

THE PROMISE OF THE RETURN OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND GLORY AND OF THEIR WITHDRAWAL EZEKIEL 11:14–25

Introduction

Judgment is usually an unpopular subject. Few of us enjoy having our sins pointed out or being warned about coming judgment. But God has a purpose in judgment, a surprising purpose. His purpose in judgment or discipline is always to arouse us to draw closer to Him, to seek His forgiveness and help. We usually draw closer to God through suffering rather than through the good times of life. When God's hand of judgment disciplines us through trials and hardships, it drives us to cry out for His mercy. In such times many of us trust the LORD, and He saves us from dooming ourselves eternally.

The present Scripture gives us a picture not only of God's coming judgment, but also of the future restoration that Christ will bring about when He returns to earth. Remember that Ezekiel was sitting in his house surrounded by some of the leaders of the exiles (8:1-2). While he was seated there talking to the elders, all of a sudden the Spirit of God came upon Him and gave Him a shocking vision: God was removing His presence and glory from the temple and the people. Once His presence was removed, there would be nothing to hold back His judgment. God would pour out His terrifying judgment upon the wicked, idolatrous nation of Israel. This is, *The Withdrawal of God's Presence and Glory from the People (Part 2): A Picture of Both Judgment and Future Restoration*, Ezekiel 10:1–11:25.

- I. God began to withdraw His presence and glory from the people: a picture of judgment (vv. 10:1-7).
- II. God withdrew His presence and glory from the temple: the result of the people's defiling His house (vv. 10:8-22).
- III. God stated the major cause for withdrawing His presence and glory: the wicked leaders (vv. 11:1-13).
- IV. God promised that He, His presence and glory would return: a godly remnant assured (vv. 11:14-21).
- V. God withdrew His presence and glory from the city: a symbol of God's allowing the people to live like they wanted (vv. 11:22-25).

I. Ezekiel 11:14–21 God Promised that He, His Presence and Glory would Return: A Godly Remnant Assured

God gave Ezekiel a wonderful promise: He would save a remnant of believers and restore His presence and glory to them. A few people truly trusted the LORD, followed Him, and obeyed His commandments. These people would survive the Babylonian invasion and be scattered throughout the empire, even as Ezekiel and the earlier exiles had been. A few of

these survivors would believe the promises of God and trust Him to fulfil His promises to Israel. These few would eventually be returned to the promised land. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. God issued a strong indictment of *the people still in Judah*, a charge of self-exaltation and self-righteousness (vv. 14-16a). The people back in Jerusalem knew that God had chosen the Jews to be His very special people, the people through whom He would fulfil His promises. Therefore, they believed that God would eventually free them from Babylonian control and allow them to re-establish Judah as one of the great nations on earth. The people still in Judah also thought that God had cursed *the exiles in Babylon*. They viewed the exile as proof of God's curse and concluded that the exiles would not inherit the promised land as their possession. Ignoring their own sins, the people in Judah felt they were the true people of God and the true heirs of His promises.
2. God instructed Ezekiel to set the matter straight. The prophet was to inform the Jews that He had in fact chosen the exiles to be His special people. Through the discipline of the exile, they would cry out for mercy and help in their suffering. Some would turn to the LORD in faith, trusting Him to save them and to fulfil His promises through them and their descendants.
3. God's promises made it perfectly clear that He had not forsaken the exiles. Someday in the future He would fulfil all His promises to them and their descendants. The LORD spelled out six specific promises:
 - => God would be a sanctuary, a refuge for the righteous exiles scattered throughout the nations of the world (v. 16b).
 - => God would liberate the exiles who truly believed in Him, and He would return them to the promised land (v. 17). Note that the sovereign LORD, the LORD God Himself, guaranteed this particular promise.
 - => God would arouse the returned exiles to destroy all idols and never participate in any form of idolatry or false worship (v. 18).
 - => God would fulfil the *new covenant* through the returned exiles (v. 19). He would give them an undivided heart and a new spirit, removing their heart of stone that had been so stubborn against Him.
 - => God would stir up the returned exiles to follow His commandments and to keep all His law (v. 20a).
 - => God would make the returned exiles His people, and He would personally be their God (v. 20b).
4. In addition to making these wonderful promises, God issued a strong warning to all the Jews and, by implication, to everyone else (v. 21). All who were devoted to anything other than the LORD would face His judgment and condemnation. Note that the sovereign LORD, the LORD God Himself, also guarantees this warning.

Thought 1. God's promise of preserving a godly remnant of believers can be applied to us all. God can remove all our guilt and save us from future punishment because of Jesus Christ. Christ died for the sins of the world. If we will just trust Him as our Saviour, repenting of our sins, God will accept us. God will save any of us who believe in Him. He will give us a new heart and a new spirit and deliver us from the coming judgment. This is the promise of His Holy Word:

John 1:12-13 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

John 3:3-8 *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

2 Cor 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Gal 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.*

Eph 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Col 3:10 *And [you] have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Titus 3:5-7 *He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

1 John 5:1 *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well.*

Psa 57:7 *My heart, O God, is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music.*

Jer 24:7 I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

Ezek 36:26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

II. *Ezekiel 11:22–25 God Withdrew His Presence and Glory from the City: A Symbol of God's Allowing the People to Live like They Wanted*

Ezekiel foresaw the final removal of God's special presence and glory from among the Israelites. Suddenly, without any signal from the LORD, the cherubim spread their wings, and the glory of God arose and left the city for the final time. The special presence and glory of God would not rest upon Jerusalem again until Jesus Christ returns to establish God's kingdom on earth. As Ezekiel watched, the glory of God arose from within the city and stood above the Mount of Olives. The reason for stopping above the mount is not stated. Apparently it was to symbolize God's longing and compassion for the people who were about to suffer His terrifying judgment. When the glory of God arose from the Mount of Olives and departed, God was no longer present to restrain the sins of the people or His hand of judgment. From this moment on, the LORD's unrestrained judgment would pour out upon the city and its citizens.

At this point in the prophet's vision, the Spirit lifted him up and returned him to the exiles in Babylon. The vision of God's glory withdrawing from the people had ended. Courageously and boldly, Ezekiel proclaimed everything the LORD had shown and said to him in the vision. He preached the totality of God's Word, both the judgment and the promises of God (v. 25).

Thought 1. When God withdrew His presence and glory from Jerusalem, the people were left to their own devices. He was allowing them to live as they chose. God has given us *free will*, the ability to choose to do right or wrong. When God created us, He did not want robots that would mechanically worship and follow Him. Rather, He wanted creatures with *free will* who would voluntarily choose to love, worship and serve Him. This is the reason some of us believe in Christ and some of us reject Him. We exercise our will, our free choice to believe in Him or to reject Him. The more we reject Him, the more stiff-necked and stubborn against Him we become. The more we reject God, the easier it becomes to reject Him. Our nature becomes conditioned to rejecting Him. God warns us that we can become so hard that we will never repent and turn to Him. When this happens, God gives us over to our sins. He leaves us to our own devices, allowing us to live exactly as we choose. Listen to the warning of God's Holy Word:

Mat 23:37-38 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate."

Acts 7:41-42 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and revelled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?"

Rom 1:28-32 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Rom 8:5-8 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Eph 4:17-19 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

2 Th 2:11-12 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. And so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Titus 1:15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

2 Chr 30:7 Do not be like your parents and your fellow Israelites, who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so that he made them an object of horror; as you see.

Psa 81:12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

Jer 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." ■