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Ezekiel: The glory of God



Revealed, retreated, and returned
Described, departed, and descended

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Introduction

The book of Ezekiel is structured like a double sandwich. We have noted before that sandwich structures (called inclusios, brackets, envelopes, bookends) put a fence around a book, indicating that this fence is the main theme of the writer. The content sandwiched in between provides support for that theme. Here are the relevant Ezekiel texts.

The glory of the Lord *revealed/described*

*I saw visions of God. This was the appearance of the likeness of **the glory of the Lord** (Ezekiel 1:1, 28).*

The glory of the Lord *retreated/departed*

*And **the glory of the Lord** went up from the cherub to the threshold of the temple (Ezekiel 9:4, 10:4).*

*Then **the glory of the Lord** went out from the threshold of the temple (Ezekiel 10:18).*

*And **the glory of the Lord** went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city (Ezekiel 11:23).*

The glory of the Lord *returned/descended*

*And behold, **the glory of the God** of Israel was coming from the east, and the earth shone with his glory (Ezekiel 43:2).*

***The glory of the Lord** entered the temple by the gate facing east, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple (Ezekiel 43:4-5, 44:4).*

The glory of the Lord *revealed*

Ezekiel the priest saw his visions of God in the land of the Babylonians in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, about 600BC. The vision of chapter one has three components:

- The windstorm from the north, and within it the four living beings (1:4-21).
- The expanse, dome, platform above the living creatures (1:22-24).
- The throne and man-like throne sitter above the expanse (1:25-28).

The storm

The storm is often a metaphor for the Lord's punishment of the wicked. See for example:

Nahum 1:3; *The Lord will certainly not allow the wicked to go unpunished. He marches out in the whirlwind and the raging storm; dark storm clouds billow like dust under his feet;*

The north

The north (*saphown*) means hidden, dark, and from the north Ezekiel saw the storm coming (1:4), as did Jeremiah:

I see a pot of boiling water; it is tipped away from the north. From the north destruction will break out on all who live in the land. For I will soon summon all the peoples of the kingdoms of the north," says the Lord. "They will come and their kings will set up their thrones near the entrances of the gates of Jerusalem. They will attack all the walls surrounding it and all the towns in Judah (Jeremiah 1:13-15).

In summary, then, the storm out of the north that Ezekiel saw in vision was a metaphor for the coming dark, judgment of God on Jerusalem.

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Four living beings

In the middle of the death-bringing fiery windstorm, by contrast were the living beings, hybrids, in appearance having human form (1:5), possibly because their feet were straight, and they had human hands (1:8), and their front face was that of a man (1:10). Animal features were the faces of a lion on the right, the face of an ox on the left, and also the face of an eagle (presumably facing the rear), and wings (1:8-9). When they moved, the sound of their wings was like the sound of rushing waters, or the voice of the Sovereign One, or the tumult of an army (1:24).

In the middle of the living beings was something like *burning coals of fire*, moving back and forth. It was bright, and lightning was flashing out of the fire. The living beings moved backward and forward as quickly as flashes of lightning (1:13-14). *Burning coals of fire* were also a part of David's poetic description of the appearance of the Lord his deliverer, as He hurled down fiery coals, descended from the sky mounted on a winged angel, or cherub and rescued David from his strong enemies (2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18, Net Bible notes). Each of the living beings had a wheel on the ground at the side comprised of two wheels, one inside the other at right angles full of eyes all around (1:15-21).

All of this is metaphor, a graphic picture of the creator, swift in movement, with omnipresent mobility, universal omniscience, and fiery omnipotence to judge His enemies and deliver the godly. God (*shaddai*), 'one of the mountain', the sovereign ruler of the world who dispenses justice is on the war path with His army.

The overhead expanse

Stretched out over their heads of the living beings was the expanse, glittering awesomely like ice, or crystal (1:22). The scene on earth may be chaotic, but heaven is ice cool and calm.

Above the expanse

Above the expanse Ezekiel heard a voice, and saw something like a sapphire-shaped throne. High above on the throne appeared to be a man, enclosed with what looked like a fire all around him. All around it was a brilliant light, like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds after the rain.

Voice, man on throne clothed in fire, light and splendour like a rainbow. Here in words and images familiar to us is God enthroned, a consuming fire, dwelling in light unapproachable, encircled by a rainbow symbolic of the covenant-keeping God who promises an end to the judgment (Genesis 9:9-17). And from that perspective, Ezekiel hears His voice, and threw himself face down, as John did centuries later (Revelation 1:17). His glory indeed revealed.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord (1:25-28).

Between glory revealed & retreated

The next glory vision is in chapters 10-11. So, chapters 2-8 deal with Ezekiel God's messenger, and his message.

God's messenger (2-3)

God's word stands Ezekiel on his feet and appoints him as His messenger, His watchman to rebellious, hard-hearted, and stony ear Israel. God makes him courageous, and fearless, strong and resolute, hard like diamond, and gives him His word to eat on a scroll, which was sweet like honey in his mouth but bitter in his spirit (chapters 2-3). We have to feed on the Word before we can preach it, so Ezekiel knew that his message was going to be bitter for Israel.

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God's message (4-7)

Through the object lessons of the brick, and sword used as a barber's razors, Ezekiel's 'show and tell' message is that Jerusalem will be sieged by the most wicked of nations, and suffer famine cannibalism, plague, wild beasts, death and exile to foreign lands. Why? Because Israel had not followed the Lord's statutes and regulations and engaged in rampant idolatry. Nevertheless, the Lord will have mercy and will spare some of them, who will escape the sword when scattered in foreign lands.

In sum, then, Israel's sinful rebellion is incompatible with the glorious presence of God.

The glory of the Lord *retreated*

Reason the glory departed

Transported from Babylon to Jerusalem in vision, Ezekiel was surprised to see that the glory of the God of Israel *was there* (8:4). Before he sees it it going up and out from its place, the Lord shows him in detail Israel's idolatry that causes Him to leave.

Firstly, Ezekiel saw to the north of the altar gate the idol of jealousy at the entrance (8:5-6). Secondly, to the entrance of the court he was shown 70 elders each with a censer offering fragrant incense to every image of creeping thing and beast (8:7-13). Thirdly, he brought him to the entrance of the north gate of the Lord's house to see women weeping for Tammuz, a Mesopotamian god associated with fertility, agriculture, and the shepherd (Net Bible notes) (8:14). Finally, Ezekiel was brought to the inner court of the Lord's house to see at the entrance to the Lord's temple near the altar, were about 25 men with their backs to the temple, facing east worshipping the sun (8:15-16).

Executions and exemptions (9:1-11)

Ezekiel saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate facing north, each with his destructive weapon in his hand. They were to visit destruction on the city. Among them was a man dressed in linen with a scribe's inkhorn at his side and they came and stood beside the bronze altar. The man with the inkhorn was instructed by the Lord to go through Jerusalem and mark the foreheads of the people who moan and groan over all the abominations practiced in it. The six men were instructed to go through Jerusalem and strike down all people who did not have the mark (For further details, see my Scriptus paper No. 5, titled 'Stamped').

The Glory retreats in 3 steps

Step 1. After the people were marked and the others destroyed, the Lord spoke from His throne above the cherubim and above the expanse to the man with the inkhorn who was instructed to fill his hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the Jerusalem. Then *the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub* where it had rested to the threshold of the temple (10:4).

What the ancient Hebrews were thinking of when they spoke of the Cherub remains unclear, but their word for Cherub very closely resembled the term 'According To Greatness' or 'According To Abundance' ([Abarim Publications](#)).

Step 2. Then *the glory of the Lord* moved away from the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the Lord's temple as *the glory of the God of Israel* hovered above them (10:18).

Step 3. The *the glory of the Lord* rose up from within the city and stopped over the mountain east of it (11:23). That was, of course, the Mount of Olives.

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Parallels with Christ

Doesn't it feel oddly familiar that Ezekiel's narrative has uncanny resemblance to the incarnation?

- Ezekiel first experienced the glory of the Lord in heaven (1:28), as the Son of God did (John 17:5);
- Ezekiel was then sent as a prophet to the rebellious house of Israel (2:3), was given the scroll of the word of God to speak to Israel (3:1-3), just as Christ came to do the will of God, as it was written of Him in the scroll of the book (Hebrews 10:7);
- Ezekiel foretold of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (4:1-3), as Jesus did (Luke 21:20-24);
- Ezekiel had to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel (4:4-5) as Jesus did (John 129);
- Ezekiel foretold of the scattering of the nation to the four winds (5:1-6:7), as Jesus did (Luke 21:23-24);
- Ezekiel first experienced the glory of the God of Israel there on earth in the temple (8:4), just as John and others saw His glory on earth (John 1:14, 2:11, 11:40);
- Ezekiel described the appalling abominations in and around the temple (8:1-9:2), just as the Lord did (Matthew 23), and
- Ezekiel described the departure from the temple and Jerusalem of the glory of God to the Mount of Olives (chapters 10-11), just as Christ left the temple and sat on the Mount of Olives after enumerating the sins of Israel (Matthew 24:1-3). Also, it was from this Mount that the Lord later was *taken up in glory* (Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-12, 1 Timothy 3:16).

In sum, the *the glory of the Lord* retreating simply confirms that Israel's sinful rebellion is incompatible with the glorious presence of God.

Between the glory retreated & returned

This is a long section between the two visions. However, there are two anchor points. While Ezekiel was in vision in Jerusalem, *the God of Israel was there* (8:4). Soon after God was not there as He retreated. After describing the glory returned, Ezekiel signed off his book with, *the Lord is there* (48:35). In the first instance He was there but left, but in the second case, He is there having returned never to leave.

This in-between section deals with Israel's retribution, repentance, and resurrection.

Retribution

- **Object lessons.** Five times the Lord uses **object lessons** (*mowpheth*), a wonder, or sign, 'a show and tell' demonstration of what He was about to do.
- For example, Exodus 7:9: Pharaoh wasn't scared, or intimidated by Moses so he told him to prove his credibility by displaying a wonder (*mowpheth*) ([Chaim Bentorah](#)). (Note: As a culture, we have an unsatisfied thirst for wonder through knowledge acquisition, as 'wonder' has been used in books more since the 2000 boom in information technology than in anytime over the last 200 years ([Matt Crummy](#)). Will we find it in IT?



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- **Exile.** Far from being positive wonders for Israel, the object lessons (*mowpheth*), were intimidation omens, for they will go into exile and captivity (12:6, 11, Chapter 19).
- **Sanctuary destroyed.** Another object lesson: The Lord takes away from Ezekiel the delight of his eyes (his wife) and he was not to mourn or weep but be an object lesson to Israel (24:1-24), for the Lord will desecrate His sanctuary the delight of their eyes (24:19-24-27).
- **Famine, animals, sword, plague.** There would be psychological judgment as treacherous Israelites eat their bread with anxiety and drink their water in fright, for their land will be stripped bare of all it contains, the inhabited towns will be left in ruins, and the land will be devastated (12:17-20, 14:12-23, 21:1-27).
- **False prophets.** The Lord will destroy the prophets who gave the nation a false sense of security and led it astray. The Lord will judge them (12:-21-13:23, 14:9-11, 34:1-10).
- **Idolatry.** Another object lesson is any Israelite, or resident foreigner, who erects his idols in his heart and then consults a prophet to seek something from the Lord will set His face against that person and will make him an object lesson and a byword and will cut him off from among His people (14:1-8). True also of the elders (Chapter 20).
- **Fire.** Fire will consume the residents of Jerusalem (Chapters 15, 22).
- **Judgment exhausted.** Because Israel engaged in idolatrous prostitution with the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, the Babylonia, the Lord will give Israel into their hands, and they will leave it naked and bare. He will exhaust His rage on them, and calm down and no longer be angry, and repay them for what they have done (16:1-58, chapter 23).
- **Judgment on enemies.** Israel's surrounding enemies meet their end at God's hand suffering his retribution. They are Ammon (25:1-7), Moab (25:8-11) Edom (25:12-14, 35:15), Philistia (25:15-17), Tyre (26:1-28:9), Sidon (28:20-26), Egypt (29:1-32:32), and Mount Seir (35:1-15).

Gog, of the land of Magog

One of Israel's mysterious foes is this one (Chapters 38-39), and the ten references of Gog by Ezekiel are as follows.

Mortal, set your face toward **Gog**, of the land of **Magog**, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy **against** him and say: Thus says the Lord God: I am **against** you, O **Gog**, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal (38:2-6).

Say to **Gog**, On that day when my people Israel are living securely, you will rouse yourself...you will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the earth. In the latter days I will bring you **against** my land, so that the nations may know me, when through you, O **Gog**, I display my holiness (38:14-16).

On that day, when **Gog** comes **against** the land of Israel, says the Lord God, my wrath shall be aroused (38:18).

I will summon the sword **against** **Gog** in all my mountains, says the Lord God (38:21).

Prophesy against **Gog**, I am **against** you, O **Gog**, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal (39:1).

On that day I will give to **Gog** a place for burial in Israel...for there **Gog** and all his horde will be buried; it shall be called the Valley of Hamon-gog (39:11).

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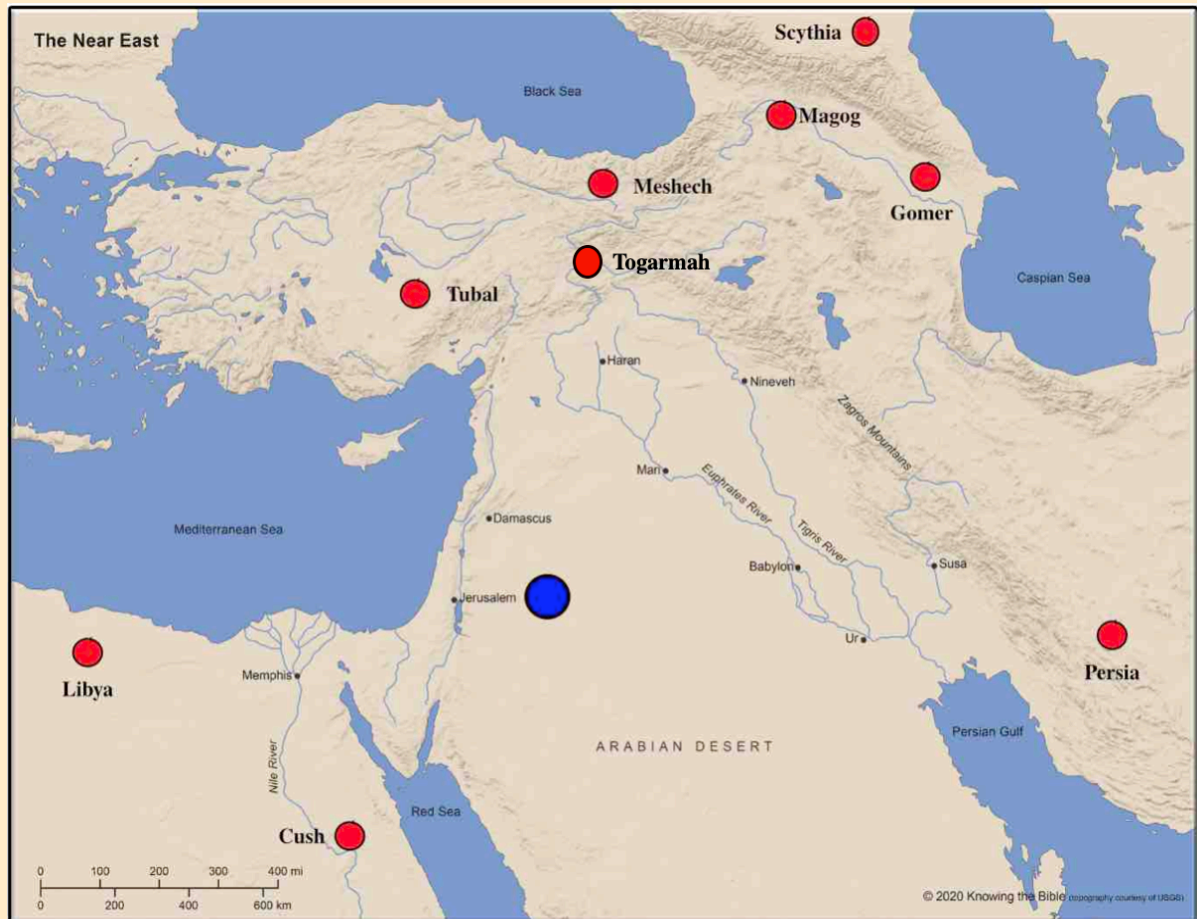
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Gog, of the land of Magog continued

The two nations Meshech and Tubal mentioned above were the sons of Japheth (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5), and located in Cappadocia of Asia Minor. The map below shows Gog's confederacy of nations in Ezekiel's day (red dots) with which he planned to attack and plunder Israel, although he was brought to Israel by God. There, the powers that Magog would gather in a union (Persia, Ethiopia, and Put, Gomer, and Beth Togarmah) lie at the compass extremities, with Jerusalem (blue dot) the centre point, hemmed in.



This invasion by Gog and its confederate armies was to be 'after many days' and 'in the latter years' he will come to a land restored from the ravages of war, to a people brought out from the peoples, and all of them will be living securely (38:8).

When prophets predicted precise events to occur within their hearers' lifetime, they included time to accent the urgency of their message. However, when they gave a general view of a new age, their time scale may be vague and longer term ([Otto](#)). Ezekiel used the expressions 'latter years and days' ('*b'acharit hajamim*'), which means "in the future", but without an eschatological sense.

Have Ezekiel's previous promises been fulfilled? Let's see.

1. Israel will remember their conduct and all their defiling deeds, and despise themselves because of all the evil deeds that they have done (20:39-44). Has Israel repented?
2. Has the Lord saved them from all their sinful unfaithfulness, purified them, and made an everlasting covenant of peace with them, and forgiven all that they have done (Ezekiel 1:18ff, 20:39-44)? Israel has returned but is not enjoying the rest that God promised. She is a nation constantly under threat of extinction by her neighbours.
3. Israel has endured the insults of the nations, and the Lord promised that no longer would they be subject to the nations' insults (36:6-7, 15). Has this happened?

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Gog of Magog continued

4. When the Lord regathers the house of Israel from the peoples where they are dispersed, they will live securely in their land that He gave to them (28:25-26). Has this happened?

5. The Lord promised that Israel's cities will be populated and the ruins rebuilt (36:8-12)? However many of Israel's ruins have not been rebuilt, nor parts of their land inhabited as in ancient times.

Further, there is no recorded event that matches Ezekiel's description of God's intervention against Gog. As the prophecies of Ezekiel 38-39 were conditional on Israel remaining faithful to her covenant obligations, because she did not Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog of Magog was not fulfilled.

As Ezekiel's texts about Gog and Magog, and God's associated promises made to Israel have not be fulfilled, it seems likely that their fulfilment is eschatological and waits the day of John's reference to Gog and Magog (Revelation 20:8), the only other biblical reference to them.

Repentance

- **Remnant confesses.** The Lord will allow a small number of them to survive the sword, famine, and pestilence, so that they can confess all their abominable practices (12:16, 14:22-23).
- **Covenant & expiation.** A small number of Israel survives the sword, famine, and pestilence, so that they can confess all their abominable practices. Israel broke the covenant, but the the Lord will remember the covenant he made with them in the days of their youth, and will establish a lasting covenant with them. Then Israel will remember, be ashamed, and remain silent because of their disgrace when He makes expiation for all they have done (16:59-63, Chapter 17).
- **Repentance required.** The Lord will judge each person according to his conduct, declares the Sovereign Lord so repent and turn from all your wickedness; then it will not be an obstacle leading to iniquity. Throw away all your sins you have committed and fashion yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why should you die, O house of Israel? For I take no delight in the death of anyone. Repent and live (Chapter 18, 33).

Resurrection

- **Israel & the Lord honoured.** The Lord will regather the house of Israel from the peoples where they are dispersed, and they will live securely, and He will make a covenant of peace with them, and the Lord their God will be with them (28:25-26, 34:11-31 chapter 36).
- **Dry bones of Israel live.** The valley of dry bones are all the house of Israel. The Lord will open Israel's graves and raise them from their graves, and will place His Spirit in them and they will live, and have you rest in their own land (37:1-14).
- **Two sticks become one.** The Lord used an allegory of two ticks, one labelled Joseph and the other Judah and He will make them into one stick in His hand. The meaning is that He will take the Israelites from among the nations where they have gone and bring them to their land. He will make them one nation, and David will be king over them, and never again will they be divided into two kingdoms. Moreover, they will not defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, and all their rebellious deeds. The Lord will save them from all their unfaithfulness, purify them; they will become His people, and I will become their God. Also, God will make a perpetual covenant of peace with them, increase their numbers, and place His sanctuary among them forever. He will be their God, and they will be His people (37:15-28).
- In brief, the interval between *the glory of the Lord* retreating and returning shows that repentance is a prerequisite to Israel's resurrection, being saved from all their unfaithfulness, receiving God's purity and covenant of peace. Has this happened yet?

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The glory of the Lord returned

And behold, *the glory of the God of Israel* was coming from the east, and the earth shone with his glory (Ezekiel 43:2).

The glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple (Ezekiel 43:4-5, 44:4).

In the visions of God Ezekiel was brought to the land of Israel and placed on a very high mountain, and on it was a structure like an encampment. What was described to him was the Temple and its structure (40-42).

Then Ezekiel was brought to the gate that faced the east, and saw *the glory of the God of Israel* coming from the east, as he had previously observed it leaving the temple and moving to the east (11:23). His sound was like that of rushing water (as in 1:24 and Revelation 1:15; 14:2; 19:6), and the earth shone from His *glory*. It was like the vision Ezekiel saw when He came to destroy the city, and the vision Ezekiel saw by the Kebar River. Ezekiel threw himself face down. *The glory of the Lord* came into the temple by way of the east gate then a wind lifted him up and brought him to the inner court. Ezekiel watched *the glory of the Lord* filling the temple (43:1-5). Similarly, God's glory filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35), and Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-11).

- **God speaks from the temple.** To make known that this is the place of His throne and for the soles of His feet, as it was previously (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 99:5; 132:7; Isaiah 60:13; Lamentations 2:1), where He will live among the people of Israel forever (43:7). Here is a summary of what He says in the next six chapters.
- **The temple's design.** The first item is its **holiness**. This is the law of the temple (43:12).
 - This is followed by the **altar** and its sacrifices to make atonement for it, cleanse it, to consecrate it, so that the Lord will be pleased with His people and accept them (43:13-27).
 - The **east gate** of the sanctuary that faces east was shut, it will not be opened, and no one will enter by it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it (44:1-3).
 - The **priesthood** was given to the descendants of Zadok to enter the sanctuary and minister to the Lord. Moreover, they will teach the people the difference between the holy and the common and between the ceremonially unclean and the clean. In a controversy they will act as judges as they did in earlier times (44:4-31, 2 Chronicles 19:9-11).
- **Portions of the Land.** The Lord's portion will be a holy portion of the land around the sanctuary. Also, it will be for the priests as a place for their houses. Alongside the portion set apart as the holy allotment will be for the city and whole house of Israel. For the prince there will be land on both sides of the holy allotment and the allotted city. (45:1-8). Statutes for sacrificial offerings were also made (45:9-46:24).
- **Water from the Temple.** Water flowed from under the threshold of the temple toward the east. As it flowed so its depth increased (47:1-6). On the banks of the river were a vast number of trees every kind of tree will grow for food. Their leaves will not wither nor will their fruit fail, but they will bear fruit every month, because their water source flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. The waters flow down into the rift valley; to the Dead Sea, and the waters become fresh. Every living creature that swarms where the river flows will live. Fishermen will stand beside it; from En Gedi to En Eglaim they will spread nets. They will catch many kinds of fish, like the fish of the Great Sea (47:7-12).



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The glory of the Lord *returned* continued

- **Boundaries for the Land.** The land was to be allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel equally. (Joseph will have two portions), as their inheritance. Also, an inheritance was to be allotted to the resident foreigners. They must be treated as native-born among the people of Israel. The tribes in order from the north were Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Judah, the sanctuary in the middle with priests and Levites next, then land for common use by the city, for houses and for open space, then land to produce food for the workers of the city from all the tribes of Israel who will cultivate it. Then land for the prince, then the rest of the tribes; Benjamin, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad (47:13-48:29).
- **Gates of the city.** On the north side there will be three gates, one for Reuben, one gate for Judah, and gate for Levi; on the east side there will be three gates, one for Joseph, one for Benjamin, and one for Dan; on the south side there will be three gates: one for Simeon, one gate for Issachar, and gate for Zebulun; and on the west side there will be three gates: one for Gad, one for Asher, and one for Naphtali. The circumference of the city will be about 9.5kms.
- After the glory of the Lord entered, the east gate was shut, indicating that the glory of the Lord was there to stay, consistent with the Lord's promise to will dwell in the midst of His people for ever (43:7, 9). The glory of this house, then, is derived from the fact that the Lord is there.
- The name of the city from that day forward will be: ***The Lord is there*** (48:30-35).

Fulfillment

Two fascinating and challenging questions remain after reading about Ezekiel's glorious visions. They are. Was Ezekiel's temple ever built? If not, will Ezekiel's temple ever be built?

Was it ever built?

The history of the temple in the Hebrew Bible is clear. The first temple was built by King Solomon in about 1000 BC (1 Kings 6-8), and was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (2 Kings 25, 2 Chronicles 36). When the Persians conquered the Babylonians almost a century later, King Cyrus encouraged the exiled Jewish leaders to return to Israel to rebuild the Temple (about 536 BC).

This second temple was completed in about 516 BC (see Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai), but it was a simple structure. Some of the furniture of the first temple was missing in the second. For example, the second Holy of Holies stood empty. There was no Ark, no cherubs that were on the cover, no stones in the high priest's breastplate, and God's presence that dwelt in the First Temple, was absent from the second.

Their makeshift effort was not to the taste of King Herod, who swept away the shabby house of worship, created a great platform on the top of the Mount and had the grand Second Temple erected on it, within a massive compound, in 19 BC. The Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE (Haaretz.com). That God's presence that dwelt in the First Temple, was absent from Herod's temple was a feature totally at variance with Ezekiel's structure, and accordingly, it was not Ezekiel's temple. We can safely conclude that Ezekiel's temple was not built in the BC era.

Let us now turn to the NT.

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Will it ever be built?

The Jewish view

Even though the Temple has lain in ruins for nearly 2,000 years, the Temple Mount is still sacred to the Jews. For some, God's Presence has not left. In fact, tradition teaches them that the Ark of the Covenant is in a specially built vault deep under the Temple Mount. Further, the Jews will rebuild the Third Temple when Messiah arrives (Chabad).

I'm not sure what they would do with the Lord's words to Jeremiah: *And when you have multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall no longer say, "The ark of the covenant of the Lord." It shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord* (Jeremiah 3:16-17).

Of course, based on the words of Jesus, the notion that God's Presence has not left the temple mount is complete nonsense. The glory of God not only departed in Ezekiel's day, this event was repeated in the departure of Jesus from the temple and His return to heaven from Olivet, and the complete destruction of the temple by the Romans (Matthew 23:37-39).

Moreover, there is no consensus among the Jews about building a Third Temple because not all Jews believe God has granted them authority to rebuild the Temple. Many hold that only God will build it. Further, Judaism has flourished for thousands of years without a Temple. Since the rabbis say that Torah study and prayer can replace Temple service, there is less urgency to bring back a Temple. Additionally, many Jews agree with Maimonides that sacrifices are no longer the best way to worship God. Early leaders in the Reform movement even named their houses of worship temples to signify they had abandoned the traditional Jewish longing to rebuild the Temple.

Finally, however, a minority of Jews are preparing to build a Third Temple by studying Temple worship practices and constructing implements to be used in the Temple when it is rebuilt ([Haaretz](#)). When we spoke to rabbis in Jerusalem some years ago about the third temple this was their unashamed position.

The NT view

The word 'temple' in the NT is applied in nine different ways, in my view. It refers to the physical temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 4:5), the body of Jesus (John 2:19-21), a pagan place of worship (Acts 19:27), a local church (1 Corinthians 3:16), the Christian's body (1 Corinthians 6:19), all members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19-22), temple, possibly as metaphor (2 Thessalonians 2:4), God as the dwelling place of His people in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 3:12, 21:22), and the dwelling place of God in heaven (Revelation 7:15).

However, the NT texts use different words that we translate as 'temple'. The physical temple in Jerusalem is (*hieron*), as is the pagan place of worship, and refers to the entire precincts of a sacred place. On the other hand, all of the other texts mentioned above use (*naos*) that denotes the central sanctuary itself, from *naio* (to dwell). Where pagans embodied their deities in effigies and placed these things in temples for them to live in, the temple of the Lord was centred on an empty room that specifically reminded Israel that the Living Creator of the universe does not live in a building made with hands (Acts 7:48, 17:24, see 1 Kings 8:27).

When in 64-63 BC the Roman general Pompey conquered the nations of the Levant, he first entered the temple of the defeated nation's national deity, to demonstrate his superiority and even the deity's passive consent for him being there. When he entered Jerusalem's Holy of Holies in 63 BC, he found no deity and was thus unable to demonstrate his superiority. Rome's subsequent hate for Jews and thus Christians stemmed from their atheism (that means: without an effigy), because Rome needed any kind of theism to make its monstrous world work ([Abarim Publications](#)).

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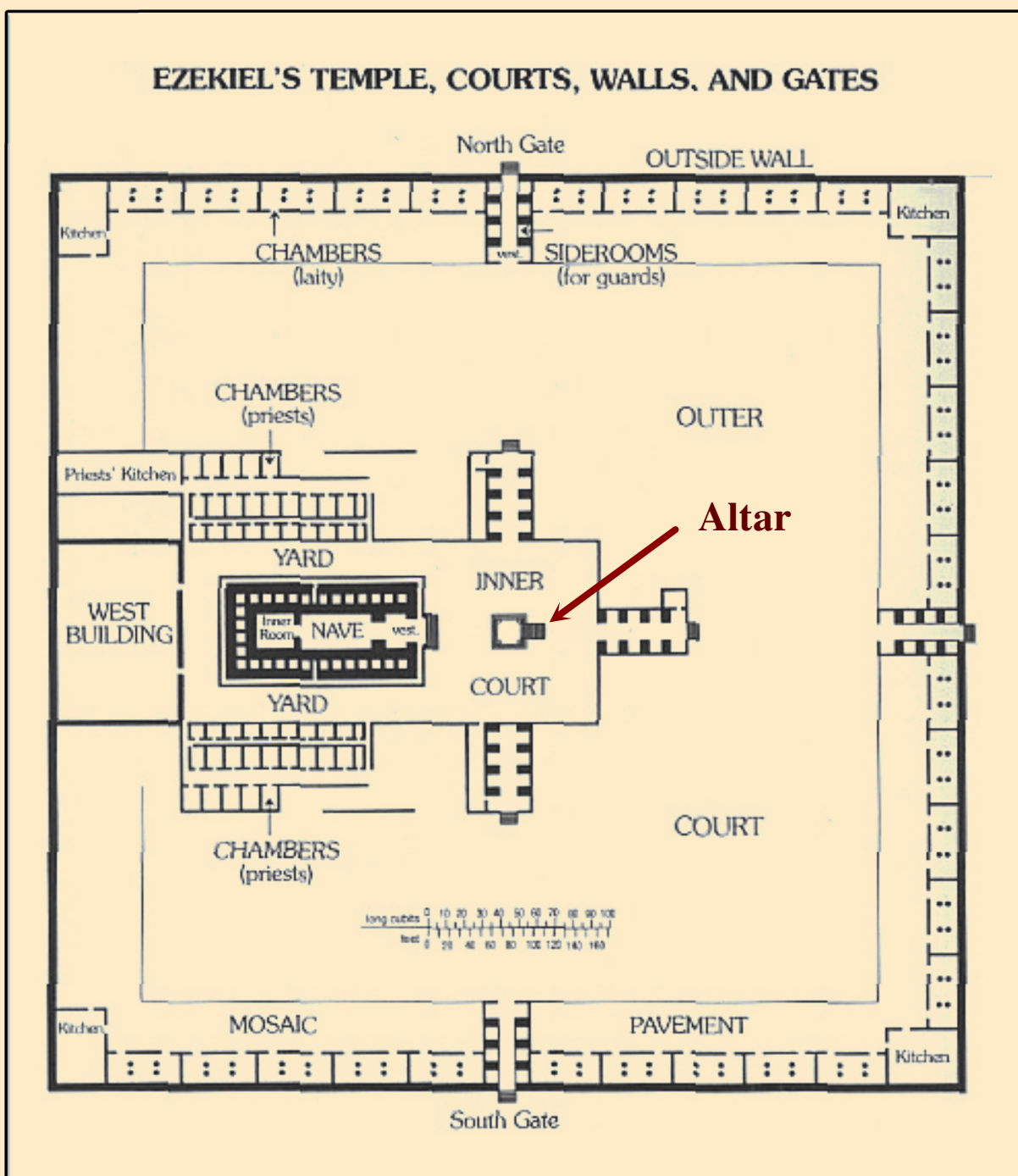


The millennium view

We have noted that prior to Jesus Christ, there were only two temples, Solomon's, which was repaired by Zerubbabel, and Herod's, which was an elaborate extension of the first. Since AD 70 when Herod's temple was destroyed, no temple has been built in Jerusalem, and none of the nine categories of temple mentioned above resemble Ezekiel's architectural description of his temple.

Moreover, the only Bible passage that mentions the 1000 year reign of Christ (the Millennium), is Revelation 20:1-6, and no temple is mentioned in these verses. Essentially, unless other Bible texts make it crystal clear that Ezekiel's temple is the millennial temple, then there is no biblical authority to assert equivalence between the two temples. Without such explicit evidence, however, some scholars justify their position by noting the omissions in Ezekiel's temple. For example, compared with Solomon's temple, Ezekiel's has no gold, no silver, no ark, no lampstand, no incense altar (despite many scholars referring to a small altar as the incense altar, which the text refers to as a table; 41:22), no laver, no veil, and only three of the seven feasts. Their explanation is that the substance has come, and the events of which they speak have been fulfilled. Christ in all His glory has replaced the shadows.

However, the huge theological hole in this argument is exposed by Ezekiel's major item of furniture, the altar of sacrifice identified on the temple plan below (from the ESV Bible, 43:13-25, 45:15-20).



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The millennium view continued

If their explanation is that Christ in all His glory has replaced the shadows, why the need for Ezekiel's altar but not the other furnishings? If it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), and Christ, has been offered once to bear the sins of many, and will appear a second time not to deal with sin (Hebrews 9:28), why Ezekiel's altar?

Moreover, the view that the millennial sacrifices are not atoning for sins but rather commemorative of the death of Christ is destroyed by Ezekiel 45:17, since the temple offerings "make atonement for the house of Israel". As God never found any pleasure in these sacrifices (Psalm 40:6; 51:16; Hebrews 10:6), it's unlikely that He would resurrect them in the Millennium ([Gregg](#)).

The argument that Ezekiel's temple is the millennial temple I find unconvincing, and the texts below confirm my thinking.

Ezekiel's conditional view

*Ezekiel, son of man, this temple is my throne on earth. I will live here among the people of Israel forever. They and their kings will never again disgrace me by worshiping idols at local shrines or by setting up memorials to their dead kings. They disgraced me with their evil ways, and in my fierce anger I destroyed them. **But if the people and their kings stop worshiping other gods and tear down those memorials, I will live among them forever.***

*The people of Israel must suffer shame for sinning against me, so tell them about my holy temple. Let them think about it, **then if they are truly sorry, describe** for them the design and shape of the temple, the gates, the measurements, and how the buildings are arranged. **Explain** the regulations about worshiping there, then write down these things, so they can study and obey them (Contemporary English Version, 43:7-11).*

These verses are ignored by most writers commenting on Ezekiel, but if we listen closely to the words of the Lord they are critical to a correct interpretation of the visions. What other meaning can we put on ***but if the people*** stop and tear down, and ***I will live among them forever?*** Clearly, the "if" is conditional. If Israel doesn't stop sinning, the Lord will not live among them in the temple.

Further, what other meaning can we put on ***if they are truly sorry then describe and explain*** the temple? Notice the order. First, Israel had to be sorry for their sin, ashamed (*kalam*), a synonym of (*boosh*), which means something like or "Eating me up inside". Shame is the primary difference between the time Adam and Eve spent living in paradise, where everything was called "Good," to the day they chose the knowledge of "Bad," and Death ([Kaylened](#)).

Following this repentance, then Ezekiel could stand in front of Israel and verbally describe the temple. Then he could explain it visually so that the nation could recognise it and follow it.

In sum, Ezekiel's temple was conditional. It's clear that Israel's repentance was required before Ezekiel described the temple and its laws. The glory of God demands a law-abiding people before God will dwell among them.

Has Israel repented? There is no evidence of that since Ezekiel's time so his temple has not been built. Will it be? I think not, for there is no need or room for a sacrificial altar since the eternally efficacious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. As Hebrews 13:8-10 puts it: *Jesus Christ never changes. We have an altar where even the priests who serve in the place of worship have no right to eat.* And, remember, John saw no temple in his vision of the Millennium.

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Conclusion

The book of Ezekiel is structured like a double sandwich around the glory of the Lord being revealed (1:1, 28), in retreat (Chapters 9-11), and then returning (Chapter 43). In between revealed and retreat, Ezekiel warned Israel that its sins will have consequences, which they ignored. In between retreat and returned, his message was of retribution for their sins, repentance was demanded, which if obeyed would result in Israel's resurrection and their and God's return to their land. In summary, then, the storm out of the north that Ezekiel saw in vision was a metaphor for the coming dark, judgment of God on Jerusalem. Therefore, Israel's sinful rebellion is incompatible with the glorious presence of God.

There are parallels with Christ. Christ as the glory of God was revealed, when rejected He treated to Olivet from where He ascended to glory, and from there He will return to Olivet in the manner described in Ezekiel's vision.

The theme is a simple one. God retreats from His sinful people, judges them, but on their repenting He restores them to Him and He to them. But sadly for Israel of Ezekiel's day, their lack of repentance to God for their sin meant they had to look back on the vision and lament "what might have been."

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