

## **Elvis and the Glory of God**

### **Ezekiel 11:22-23**

“Elvis has left the building” is a cultural catchphrase. At one time the singer’s promoters used the line to control overeager fans, assuring them that there was no longer any reason to push and crush each other since the hero they were hoping to glimpse was gone. Today the phrase is a joke denoting an opportunity that’s vanished.

Elvis helps me understand one of the strange visions of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel lived in Babylon. He and many of his fellow Israelites had been exiled there after the people’s persistent sin led God to allow Babylon to conquer Jerusalem. Some Israelites remained in Jerusalem. But the Temple there, home to God’s glory since the days of Solomon centuries before, had become a place of idols and greed.

In his vision, Ezekiel is taken back to Jerusalem where he sees the cloud-like glory of God, attended by heavenly creatures called cherubim, exit the door of the Temple.

Then:

The cherubim lifted their wings and rose into the air with their wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel hovered above them. Then the glory of the LORD went up from the city and stopped above the mountain to the east. (Ezekiel 11:22-23)

The meaning of the vision is plain: God has finally had enough of his people’s sin and He is leaving. The people will no longer have reason to seek His presence or to hope for His protection. The show in Jerusalem is over. God has left the building.

### **The warning of God**

This sort of Bible passage is unpleasant to think about. The departure of God is far more serious than missing a chance to see Elvis. But God’s action is a necessary consequence of the people’s disobedience. After all, if God were to decide He could live with evil, He would hardly be worth worshipping.

For churches and individual believers today, there’s a serious warning here. We must not assume God will hang around just because He’s been with us or our ancestors in the past. Unless we constantly retune our hearts to fit His, sooner or later He is bound to withdraw His blessing from us like He did the people of Jerusalem. This means we need to attend to our relationship with God if we expect to feel his presence and blessing in our lives.

### **The wonder of Go**

But there's another side to this passage. Notice that the glory of the LORD doesn't disappear altogether. It stays nearby. God separates Himself from evil but does not desert His people. In fact, God's glory stops east of the city, in the direction of Babylon. And earlier in the book, Ezekiel has seen God's glory in Babylon itself (see Ezekiel 1:1-28). So God, who punishes His people with exile, also goes with them into that exile.

I am amazed, not only by the strange splendor of Ezekiel's vision but amazed by God himself! I'm amazed that God would stoop to share in the hurt and indignity of the punishment he imposed. And like those Elvis fans, through the cloud of Ezekiel's vision I glimpse my own hero, Jesus. In Jesus, God has come to us in our land of exile. He walks alongside us in this hurtful and undignified world. He suffers with and for us. He has not left us after all.

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