

Ezekiel 9 – Being Marked Out for Salvation

The 9th chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy introduces us to a vision of 6 armed men, who are commanded to go throughout the midst of Jerusalem, and carry out the judgement of Yahweh. However, there was a 7th man in their company with an inkhorn rather than a weapon. He was to place a mark upon the foreheads of those who were not party to the apostasy in the city, and who sighed and cried for the abominations done therein. So there were 2 aspects being performed: the destruction of the apostates, and the preservation of the faithful: we shall consider both of these in some detail.

It is important to note that first of all, the things described in Ezekiel chapter 9 are a consequence of the events of chapter 8. Here, the prophet was brought in vision to: "the inner court of Yahweh's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of Yahweh, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, **with their backs toward the temple of Yahweh**, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (Eze. 8:16).

Notice here, that their idolatrous worship of the Sun involved them literally turning their backs on the things of Yahweh. They faced away from the temple to the opposite direction, and spurned all of the principles that were embodied in it. Hence, in Ezekiel chapter 9, Yahweh's judgments were to come against the idolatrous nation, beginning at the House that they desecrated.

Ezekiel chapter 9 commences with a description of 6 men, concerning whom it is said that they "have the charge of the city". As these men carry out the judgments, it has been suggested that they were the angelic agents who were to bring the Babylonians against Israel. However, it is also interesting to notice that in Jeremiah chapter 39:3, there were 6 princes of Babylon who besieged and took Jerusalem. It would seem appropriate therefore, if these agents were 6 angels who guided the 6 Babylonian princes in their judgements against Yahweh's people.

Amongst the 6 men, there was a 7th figure, who was very different in both equipment and purpose. Rather than carrying a weapon, he had a writer's inkhorn instead. And rather than to destroy, he was to place a mark upon the heads of those who were to be spared destruction. It is both interesting and exhortational to consider this man in more detail.

THE SEVENTH MAN

This seventh character is described with his mission thus:

"... and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side ... and Yahweh said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, **and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry** for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezek. 9:2, 4).

And to the warrior agents, he was to prophesy:

"Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: **but come not near any man upon whom is the mark**; and begin at my sanctuary" (Ezek. 9:5-6).

Putting these verses together, we find that those who would be spared the judgment are those who were marked in the forehead by the writer with his inkhorn. It is significant that these same principles feature in the prophecy of the Apocalypse. In Revelation chapter 7,

we again read of destroying angels who bring about Yahweh's judgments upon the earth. And again, we have an angel who places a mark upon the forehead of those who were to be spared:

“... I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, **till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads**” (Rev. 7:1-3)

It is clear then, that in order to escape the judgements of God, we need to be subject to this sealing process, and have the mark in our foreheads. But what is that mark? Evidently, it is not a literal mark written with a literal inkhorn/pen, but is symbolic of a greater principle. The fact of Ezekiel's linen clothed man bearing an inkhorn instead of a weapon indicates he was to write something upon the foreheads of those who sighed and cried. Perhaps we have a clue as to what he wrote in Exodus 28:36, where we read of the High Priest, and words that he was to have written upon his forehead:

“... thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and engrave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO YAHWEH. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre, upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And **it shall be upon Aaron's forehead**, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and **it shall be always upon his forehead**, that they may be accepted before Yahweh” (Exod. 28:36-38).

In the positioning of this golden plate upon Aaron's forehead, we have a number of principles exhibited: 1) The plate was of Gold - i.e. perfected faith. 2) It was bound to his head with a blue lace - i.e. the commandments of God, and 3) The writing was “Holiness to Yahweh”. The head is the place of thought and intellect, and so Aaron as the peoples' representative before God, was epitomising those principles that should have always be in their minds. The entire system of salvation is based upon the exaltation of Yahweh, and an acceptance that He is holy. Indeed this holiness is to be exhibited by the disciples: “... as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy for I am holy ...” (1 Pet. 1:14-15). The holiness of Yahweh must always be in the mind's of Messiah's disciples: indeed, it is this that will spare us from the judgments of God coming upon the earth.

THOSE THAT SIGH AND CRY

Those who were marked out for salvation comprised those who would “sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done” in the midst of Jerusalem (see verse 4). For them, mercy would rejoice against judgment, and the mark upon their heads demonstrated to the destroying angel that they were to be spared. It is similar in certain respects to the Passover, and the daubing of the blood upon the doorpost and lintel of their houses. Then, the destroying angel would pass over the houses that bare the mark, and spare them for salvation. Even so, Ezekiel saw that the 6 agents of destruction would spare those whose souls were sore vexed at the apostasy in Israel, particularly in the House at Jerusalem.

This was the spirit of the Psalmist, who was also disturbed by these things: “Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law” (Psa. 119:53). And when Sodom was destroyed, Lot was spared, as God “delivered just lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.” In this was

exhibited how that “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet. 2:7-9).

Notice, those who were marked out for salvation were not those who maintained an objective sense of detachment from what was going on. It was not those who looked on, and considered themselves righteous because they were not directly part of the abomination: it was those who were deeply concerned and affected by what was happening. Those who “love the brotherhood” will, like Lot, be sore vexed at the inroads of apostasy into the household of faith, and it is those who bear the hallmarks of salvation within their minds and thinking.

JUDGMENTS UPON THE HOUSE

The judgments were to begin with the House of Yahweh itself: “ ... begin at my sanctuary” (Eze. 9:6) was the command. 2 Chronicles 36 recounts the historical fulfilment of this, after describing how that the people spurned the ministries of the prophets:

“Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men, with their sword **in the house of their sanctuary**, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or them that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand ... and **they burnt the house of God**, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof” (2 Chron. 36:17-19).

In this vision, Ezekiel saw how the house would be defiled by death:

“he said unto them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go ye forth. And they went forth and slew in the city” (Eze. 9:7).

Similarly, the Psalmist wrote:

“Oh Yahweh, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; **thy holy temple have they defiled**; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the air, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem and there was none to bury them” (Psa. 79:1-3).

Such was the great calamity that was to come upon Yahweh’s Holy Nation. The Chronicles record (cited above) describes how that this took place at the hands of the Babylonians. But the historical narrative also records how there were those who escaped the sword:

“And **them that had escaped from the sword** carried he away into Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia ...” (2 Chron. 36:20).

So it was, that according to the vision shown to Ezekiel, there was a remnant who were spared, and delivered from the wrath to come. Ezekiel himself was part of this remnant: “ ... it came to pass that as they were slaying them, **and I was left**, that I fell upon my face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh! Wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?” (Eze. 9:8).

In a manner reminiscent of Lot in Sodom, Ezekiel the priest interceded on behalf of the people that they would not be utterly destroyed. He was left – and like Elijah, it seems that he thought he was the only one. Elijah’s circumstances were similar:

“he said, I have been very jealous for Yahweh Elohim of Armies: for the Children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; **and I, even I only, am left** and they seek my life, to take it away” (1 Kings 19:10).

But there has always been a remnant who refuse to bow before the altar of mammon. As it was declared to Elijah:

“what saith the answer of God unto him? **I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.** Even so then, at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:4-5).

Returning to Ezekiel’s vision, the Divine penman accomplished the work appointed for him:

“And, behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, **I have done as thou hast commanded me**” (Ezek. 9:11).

His labours had ended: he finished the work. Even so, we come to consider the work of our Saviour:

“I have glorified thee upon the earth: **I have finished the work** which thou gavest me to do ...” (Jno. 17:4)

Our Redeemer is the One who has marked us out for salvation. Messiah is the One who laid down his life for his friends. We have “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God: And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which **delivered us from the wrath to come**” (1 Thes. 1:10). Only by the implanting his Word into our minds and hearts can we be saved, hence the exhortation to “lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21).

We, like Ezekiel, are living in the days immediately before the pouring out of the judgements of God. The Apostle speaks of our day, in terms like that of Ezekiel:

“... for the time is come that **judgement must begin at the house of God:** and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? ...” (1 Pet. 4:17)

Just as in Ezekiel’s vision, the judgements began at the house of God, so it will be that the future judgements will begin with the household of faith. We must ensure then that we have the mark, or seal, of God in our foreheads, so that we can approach that day with confidence that we will be spared. As Peter continues: “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4:19). Let us do likewise, and face the future with confidence, being marked men and women, destined to receive salvation at the hand of our coming king, the great Judge of all the earth.

Christopher Maddocks