

God's Divine Glory Returns

Printed Text · Ezekiel 43:1-12

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: COMPREHEND the vision of God's holy and merciful glory in the temple; ASSOCIATE a sense of holiness of place with the presence and mercy of God; and GROW in respect for the sacredness of worship settings.

In Focus

Robert had not been to church in a long time. When he bumped into his childhood friend Joyce at the grocery store, he was convicted. She talked about the new pastor and the way certain people were growing in God. He was even jealous that some of the young people whom he had seen in diapers were now actively serving in the church and passionate about the Lord. In spite of all his career accomplishments and financial wealth, he knew that something was desperately missing in his life. He decided to get back to faithfully attending church starting this Sunday.

He had come to Sunday worship a little early, and no one was around. He saw the empty pews that reminded him of what it was like to be in the service worshiping with the people of God. Robert felt overwhelmed just being there in the silence. As he walked down the center aisle, a surge of emotions came over him as he remembered the days when he was passionately following Jesus. Tears began to well up in his eyes. He knew that this was what he was missing.

Although God is everywhere, certain places remind us of His presence and encourage us to live holy lives before Him.

Keep In Mind

"So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house" (Ezekiel 43:5, KJV).

Words You Should Know

- A. **Glory** (Ezekiel 43:5) kavod (Heb.) – Abundance, splendor, riches, reputation
- B. **Abominations** (v. 8) t o' e v a h (Heb.) – Disgusting things in a ritual or ethical sense

Say It Correctly

Chebar. Keh-VAR

Shekinah. Sheh-kee-NAW

KJV

Ezekiel 43:1 Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east:

2 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

3 And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.

4 And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the

east.

5 So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.

6 And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me.

7 And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.

8 In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger.

9 Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever.

10 Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

11 And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

12 This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

NLT

Ezekiel 43:1 Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east;

2 and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

3 And it was like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions were like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.

4 And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

5 And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.

6 Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me.

7 He said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever. And the house of Israel will not again defile My holy name, neither they nor their kings, by their harlotry and by the corpses of their kings when they die, 8 by setting their threshold by My threshold and their door post beside My door post, with only the wall between Me and them. And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger.

9 Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever.

10 "As for you, son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the plan.

11 If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them.

12 This is the law of the house: its entire area on the top of the mountain all around shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

The People, Places, and Times

Inner Court. The inner court was a separate area in the temple reserved only for priests. This separate area contained ten golden lampstands. It also contained a table for the shewbread, which was constantly on display and replaced every Sabbath. An altar of incense stood in the inner court before the entrance into the Holy of Holies, where the glory of the Lord was manifested. As a member of the priesthood, Ezekiel was qualified to have access to this area of the temple (1:2).

The River Chebar. The Chebar was a river that ran through the land of the Chaldeans. Many of the captive Jews settled here. Many believe that the Chebar was the royal canal of Nebuchadnezzar that joined the Tigris and Euphrates. Ezekiel sat here among the captives and received many of his visions and prophetic words at this location (1:1–3).

Background

During the final section of the book of Ezekiel, there is a special focus on the coming restored temple. These visionary narratives provide a glimpse of God’s plans for His land and His people. Here we can see Ezekiel’s priestly concerns and knowledge come into play. The temple was described in architectural terms in the previous chapters and as such, it is empty and lifeless. Now the glory of God came to the temple. As a result, the temple was full of life. Ezekiel then begins to talk of what that means for those who serve and worship in the temple. Since the glory of God is now present in the temple, its worshipers must be holy. It must not continue to be business as usual. As a priest, Ezekiel stressed the holiness that is required by God and the putting away of all things that would defile the temple.

At-A-Glance

1. The Return of the Glory (Ezekiel 43:1–5)
2. Return to the Glory (vv. 6–9)
3. The Requirements for the Glory (vv. 10–12)

In Depth

1. The Return of the Glory (Ezekiel 43:1–5)

After describing the measurements and the physical description of the temple, Ezekiel is brought to the gate in the east. There he has a vision of the glory of the Lord with both an aural component (the “noise of many waters”) and a visual component (“the earth shined with his glory”). He notices that this vision is similar to the ones in previous chapters where the Lord called him to destroy the city (Ezekiel 9:5–11) and the one that he received at the river Chebar (Ezekiel 1–3). The Spirit takes Ezekiel up into the inner court of the temple, and he observes that the glory of the Lord fills the house.

This is the return of God’s glory to the temple. It is important to note that without the glory of God, the temple is just another building. The glory of God animates it and gives it life. Ezekiel recognizes this and falls on his face. The proper response to experiencing the glory of God is authentic worship. Notice that Ezekiel didn’t sing a song or begin to preach. He fell on his face because it was God who was there and took center attention.

2. Return to the Glory (vv. 6–9)

Next, as Ezekiel is face down in submission to God and His glory, God speaks to him. He lets Ezekiel know that the temple must not be defiled by Israel anymore. He refers to Israel’s past

actions and the abominations they committed in the temple. They must treat the glory of God with reverence. It is not enough that God's glory has returned to them; they also must return to Him. They must put away their whoredom and the carcasses or memorials of their kings. This word is not just for the common people of Israel but also for her kings and leaders. What God is saying in these verses is that He will not share His glory with anyone else. He will not be worshiped alongside other man-made gods, whether they are statues or men.

God's glory would return to the temple, but Israel needed to return to Him. Without His glory, they would be just like the temple in the absence of His glory—a lifeless shell. God promises them that if they would return to Him by putting away these abominations, then He would dwell with them forever. This is God's desire and plan, and this is the true reason the temple is to be rebuilt. God wants to be with His people in a life-giving and sustaining way!

3. The Requirements for the Glory (vv. 10–12)

Ezekiel is now commanded to show the temple or "house" to the "house of Israel" so they would be ashamed of their sins and the things they have done to defile God's name. Ezekiel is instructed to show them the pattern of the house. The Lord says that if they see the pattern and are ashamed of their sins, then he is to show them all the measurements and architectural designs of the temple. He is to show them the decorations and the ritual acts that are to be performed in the temple. This is what they are to do in order to maintain the presence of God's glory in the temple.

God also says that there is one major requirement or law from which all other requirements are derived: the law of holiness. The Lord lets Ezekiel know that the temple and the mountain that it sits on are to be holy. This means the people are to be holy in their behavior and actions. Both the place where the Lord's glory rests, and the people who are blessed to have His presence among them are to be holy. Holiness is required to experience the glory of God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Ezekiel's reaction to seeing the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 43:3)?
2. What did the Lord ask the children of Israel to remove and put away (v. 9)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what ways can we as God's people defile His name in the 21st century?
2. How can we experience the glory of the Lord today?

Liberating Lesson

Our society has lost the sense of the sacred. Most people live as if everything is banal and trivial. This type of attitude has even spread to the church. Our worship of God sometimes can be dull and lifeless and treated as something that is man-made and common. God's presence is always near when His people gather. His glory is meant to be experienced in these settings. The attitude of sacredness and sensitivity to the presence of God ought to permeate our gatherings and continue with us once we go our separate ways. God is a holy God and deserves to be treated as such.

Application For Activation

How can you grow in respect for the sacredness of worship settings? One of the ways you can do this is to begin to pray when you step through the doors of your church. Say a prayer to calm your heart and focus your mind on God. In this way, you can remind yourself of the reason you are there and go in with a desire to experience the glory of God and to worship Him.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Ezekiel 43:1–12

Just as God showed the Apostle John a revelation of the future in a vision, which included the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2), so he permitted Ezekiel a similar partial vision of the new temple (begun in Ezekiel 40). The whole purpose of the restored temple would be to receive God's glory, which would arrive from the east. This coming glorious event would perfectly reverse Ezekiel's prior vision of the glory departing toward the east (10:1–22; 11:22–25).

1 Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: **2** And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.

God's actions and symbols are never accidental, and the emphasis here on the east is significant for several reasons in addition to the prophetic context. This is the direction to which God's presence departed in Ezekiel 11:23. The sun rises in the east, so God's glory followed the path of the rising sun as it cast its light on the temple. Entering the east gate led directly to the main entrance to the temple, which was a direct path to the Holy of Holies. Directly to the east of the temple mount is the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane, both of which have momentous biblical significance, including both Jesus' agony (Matthew 26:36–39) and His parting ascension (Acts 1:9–12). This gate is also the one into which Jesus rode on a donkey on Palm Sunday (Mark 11:1–11)—another example of God's incarnate glory entering the temple from the east. The word for east in Hebrew (kadim, kah-DEEM) also means first or at the beginning, indicating that God's glory has existed since the beginning and is primal (first and fundamental).

3 And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. **4** And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. **5** So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.

Ezekiel had two prior experiences with God's glory: 1) he saw in a vision the destruction of Jerusalem when the glory left, moving toward the east (10:1–22; 11:22–25), and 2) he saw a vision of the glory when he was called to the ministry of prophecy by the river Chebar (Kebar River, NLT),

where the glory had come from the north (1:25–3:15). Nothing could be more natural than to fall prostrate before such brilliant radiance (cf. 1:28).

Since Ezekiel witnessed the glory departing, it was altogether fitting that he is given a preview of its return. For Old Testament believers, the glory of the Lord was a tangible reality that wasn't witnessed often, but whenever it appeared, it was unforgettable and beyond description. Numerous Scriptures attempt to capture it, e.g., Psalm 24:9–10, which seems appropriate for Ezekiel's vision: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory."

For New Testament believers, God's glory is usually an intangible concept but we are not without examples of New Testament references to His tangible glory, e.g., "who [is] the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3), among others from the beginning to the end of the New Testament (cf. Matthew 1:23; Revelation 21:23). One would be correct to say that in the Christian era, Jesus' veil of humanity was removed momentarily during His transfiguration, revealing the glory of God (Matthew 17:2).

6 And I heard him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. 7 And he said unto me, Son of man, the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and my holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoredom, nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places.

Even in a vision, Ezekiel does not behold God directly, but rather he hears Him from within the Holy of Holies; His glory makes it beyond man's ability to perceive Him directly. Although God dwells in heaven and earth cannot contain Him, still He chooses to dwell on the earth. Isaiah 66:1 captures the balance, "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (cf. "throne" in Jeremiah 3:17, 17:12, with "footstool" in Psalm 99:5, 132:7). In this speech, God dedicates the restored temple Himself, essentially saying that the soles of His feet are on the same ground as the soles of mankind. The difference is that wherever God chooses to make His earthly habitation must be holy and sacred.

The word "dwell" in Hebrew is shakhan (shah-KHAN), which means "reside," "inhabit," or "rest" and is the root of the word "Shekinah" (which does not appear in Scripture), referring to the glory of God that appeared in a cloud to guide the Israelites (Exodus 16:10). This cloud also appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:16–17, 33:22) and filled the tabernacle in the wilderness when it was finished (Exodus 40:34–38). It also filled Solomon's temple on the day of its dedication (1 Kings 8:10–11). Interestingly, the Hebrew for tabernacle, mishkan (mish-KAHN), also comes from the same root. Some theologians connect this dwelling or settling of the divine presence with the New Testament use of the Greek parousia (par-oo-SEE-ah), which means "presence" or "coming" (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Peter 1:16).

The Lord's speech reassures Ezekiel declaring that His return is permanent, which provides hope not only for Ezekiel but for the captives in Babylon. From the beginning, God's presence marked and accompanied every move of the nation of Israel, and by itself distinguished Israel from all other nations, and her God from all other gods. Israel was not complete without God's presence, and now it not only will return, but this time it will be home "forever."

8 In their setting of their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts, and the wall between me and them, they have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger.

God reminds Ezekiel why His presence had departed from the people: because of their cumulative and collective sins, represented by their spiritual “whoredom” (v. 7), which is another word for idolatry. This is illustrated by the temple example. The corruption of the temple was a sign of the overall moral corruption of the nation. Apparently, the temple authorities had permitted either actual burials of deceased kings on the temple mound or had erected memorials to them, neither of which glorified the living God, the King of glory, in what was supposed to be His sacred temple. Instead, they had defiled (Heb. tame’, tah-MAY) or profaned God’s name and treated it with disrespect. The notion that only the thickness of a wall or the threshold (Heb. saf, SAHF) or timber that lies under a door separated such profane things from God’s exalted sacred place was an abomination against God’s holiness. It was complete and total disobedience to do this on the sacred temple grounds. Ezekiel points out the Lord’s consuming of the nation due to these grave sins.

9 Now let them put away their whoredom, and the carcasses of their kings, far from me, and I will dwell in the midst of them for ever. 10 Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern.

The prophet’s message is continued even beyond the time of the prophets and even into our current day and age. The message of the prophets has taken similar forms throughout the history of faith, but the theme barely varies—turn from the death of evil and turn to the life of God; put sin out of your heart and purify your temple so God may dwell within you—culminating in today’s ultra-succinct Gospel in a nutshell, “repent and be saved.”

The temple is God’s symbolic dwelling. It is His earthly residence, which is not to be defiled in any way. It is the ultimate paradox that the infinite, uncontainable God chooses to be present among mortal, finite humanity—a paradox perfectly embodied in the life of Jesus Christ: “who is the image of the invisible God” (from Colossians 1:15). This same paradox creates the ultimate tension in humanity— at any given time, how much is the profane rejected and the glory of the sacred presence welcome in our hearts? God wants to be King over all and will share His glory with no one else.

The use of the word “ashamed” as the purpose of the vision stands in stark contrast to modern thinking, which tends to avoid the subject at all costs. Yet shame, like guilt or fear, can be a valuable emotion if it leads one to transformation—much like the sensation of burning helpfully teaches one to withdraw from or avoid things that burn. Only from within the healthy experience of shame in confessing one’s sins can one truly repent and thus fully experience God’s mercy and grace.

11 And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them. 12 This is the law of the house; Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

The ultimate disaster for Israel was the Lord’s departure. Even captivity by her enemies did not compare to His absence. Conversely, the ultimate blessing for Israel would be His permanent return. The element on which both departure and return hinged was Israel’s faithlessness or her faithfulness. As a result, it is not enough that the people be aware of God’s return. They must know everything involved with the temple, including its design (both exits and entrances) and the laws and teachings associated with it, which refer to the instructions originally laid out through Moses. Just as Jesus came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17), so Ezekiel promises that God will restore the blessings associated with Him originally through Moses (both His presence and worship of Him). Ezekiel was exhorted to deliver the message of hope both orally and in hard copy. One can only imagine the depth of meaning and significance that his vision would have brought for the languishing exiles. Many today are in self-imposed exile, imprisoned by their own

bondages, and held in bondage by their addictions and profane habits. Not so different from the people of Ezekiel's time, they are in desperate need of the hope of God's glory entering their temple and evicting their darkness and sin. By receiving Him, they experience the sacred place of God's glorious presence within their hearts.

Summary

Ezekiel's vision of hope for exiled Israel could also be compared to Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for a racially torn America, which he cast for downtrodden people who desperately needed to be infused with hope for the future. Just as Ezekiel's vision superseded his people and his time, so King's "I Have a Dream" speech also was a timeless message and vision for all humanity, for any who could see with new eyes the difference that a holy God could make in an evil world. Perhaps King had Solomon's words in mind that "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

Daily Bible Readings

Monday

Deuteronomy 5:23-29

Tuesday

Psalm 138

Wednesday

Exodus 3:1-6

Thursday

Psalm 24

Friday

Psalm 5

Saturday

Psalm 11

Sunday

Ezekiel 43:1-12