

Ezekiel 8:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.

Analysis

And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. The vision reveals not ordinary Israelites but the seventy elders—the highest leadership—engaging in idolatrous worship. This comprehensive leadership corruption makes judgment inevitable and demonstrates betrayal at every institutional level.

Seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel represents the council of elders, Israel highest governing body (Exodus 24:1, Numbers 11:16). These are not ignorant common people but leaders responsible for maintaining covenant faithfulness. Their presence demonstrates institutional corruption at the highest levels—those who should guard against idolatry lead in practicing it.

Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan is specifically named, providing historical specificity and showing this is not generic vision but revelation of actual people. Shaphan family had served faithfully under Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-13); Jaazaniah corrupt worship represents tragic apostasy even among formerly faithful families. With every man his censer in his hand indicates priestly-type worship activity—burning incense before idols.

A thick cloud of incense went up mimics legitimate temple worship where incense symbolized prayers ascending to God (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8). Here it parodies true worship, offering prayers to idols instead of Yahweh. From Reformed perspective, this shows the most dangerous corruption: religious activity divorced from true object of worship, form without faith.

Historical Context

The seventy elders represented Israel leadership structure established at Sinai (Exodus 24:1, Numbers 11:16-25). By Ezekiel time, this council functioned as religious and civil authority. Their engagement in idolatry meant covenant violation was not grass-roots movement but leadership-driven apostasy—the most dangerous kind.

Jaazaniah son of Shaphan identification is historically significant. Shaphan the scribe had been key figure in Josiah reform, reading the rediscovered law book and supporting temple purification (2 Kings 22). That his son (or descendant) now leads idolatrous worship shows how quickly even faithful families can fall when institutional structures corrupt.

The burning of incense was standard worship practice in ancient Near East across many religions. In Israel, incense offerings were exclusive to Yahweh and regulated by law (Exodus 30:34-38). Using censers to offer incense to idols represented direct violation of explicit commandments by those most responsible for knowing and teaching the law.

For exiles, this revelation explained judgment: their leaders, the very people who should have prevented apostasy, led the nation into idolatry. God judgment was not excessive but necessary response to comprehensive covenant breach at every level.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. What does leadership-level corruption teach about how institutions fall into apostasy?
2. How does religious formalism divorced from true worship corrupt spiritual life?
3. What is the significance of second-generation apostasy even among formerly faithful families?
4. In what ways do church leaders today offer incense to idols while maintaining religious appearances?
5. How does Christ as great high priest provide leadership that never corrupts or apostatizes?

Interlinear Text

וְשִׁבְעֵי יָם	וְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	בֵּית	וְיָאָזָנִי הוּא	וְשִׁבְעֵי יָם
them seventy	men	of the ancients	of the house	of Israel	Jaazaniah
H7657	H376	H2205	H1004	H3478	H2970
בֶּן	שָׁפָן	עֹמֵד יָם	בְּתוֹכָם	עֹמֵד יָם	לִפְנֵיָהּ
the son	of Shaphan	And there stood	and in the midst	And there stood	before
H1121	H8227	H5975	H8432	H5975	H6440
וְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	מִקְטֹרֶתָּהּ	בְּיָדָהּ	וְעֵתָּהּ	עָנָן	הַקֵּטֹרֶת
men	his censer	in his hand	and a thick	cloud	of incense
H376	H4730	H3027	H6282	H6051	H7004
					וַיָּעָלֶה
					H5927

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 16:35 (Parallel theme): And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

Numbers 16:17 (Parallel theme): And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

Numbers 11:16 (References Israel): And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

Jeremiah 19:1 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests;

Exodus 24:1 (References Israel): And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.

Numbers 11:25 (Parallel theme): And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.