

## Pictures and Images in Worship Ezekiel 8:7-11

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. I, 286-287, emphasis added; updated to modern American English.

### **Ezekiel 8:7-11**

“And He brought me to the door of the court; and, when I looked, behold, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, “Son of man, dig now into the wall;” and when I had dug into the wall, behold, there was a door. And He said unto me, “Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they are doing here.” So I went in and saw; and, behold, every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had his censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up.”

Ezekiel says, *there were painted birds, reptiles, and animals*. Then he adds, *an abomination and all the idols of the house of Israel*. We see that there was not only one idol, but a great number. And in truth as soon as the true worship of God is *neglected*, men place no bounds to themselves; they are not content with one or two errors, but they heap to themselves numberless delusions. So the children of Israel fell away from one idol to a great multitude.

Ezekiel says that *part of the temple was full of pictures all around*. It is indeed certain, that the use of painting was always plentiful, but God wished His temple to be pure from images, lest men, being taken with such enticements, should turn aside directly to superstition.

For if we see a man or an animal painted in a profane place, a religious feeling does not creep into our minds, for all acknowledge it as a painting. Moreover, idols themselves as long as they are in taverns or workshops, are not worshipped. If the painter's workshop is full of pictures, all *pass* them by, and if they are delighted with the view of them they do not show any sign of reverence to the paintings.

But as soon as the picture is carried to another place, its sacredness blinds men and so stupifies them, that they do not remember that they had already seen that picture in a profane dwelling. This therefore is the reason why God did not admit any pictures into His temple. And surely when the place is consecrated, it must happen that the painting will astonish men just as if some secret divinity belonged to it.

Although the Prophet here does not say simply that the walls were full of pictures, yet he says, *that an abomination and the idols of the house of Israel were there*. We see therefore not only that the walls were so decorated for the sake of ornament, but because the people desired to celebrate all the deities whose names it knew to be famous among the profane nations.