

X Marks the Spot

God's Marking of the Righteous and Judging the Wicked

Ezekiel 9:1 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."

(Ezekiel 9:1-11)

Idolatry

The “[mark of the beast](#).” Today it is an infamous phrase that carries with it the symbol “666” as well as nearly endless speculations on what it is and means. The actual phrase only appears in [Revelation 16:2](#), “[The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore *the mark of the beast* and worshiped its image.](#)” You can note several things of importance in this verse. [First](#), *an angel* is pouring out wrath upon those with the mark. [Second](#), those with the mark are worshiping the *image* of the beast—in other words, *an idol* of some sort. [Third](#), this makes those who have the mark non-Christians. And of course, that mark was labeled with the numbers “666” (or in some manuscripts 616), back in [Rev 13:16](#), where it is called, curiously, the “[number of the beast](#),” “[the number of \[a\] man](#) [or “[man’s number](#)”].” Importantly, this mark is put on the right hand or [the forehead](#).

I asked Grok A.I. to [give me some of the recent speculations on Twitter/X for the Mark of the Beast](#) and it gave the following: the *Google logo*, *COVID-19 vaccines*, *European microchips*, *Israel’s flag*, *the Sabbath*, and *consumerism*. Some of these you have surely heard of, such as the idea that goes back to the 80s that the mark will be a barcode or to the 2000s that it

will be a microchip that they put under your skin. Others, you have probably not heard of before.

As I was listening to a recent *Blurry Creatures* podcast, my friends Luke and Nate interviewed a very interesting fellow who has rescued tens of thousands of children from human sex and ritual trafficking from nations all around the world. For some reason, they got onto [a tangent on the Mark of the Beast](#). He gave an interpretation that felt relevant for this introduction.

And if I can bring up something here. We were talking ... the seed war ... nephilim things ... the hybrid thing, all of that kind of stuff. One of the things that will happen in the end times ... specifically during the tribulation, is that a big portion of the world will be attacked by quote unquote “beasts.” “Beasts” in the Old Testament are not animals. They are this hybrid thing ... When it comes to the beast, here’s what he says in Ezekiel. He says, “[So I send upon you famine and all evil beasts.](#)” This is Ezekiel 5:17. “[And they shall bereave you and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee. And I’ll bring the sword upon you. I, the Lord have spoken it.](#)”

One of the judgements that God brings is this beast. Now we know the mark of the beast: 6, 6, 6, we know that to be the antichrist, the ultimate hybrid fusion, so much so that they [these beasts] can claim humanity no longer was created by you. Now humanity has been created by us. And I actually think that the mark of the beast **makes you unredeemable**. I think it, I think it changes your DNA to a point to where you are no longer of the bloodline of Adam.¹

OK. So. Ughh. This **highly (HIGHLY) speculative** view of the Mark of the Beast is now being fused with nephilim eschatology, and whatever you make of that, there's just nothing in the text that says the mark of the beast changes your DNA and makes you a non-human. He's just making that up. Then there's the idea that the mark makes you *unredeemable*—as if you *were* redeemable prior to the mark, then you get the mark, then you are no longer redeemable, that is savable.

I'm telling you about this Mark of the Beast to set up for us the sermon, not from Ezekiel 5—which we already went through, where we did actually note that the beasts there

¹ **Troy Brewer**, "[Nephilim Magick & Ritual Workings](#)," *Blurry Creatures* Ep 348 (Aug 12, 2025).

could be demonic entities of some kind—but **Ezekiel 9**. But to do this properly, I need to take you **to the counter-mark in Revelation**, the mark that isn't nearly as much fun to talk about and so hardly anyone does. You say, “**There's another mark in Revelation?**” Yes!

It is referred to on **four occasions**, the first of which is **Revelation 7:3**. John sees an angel ascending “**from the rising of the sun**” (curiously, we saw that language in the last and worst of the four great abominations in **Ezekiel 8:16**) “**with the seal of the living God.**” And he calls out to four angels of death who had been given great power to harm earth and sea and said, “**Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.**”

The second reference is **Rev 9:4** where locusts are told “**not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.**” **14:1** is the third. “**Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.**” And finally **22:4**, “**They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.**” In each instance, there is a mark or a sign placed on the forehead, exactly like the Mark of the Beast is. What's going on with these marks and why

might I bring them up when we are looking at Ezekiel 9 of all places?

Ezekiel 9: Context and Structure

As we enter this chapter, I want to remind you that we are **in the center**—really the second half of the center that started in Ch. 8, of the large structure of Ezek 1-11. Curiously, you can read Ezekiel 8-9 as a single unit of thought that centers on God’s resolving to judge evildoers in his temple and then executing that judgment upon them.

- A. Vision begins, God’s glory present (8:1-4):
 - B. Abominations revealed (8:5-16)
 - C. God’s resolve to judge (8:17-18)**
 - C’. Execution of judgment (9:1-7)**
 - B’. God’s response to intercession (9:8-10):
- A’. Vision concludes, God’s glory departing (9:3, 11)

But our chapter, like Ch. 8, is also a **self-contained** unit, chiastically structured:

- A. (v. 1–4): God summons agents, commands man in linen to mark righteous.
- B. (v. 5): Command to smite without pity.
- C. (v. 6): Agents slay all but marked, begin at sanctuary.
- D. (v. 7): Defile temple, fill courts with slain.**
- C’. (v. 8): Ezekiel laments slaying, fears for Israel’s remnant.
- B’. (v. 9–10): God justifies judgment, no pity.
- A’. (v. 11): Man in linen reports completion.²

² See Admin, “[Ezekiel 9:1-11](#),” *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Sept 14, 2015).

The structure underscores **God's justice** in distinguishing **the righteous who are marked** from the wicked who are judged, with the temple's defilement symbolizing the broken covenant, framed by divine presence and agency. It further demonstrates **God's omniscience** in distinguishing the **righteous who are marked** from the wicked who are judged, with a very curious link to the Passover which will even more amazingly point us forward through the mark to the NT work of Christ. The whole chapter will teach us that proper worship matters, as idolatry, even if well-intentioned, incurs judgment. The rode to hell is paved with good intentions.

Ezekiel 9: Context and Structure

Ezekiel 9 is only **11 verses** long. It begins, “**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’**” (**Ezek 9:1**). The “he” would refer back to **the Holy Spirit** who lifted Ezekiel up in that amazing passage where the Spirit and the one like a man (Christ) seemed to be blurred together. And it needs to be point out, he's angry. He is crying **in Ezekiel's ears with a loud voice**. He's mad!

Now, the prophet is still in the middle of his vision, so what is happening here is not happening in Jerusalem, but in

his mind. Yet, it is a portent of things that will be coming soon enough in the city. It says that the loud voice told someone to bring the executioners of the city. These executioners are agents who are charged with the execution of a sentence.³ They come with their weapon, called here a “destroying weapon.” We know nothing about what that weapon might be. Whatever it is, it is deadly.

Now, I want to make a theological point here. Recently, American evangelical pacifist and social justice activist who co-founded the “Red-Letter Christians” ministry with Tony Campolo posted, “Growing up we were taught to ask WWJD... What Would Jesus Do? Sure, it got a little cliché and commercialized... but it is still the right question. I pray that every Christian in America and around the world would ask that right now — What would Jesus do? Who would Jesus starve? Who would Jesus bomb? Who would Jesus turn away?”⁴ and subsequently went on to name not individuals he saw on the street, but governmental policies that the left doesn’t like such as helping Israel against the Palestinians or having a border wall. Obviously, the post implies, Jesus wouldn’t do any of this stuff.

³ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 303.

⁴ Shane Claiborne, “WWJD?” X (Aug 9, 2025).

Now, in Ezekiel 5-8, we literally saw God directly tell us that he would execute the judgments of 1. **starving his own people** (**Ezek 5:10**), 2. **warring again his own people** in the ancient equivalent of bombing them (**5:15-17**), and 3. **turning his back** on his own people, not even hearing their prayers (**8:18**). Ironically, these are **the exact same three things** he said Jesus would never do, yet here, God is literally doing all three of them.

But it's more than that, and this is why I mentioned his *Red-Letter* Jesus ministry. Because to these kinds of people, the only thing Jesus ever spoke in the Bible was those red-letters, i.e. a few words in the Gospels. I often tell people in this context that I want my own red-letter Bible where I make **the entire text of Genesis – Revelation red letters**! Remember that man on the throne that Ezekiel saw in Ezekiel 1 and again in Ch. 8? Well, that's *Jesus* in a preincarnate form. Same Jesus. Same God. I don't mean to take anything away from Jesus' very important teachings on turning the other cheek and fighting for peace, and a being a good Samaritan, and all of that. But the two things that mean-wellers like this fail to comprehend is that **Jesus was talking to individuals, not the state** and God—*Jesus*—gave the sword to the state but he gives his individual disciples a different ethic for their own personal lives and a different mission to the church. People

like this confuse church and state and individuals. More, they seem to have no idea that *it is Jesus who is executing his judgments* throughout Ezekiel. Johnny Cash puts this well,

There's a man goin' 'round takin' names
And he decides who to free and who to blame
Everybody won't be treated all the same
There'll be a golden ladder reachin' down
When the man comes around

The hairs on your arm will stand up
At the terror in each sip and in each sup
Will you partake of that last offered cup
Or disappear into the potter's ground?
When the man comes around⁵

To be a *biblical Christian*, one must fundamentally come to understand that Jesus is the God of *Ezekiel* and that his Spirit—as Paul calls the Holy Spirit (*Php 1:19*; cf. *Acts 16:7*), is the God of Ezekiel, for they are one God. And when God judges in the OT or NT, you cannot divorce *the Spirit of the Son* from the judgment of God. Father, Son, and Spirit all speak as one and all decree the judgments together as one. Any view less than this is idolatry.

⁵ *Johnny Cash*, “The Man Comes Around,” *American IV*, American Recordings (2002).

At any rate, the vision continues, “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” (Ezek 9:2). Here we see the executioners arrive and there are six of them. They are *ish*-men not *adam*-men (two different Hebrew words for “man”). If they were *adam*, we would know for certain that they are human. As it is, that’s actually a question we will want to keep in the back of our minds. They are coming from relatively the same place that Ezekiel has just been as he entered the temple at the north gate, the direction of evil. They come with their weapons, this time called “weapons of slaughter.” Whatever that is, it appears that there is going to be a blood-bath.

But then it says there was one more man with them. 6+1. It’s like creation, forming a perfect seventh. This man, also an *ish*-man, is clothed in linen and he has a writing case at his waist. Now, being clothed in linen is how the priests were clothed (Ex 28). But it is also how *angels* are clothed (Dan 10:5; 12:6-7). Both are ministers to God—one in the earthly court; the other in the heavenly court. And both can act as God’s agents of judgment, as the Levites going to Moses’ side

to destroy their brothers are the golden calf incident demonstrates. Which is this man here?

Notice that he has a [writing case](#). The term here is borrowed from Egyptian and refers to a scribes' writing equipment (*sopher ha qeset*). It has a pen, ink horn, wax writing tablet, those kinds of things.⁶ So it could be a priestly scribe, someone like Ezra. And yet, in the Bible and extra-biblical Jewish literature, there are also *angelic* scribes. [Daniel 8:13](#) has the curious case of “[the one who spoke](#)” (ESV), which in the KJV is rendered, “[that certain saint](#).” The word is *Palmoni* (both Greek and the LXX). It appears only once in the Bible and may mean “a certain one.” But it likely comes from a root meaning to number or count and the word for wonderful. Thus, older commentators called him the “wonderful numberer of secrets.” He is clearly an angel and many linked him to Christ.⁷

Why bring up counting? As we keep reading, we see that “[the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house](#)” ([Ezek 9:3](#)). This is supernatural language. It is [such an important event](#) that we are going to come back to it next time and look at it in much more detail. For today I will simply have you notice

⁶ [Michael Heiser](#), “[Ezekiel 8-9: Episode 117](#),” *Naked Bible Podcast* (Sept 10, 2016), 22.

⁷ [John Mayer](#), *Commentary Upon All the Prophets*, [Calvin](#), *Commentary on Daniel*, [Andrew Willet](#), *Hexapla in Danielelem*, etc.

that the mention of these seven persons are in direct association with the Glory of God, and that sounds very much like something like Isaiah 6 where the Glory of God fills the temple and suddenly the prophet sees these heavenly beings.

In fact, the Glory of God is now called a “**Him**.” In fact, in the beginning of **vs. 4** he is called “**The LORD**” (YHWH). **The Glory of God is God**. And he calls to “**the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist**” (**3b**). This this is intertwined in a mini ABA’ structure: A man with linen and a case | The Glory of God calling to | the man with linen and a case. What does he tell 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**” (**4**). Essentially, his man in linen is commanded to count all the people in Jerusalem that hate the idol worship that has taken over the city and temple. He is a great counter, like Palomi. Indeed, it seems to me as with most others that this can be none other than a heavenly angel.

But this verse takes us back to the introduction and **the marks of Revelation**. Now, the words for the mark (*charagma*) of the beast and the sign (*sphragis*) on the forehead of the righteous is not the same as the LXX word used here (*sēmeion*). The **mark of the beast** is a word that evokes the Greco-Roman

practice of branding slaves or making loyalty to earthly powers, while the word used for [the sign on the righteous](#) aligns with divine authority and protection. Different concepts, yet both going *on the forehead*. Ezekiel’s mark also goes *on the forehead*, but it uses a third word and it appears to be a word chosen for [the broadest possible kind of mark](#) that someone could make, and this takes us to one of the most interesting little rabbit holes you will find in the OT.

The Hebrew word for “[mark](#)” is the word *tav* (תָּ). Tav is literally the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (like our “Z”). But, it is essentially our letter “T” (they only have 22 letters). Today, the symbol for the tav is written in something called “[block Hebrew](#),” and as Heiser puts it, this “*tav* (ת) “[looks kind of like a doorway with a little appendage on one leg at the bottom.](#)”⁸ But the way the *tav* was written in Ezekiel’s day was quite different. It looked like our letter [X](#) or when they shifted it 45⁰ it looks like our little letter “[t](#).” Amazingly, all three of these things are theologically relevant.

Hebrew Block-Letter	Projected Proto-Hebrew Original Letter	Middle-Egyptian Hieroglyphic Exemplar (Sign-List Number)	Original Hebrew Alphabetic Name (NIVEC Number)	Hebrew Consonantals of Middle Kingdom (ca. 1842–1760 BC)	Hebrew Consonantals of New Kingdom (ca. 1560–1307 BC)	Hebrew Consonantals of Iron Age - Canaan (ca. 1150–587 BC)
ת	 Sinai 92	 (M42)	<i>tayiš</i> , male goat תַּיִשׁ (9411)	 Sinai 376		

See the whole chart [here](#)

⁸ Heiser, 23.

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First, let's consider the modern look of the symbol for the letter—a doorway with a little appendage on one leg at the bottom. We could rephrase this such that it looks like a doorway with **two posts and a lentil**. Sound familiar? If not, perhaps the next verse might jog your memory. “**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” (Ezek 9:5).** Do you recall **Ex 12:12-13**? “**For I will *pass through* the land of Egypt that night, and I will *strike* all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on *the houses* where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.**” Passing through, striking, and an angelic messenger are all ideas shared in the two stories. Further, God does not spare even a single of the firstborn of Egypt, showing that he likewise shows no pity. This is why this passage reminds scholars so much of the Passover story.

But the modern letter *tav* also reminds me of it. **Ex 12:22** says, “**Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch *the lintel* and *the two doorposts* with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the**

door of his house until the morning.” Though it is anachronistic to use the modern block letter here (since *tav* was not drawn this way back then), it still stands as a great analogy for the connection between Exodus and Ezekiel. God is marking those who hate idolatry with a mark that strongly resembles the Passover in modern script, when he refused to kill those with the blood on their door—the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

Now, of course, the Passover had direct tie-ins to the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’ death which was for Ezekiel still future—as in over 600 years in the future! And incredibly, the letter drawn on those who hated the idols in their hearts would have looked like the letter X. Now, even in English we have had people who couldn’t spell their own names simply make “their mark,” and this has always been the letter x. X marks the spot, right? In fact, this practice goes back to perhaps our earliest written book in the OT: Job. Job 31:35 says, “Oh, that I had one to hear me! (Here is my signature! Let the Almighty answer me!).” “Signature” is the word *tav*, his X, his mark. In the context, he is saying, “Give me an official affidavit. I’ll swear that my testimony about myself is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. My mark is my oath.” The mark in Ezekiel 9:4 is similar. In marking these righteous, it is the Numbering Angel

who is giving a legal document to the heavenly court that this person (they themselves become the document!) is **innocent of the crimes** that are about to be punished.

But here's the remarkable thing about this. You've surely heard of **X-mas**. Many well-meaning Christians wrongly think that X-mas is a secular way of mocking Christianity by crossing out the name of Jesus with an X. Actually, the X is simply a shorthand for "Christ," since Christ in Greek (*christos*), begins with the letter *chi*, which is our English X: **Χριστός**. In other words, the X isn't just a mark, it is the mark that Christians began to use for Christ and Christian, for example in the famous *ἰχθύς* (*ichthus*) acrostic which stood for Jesus (I) Christ (X) God (Θ) Son (Υ) Savior (Σ).

But it gets even wilder. Because this *tav*-X mark was often written as our lower-case "t" which looks **exactly like a Roman cross**. In fact, many Church Fathers believed this marking was a type of the death of Christ that would cover the sins of the righteous by the cross. Tertullian said, "**He foretold that His just ones should suffer equally with Him—both the apostles and all the faithful in succession; and He signed them with that very seal of which Ezekiel spake: 'The Lord said unto me, Go through the gate, through the midst**

of Jerusalem, and set the mark *Tau* upon the foreheads of the men.” Now the Greek letter *Tau* and our own letter T is the very form of the cross, which He predicted would be the sign on our foreheads in the true Catholic Jerusalem” (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.22).⁹ Cyprian said, “God says that only those can escape who have been reborn and signed with the sign of Christ; when sending his angels to lay waste the world and to destroy the human race he threatens more seriously than the last time.” (Cyprian, *To Demetrian* 22).¹⁰

This is where the superstition of crossing oneself originates, and it actually began to be used in some places pretty early on in baptismal rites (see Horsiesi, 305–390, *Regulations* 7 who ties it directly to Ezekiel 9:4).¹¹ Most Reformers didn’t like this, of course, because superstitions are rarely good things, but also it is clear that their skepticism of the basic idea stemmed more because by their time Hebrew was written in the block letters, and they had forgotten about the earlier script, which the Fathers still knew quite well.¹²

⁹ Tertullian, “The Five Books against Marcion,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 340–341.

¹⁰ Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, eds., *Ezekiel, Daniel*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 35.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² You can see this in Gill for example admitted that Origen and Jerome both tie the *tav* to the cross but says “not the Hebrew letter as some say, because in the form of a cross, and so signifying salvation by the cross of Christ; for this letter has no such form, either in the characters used by the Jews, nor by the Samaritans, at least in the present character.” (Gill, *Ezekiel* 9:4).

We've rediscovered the ancient script and the tav really did look like a cross. Yet Calvin, who clearly didn't understand that, nevertheless relates this mark to Christ in yet another way, "The faithful were marked with *the last letter*, because they were last among men, and as it were the offscouring of the world. Since therefore from the beginning, the world has treated the sons of God as if they were cast-aways, therefore I have said that they may be signed with the last letter."¹³ *The first will be last, and the last will be first*, right? That's what Jesus said.

In all of these we have clear links of true believers in God—sons of God alone being marked, and it is in my estimation a remarkable thing that in one letter we could have ties to the Passover, to Christ's name, to his death, and to the first being last and the last being first. Surely, *God alone knows the end from the beginning* and when he marked people off 600 years before Jesus came, he did this as a type of the greater marking to come.

Let's continue. The *command of the Lord* here is truly sobering. "*Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women...*" (*Ezek 9:6a*). That's the God of the Bible. He hates sin that much, especially sin that defiles

¹³ *John Calvin* and Thomas Myers, *Commentary on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 305.

his sanctuary, that is literally done inside of it during worship as worship. And that's important to keep in mind, because those are the sins that were called out in the previous chapter. They were sins of idolatry and worshiping the gods in the temple. This isn't "merely" sin that people commit day to day, though he hates those too. This is worse. Indeed, not all sin is created equal.

But just as someone in our day might be tempted throw the Bible across the room because they just can't accept that this could really be the "God of love," he throws us a curveball, telling the executioners, "... but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary" (6b). So God is clearly distinguishing and able to distinguish between those who love him and those who don't, those who obey him and those who don't, those who hate what happens in their midst and those who go along with the sin. It reminds of "righteous Lot" who was "greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked" in his midst (2Pe 2:7). God saw him and sent two angels to come and rescue him, delivering him and his family from the fires that were about to engulf Sodom and Gomorrah. God knows those who are his. He marks them. He knows those who are his. He's the one who gives them a heart to love him in the first place. It isn't a guessing game with God. He rescues the righteous and does

not treat them like the wicked ever, from the first pages of the Bible to the last. His nature is consistent. And his love is real.

Nevertheless, judgment begins in the temple. Is this where Peter gets it when he says, “Judgment ... begin[s] at the household of God” (1Pet 4:17)? The holy places must be the cleanest, and if they have become defiled in any way, they must be purged. Peter goes on, “And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” His point is terrifying, and if he really does get it from Ezekiel, then it is even more so, because Ezekiel says, “So they began with the elders who were before the house” (Ezek 9:6c).

The elders—the leadership of the people. God knows that the people are like sheep without a shepherd. So he begins with those who have the greater responsibility. Remember James when he says, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). This is why I can’t for the life of me understand the nonchalant, carefree, whimsical, light, unconcerned, laid-back, jaunty attitude so many preachers have when they come into the pulpit. They don’t prepare. They don’t exegete. They

often don't even talk about the Bible at all, if they even believe it. Judgment starts with those who go to the house of God to lead others in worship. That's a terrifying thing to have to live with if you take it seriously. (Frankly, it's why I read my sermons, so that I don't say stupid stuff off the cuff that I will later regret; it helps mitigate my own foolishness, which I have a lot of.)

That takes us to **the center of the chapter**. “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” (7). The **defilement** here is **not** that somehow the executioners are necessarily sinning and bringing in moral defilement—although I won't rule that out since at the end of the day these executioners were, in human terms, the wicked Babylonians who hardly did what they did with righteous holy zeal for God's Name! But it refers first and foremost to the defiling of the temple with **the strewn bodies of dead corpses** of men, women, and children that would line the walls and pock the court with their dead carcasses. Their death brings defilement to holy places. Even touching dead bodies makes one unclean. If they want to defile my temple so badly, let them deal with this defilement!

And the command's **fulfillment has only just begun**, even just as a vision. For once they finish with the temple,

they are to march throughout the city, picking off and taking down all they see scampering, withstanding, or hiding about. It's another Johnny Cash song, "Go tell that long tongue liar, Go and tell that midnight rider, tell the rambler, the gambler, the back biter, tell 'em that God's gonna cut 'em down. Tell 'em that God's gonna cut 'em down."¹⁴ And cut them down he does.

Now, the whole city will be strewn with the blood of the wicked—those who dared to defile God's temple and partake in the wicked worship of foreign gods. And that, my dear friend, is a reality of God's nature that many need to come to grips with. For he is so holy, so righteous, and so just that sin necessitates that he bring these attributes to the forefront at some point in time. You do well to remember that he has essentially been putting up with this evil from his people for a hundred years, or in some ways, for many hundreds of years and never fully bared his arm. That's because God is also kind and patient, longsuffering, and does not delight in doing evil. But at some point, it was enough. And that's the point Ezekiel found himself living through.

So, the sight and problem the prophet began to see unfold before his visionary eyes was truly awe-inspiring and terrifying. For he says, "While they were striking, and I was

¹⁴ Johnny Cash, "God's Gonna Cut You Down," *American V*, American (2006).

left alone, I fell upon my face...” (8a). He cannot bear the mayhem and the pandemonium, the death and the destruction. He looks away in horror. And yet, falling on one’s face is a sign of deep reverence and worship, and in this case, prayer. He cries out, “Ah, Lord God!” What do you think he is going to say next? Do you think he will demand that God not do this because he is Love? Do you suppose he will ask for mercy upon the wicked? It is neither.

Instead he says, “Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?” (8b). The prophet is not so foolish as to presume to call God out for wrongdoing. Nor is he so unwise as to demand that this angry God lessen his judgment upon the wicked. But he has heard of a mark that goes on the forehead of those whose very hearts detested the wickedness of their leaders. They were incapable and helpless to stop the evil. So all they could do was mourn privately and then refuse to participate in the ever growing calamity.

Ezekiel remembers *them*. He frankly believes that the wicked deserve what they are getting. But not the righteous. And it very strongly implies to me that in his vision he was in fact seeing the righteous cut down with the wicked. Or at the very least, he was not able to tell the difference in what he was seeing unfold.

It causes him to remember the mark and ask if that **was all for nothing**. “**Didn’t you promise, Lord, that the executioners are not allowed to touch those with the mark? And yet... here they are dying.**” That’s the only way I can make sense of the language “**will you destroy all the remnant.**” Some had to have been dying. That leads to an existential crisis that many people don’t know how to deal with and so they fall off the tightrope of God’s word to the left or to the right. Some say, “**If God marks you, you will never have anything bad at all happen to you.**” Other say, “**God’s mark does nothing, see, they were still dying.**”

The crisis is actually brought out in the chiastic pattern in the parallel: “**Touch no one on whom is the mark**” with “**Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?**” The remnant is the theology of the elect who have believed in the Lord and are faithful to his covenant.

What’s amazing to me is **how God answers**. What will God say? “**No Ezekiel, I none of the remnant have died.**” “**Yes, Ezekiel, I’m killing them all.**” **Vv. 9-10**. “**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.’ As for me, my eye will not spare, nor**

will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads.’” Did you hear that? God doesn’t actually answer Ezekiel’s question! He asked if God would destroy all the remnant of Israel and God didn’t actually answer him. That’s not very satisfying! I will point out that this will all return again in Ch. 11 though, so perhaps you can tuck that away for that later discussion.

But let’s think about what God wants the prophet to think about here. Instead of describing the physical fate of those marked, God goes back to the extreme wickedness of the guilty. It is “exceedingly great.” They have shed much blood throughout the land of Judah. The city of Jerusalem is nothing but a den of injustice. No one gets a fair shake in the courts or in commerce, nowhere. It’s the exact same problem that their brothers to the north in Israel had faced when the earlier prophets came to them with the covenant lawsuit complaints and God judged them.

The tie in is the phrase, “My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity” (10). This is exactly what it says in vs. 5 in the parallel, “Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity.” So God reiterates it. “I told you already, Ezekiel.” In fact, it is exactly what it says in the last verse of chapter 8, “My eye will not spare, nor will I have pity.” “Ezekiel, don’t you worry about what I do or do not do with the remnant.

You've heard my declaration to the heavenly executioners, whether the earthly counterparts from Babylon follow suit is my business. Your business is to make sure you have internalized just why I am doing this and that you tell it to the people. They are evil. They have committed gross sin. And they are only getting worse. That's what you are to focus on. That and only that, until you get it through your thick skull. I told you I would not hear their cries. And now I'm bringing their deeds upon their heads."

That's quite the way to end the chapter. And yet... The final verse takes us back to the opening. "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'" (Ezek 9:11). The man in linen with his writing case has done exactly as God had commanded. But let us remember *what* God had commanded him. As he was commanded, he passed through the city and *marked those who sigh over Judah's sins* with the *tav*. He did that, whether Ezekiel can understand that or not, he did it. This is the only thing that man was told to do, which is distinct from the other six men who were commanded to slaughter everyone in the city and not to touch those with the mark.

So this verse takes us away from the pure slaughter and back to the man and his mission. And his mission was to

mark those who hate sin so that they will not be touched by the executioners. In this way, the Lord God, who is the Holy Spirit, reassures Ezekiel that no matter what he sees happen in the city, **God in fact will remember those whom he has marked to himself.**

And friend, that is indeed the good news of this chapter. Previously, we saw this mark as the letter *tav* and how its three symbolic designations are a doorpost, reminding us of the Exodus, an X reminding us of the Christ, and a T reminding us of the cross. So now, with our chapter fully in mind, you will be able to understand the future reality even from the coming Babylonian invasion to which our chapter points.

The Passover event came about as the culmination of ten plagues that God sent upon the land of Egypt for how it had treated his people. The final plague was the plague of **the Firstborn** and it was carried out by **the destroying angel**—be he Christ himself or some created angel, we can't be sure. But to keep his own people safe from this supernatural plague, God had the people of Israel put the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the posts and lintel of their front doors, so that when he saw the blood, he would see the blood and Passover that house, not killing the firstborn inside.

That Passover would be celebrated that very night with unleavened bread made without yeast, symbolizing haste, for in the morning they would leave Egypt (Ex 12:8, 15). Later, the Passover would be celebrated with bread and wine, and this is precisely what Jesus was doing when he took the bread and told his disciples that this is his body broken for them and then the wine saying, this is the blood of the new covenant poured out for you.

In doing this, Jesus was preparing them to later understand that God was about to pass judgment upon the Son of God, expending his full wrath and anger for our sin upon the Lamb of God, who would spill his blood, so that anyone who has that blood poured onto doorposts of their heart through faith in Christ might have the angel of death pass over them. Sin *necessitates* that he bring these attributes to the forefront at some point in time, and he did this at the cross when he expended his full wrath on Jesus. “It was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isa 53:10). He bore the sin of many (12). He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities” (5). He was punished by God, stricken, smitten, and afflicted (4). He was forsaken (Ps 22:1). This, beloved, is the sign of the *tav*. Christ underwent this, the Messiah, and his X marked the spot. That spot was the *tav*, the cross upon which he would

be murdered as a common criminal though he had done nothing wrong and no sin was found in him.

The true sign is not some physical mark, be is the mark of God's elect or the mark of the beast. It is faith or unbelief. It is being in God's kingdom vs. not. If you are not in God's kingdom, then the wrath of God abides upon you (John 3:36) and you are marked by God as someone upon whom the wrath of God will not Passover because your sin is not forgiven because you will not have forgiveness because you have not believed that Jesus has done this for you.

But this sin and mark is not unforgivable. Rather, by faith in Christ you are marked with the cross. Not by making some superstitious sign of the cross every time something bad happens to you. Not by getting a tattoo of a cross put on your forehead or a your palm. But having the sign of the cross on your heart and symbolized through the mark of baptism—baptism of the Spirit giving you a new heart and baptism in water symbolizing to the world you have been set apart.

Don't you see? Those marked in Ezekiel are marked because they sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in the temple. This can only be because they truly love God and have faith in him. Notice how all of our

thoughts come together in this verse in Revelation. “If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints” (Rev 13:10). And again, “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (14:12). These appear right in the middle (14:1) of one of those marking verses of believers.

Hear the word of God and know that he forgives all who come to his Son by faith, believing the good news that he really and truly does forgive our sins through the cross of Jesus. For it is an atonement that has been made that satisfies God’s wrath in full, because the High Priest himself has offered it and the Lamb of God himself has been slain. Then know that whatever should befall you in this world, whether you live out your days in peace or die by the hand of some invading army, **God has marked you**, for it is God who has given you the faith to believe. He knows all things. And he knows his people. And he has marked them. They are kept safe from the executioner for eternity in the loving hand of God who gives them eternal life.

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