is found in an unexpected place.

And that is true for us

People under judgment for idolatry

For the proud violence that comes where the LORD is not honoured

Everyone believed that Jesus on the cross was under God's judgment, had been abandoned by Him, was experiencing His curse and not His blessing.

And surely the cross is the last place you would look for hope – death of a God forsaken man, a man who could cry with His last breathes 'MY God My God why have you forsaken me.'

But the LORD overturns the verdicts of complacent sinners, confident of their own righteousness, of their own entitlement to blessing.

In the death of Jesus sinners can find hope.

As Paul writes in *Galatians 3*:<sup>13</sup> *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*



He became a curse for us so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to us -so that we could be spared condemnation by being justified by faith, be included in His people by trusting Jesus

And so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith – have that new heart and new Spirit Ezekiel promised.

Hope is in the one judged in our place.

### **What to do with the answers? 11:24-25**

*Ezekiel 11:<sup>24</sup> And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me. <sup>25</sup> And I told the exiles all the things that the LORD had shown me.*

Well, Ezekiel comes back to earth amongst the elders of Judah gathered at his house, and he tells them ‘all the things the LORD had shown me’.

Told them everything

Told them the LORD’s view of idolatrous practices that they and/or members of their family shared in

Told them the certainty of the judgment on Jerusalem, the certainty of judgment for those who abandoned the covenant, who rejected the LORD’s statutes and rules, his decrees and laws

Told them who would be spared, and where the Lord offered hope to Israel – amongst the exiles whose hearts would be changed.

There, in Ezekiel’s house far away from Jerusalem, those elders had a choice.

To believe Ezekiel, or not.

To hold fast to their old world view

That the LORD was just like all the other gods, their national local deity who had been outmuscled by the gods of Babylon

And that they had moved beyond His power and help

And that now they had to look to themselves, or turn to other gods, the gods of their new environment

Or to humble themselves to believe a word from God that told them that the judgment coming was thoroughly deserved, that called for them to confess their sin and mourn for these abominations in their national life, in their own lives

That called them even in far away Babylonia to know He is the LORD – the living God whose word is always fulfilled, the ruler of the whole earth who should always be trusted and obeyed, The God He had said He would be in His covenant with them

And to put all their hope in Him

To abandon the false hope they clung to of getting back to Jerusalem for the bigger hope, the hope beyond hope, He offered.

That they would, beyond Jerusalem's destruction, beyond the temple's destruction, be gathered back to Judah as His purified and changed people

And as we hear Ezekiel that is our choice

God has told us of the judgment deserved for idolatry and the violence, the sin, that flows from it

He has told us it is certain, for idolaters cannot continue in His presence

And He has told us that He is free and brings hope where we would never look for hope, brings hope from the despised and rejected one

And He has told us those who are spared are those who mourn, who are grieved, for sin and turn to Him and not from Him

We can choose to defend ourselves and our idols, claim that it is our right to believe whatever we like about God, demand that we are good enough even if we don't honour our Creator or believe His word

To maintain that Jesus is the loser

Or we can change our mind and humble ourselves

Come to see the world as God sees it, the world He has created, sustains, and rules

See our sin as God sees it, serious enough to deserve death, the death of eternal separation from the good God

And put our hope in the hope God gives us, in Christ

Forsaken, cursed, not for His own sin, but ours

To become the one who can forgive us and give us new life

A new life to live by giving our loyalty, trust and worship to Him alone.