

THE RETURN OF GOD'S GLORY: A REMINDER OF THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL CLEANSING EZEKIEL 43:01–12

Introduction

When the Messiah returns to establish God's kingdom on earth a new temple will be built. This temple will be the Messiah's temple, the temple of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the new temple is completed a very special manifestation of God's glory will return and fill the temple. Just as God gave a very special manifestation of His glory to the tabernacle built by Moses (Exo 40:34-38) and to the temple built by Solomon (1 Kng 8:10-13), so He will fill the Messiah's temple in the last days of human history.

Remember, Ezekiel had seen God's glory depart from the temple due to the people's terrible sins. But this was not a new experience for the Israelites. During the days of Samuel and the high priest Eli, the LORD withdrew His glory and allowed the Philistines to capture the Ark of the Covenant, the very Ark that symbolized the presence of God among His people. As a result Eli's daughter-in-law named her newborn son Ichabod, which means *no glory* (see notes, Isa 4:1b-22). It was not until David's day that the Ark and glory of God returned to Israel. Then, when Solomon finished the temple and placed the Ark in the Most Holy Place, God filled the temple with a very special manifestation of His presence.

Now in the days of Ezekiel, due to the people's terrible sins, God's glory once again departed from His people and executed judgment upon them. He allowed the Babylonian army to destroy Jerusalem and the temple and to depart from the people, scattering them all over the nations of the earth.

But in the present Scripture God offers His people great encouragement. Despite their awful circumstances as exiles — their loss of family and the destruction of their nation, homes, property, temple and their despair and sense of hopelessness — despite all that they were now facing, a bright future lay ahead. The promised Messiah was coming. A new temple will be constructed and a new worship will be instituted among God's people. God's glory will return and fill the new temple that will be built for the true believers within Israel. This is, *The New Worship in the Messiah's Kingdom (Part 1): A Picture of God's Glory in the Temple and the Altar of Sacrifice*, Ezekiel 43:1-27.

- I. The return of God's glory: a reminder of the need for spiritual cleansing (vv. 1-12).
 - II. The restoration of the altar of sacrifice: A reminder that Christ's sacrifice alone makes us acceptable to God (vv. 13-27).
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***Ezekiel 43:01–12 The Return of God's Glory:
A Reminder of the Need for Spiritual Cleansing***

A very special manifestation of God's glory will return and fill the temple in the last days of human history. But note: this will not happen until the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to set up His kingdom on earth. At that time He will come to live among the Israelites (true, genuine believers) forever. This is exactly what this Scripture says (v. 7) as well as Haggai 2:6-9:

Hag 2:6-9 *“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.*

From the time of Jerusalem's destruction at the hands of Babylon until the end times, God's glory will no longer be present with Israel. The nation will remain under the discipline of God, which means that God's glory did not fill either Zerrubabel's temple or Herod's temple (Haggai 2:7) (Ralph H. Alexander. *Ezekiel*, p. 967). However, when the new temple is built in the last days, a wonderful event will take place. The Scripture and outline describes this amazing occurrence:

1. In his vision of the new temple, Ezekiel saw God's glory return to Israel (vv. 1-5). Obviously it was one of the most spectacular and joyful sights the prophet ever witnessed. He saw God's glory come from the east and heard a voice that sounded like the roar of rushing waters. As God's glory descended to earth, all the surrounding land shone with the radiance of the brightest light imaginable. Everything surrounding the temple — all the land and buildings — glowed in the reflection of God's blazing holiness and glory. God has displayed His presence and glory in such a dramatic way only a few times in history. He displayed it:
 - => when He manifested His holy presence to Moses in the burning bush (Exo 3:1-6)
 - => when He gave the law to Moses at Mount Sinai (Exo 24:15-18; 34:29-35)
 - => when Solomon's Temple was dedicated (1 Kng 8:11-13)
 - => when He called Isaiah to serve Him as a prophet (Isa 6:1-7)
 - => when the angels announced Jesus' birth (Luke 2:8-12)

The magnificent radiance of God's glory was exactly what Ezekiel had seen in his earlier vision, and the prophet fell face-down (v. 3; 38:1-11:25, esp. 10:18-19). The glory of the LORD entered the east gate (v. 4). Then the Spirit of God immediately took Ezekiel into the inner court of the temple. There he witnessed one of the climactic moments of human history, a moment that still lies out in the future. Ezekiel actually saw the glory of God return to the nation of Israel and fill the temple (v. 5).

What a glorious day lies in the future for the true believers among Israel! And what a strong message of encouragement for the Jewish exiles of Ezekiel's day.

2. Standing there in stark amazement, Ezekiel suddenly heard a voice speaking to him from inside the temple. God Himself was speaking to His prophet (vv. 6-12).

The LORD explained exactly what was happening and why. God's glory will fill the temple for four purposes.

- a. First, the new temple will be the place where the throne of God and His glorious presence will be (v. 7a). Of course, the special display of God's presence and glory will be centred in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Messiah returns to set up God's kingdom on earth...
 - He Himself will build the new Messianic temple.

Zec 6:12-13 Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

- He will place His throne — the seat of His government — in the temple.

Eze 43:6-7 While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever. The people of Israel will never again defile my holy name — neither they nor their kings — by their prostitution and the funeral offerings for their kings at their death." (also see Zec 6:13 above).

Rev 7:15 Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Rev 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

- He will live in the temple, dwelling forever among the true believers of Israel (and of all other nations as well).

Eze 43:7 He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever."

Eze 34:30 Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Ezek 37:26-28 "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever."

Zec 2:11 *“Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.”*

Rev 7:13-17 *Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir; you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

Rev 21:3-5 *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

- b. Second, the purpose of the new temple will be to honour God’s holy Name and to guarantee a righteous society throughout all Israel (and the entire earth) (vv. 7b-8). Down through history, the Israelites had repeatedly cursed and profaned God’s holy Name. And as seen earlier in Ezekiel, the people had also committed spiritual prostitution against the LORD by allowing idols and false worship in the temple (Eze 8:1-9:11; also see note, 2 Kng 23:4-25). Not only had they committed sexual immorality in the temple precincts (2 Kng 23:7), but they had also buried their dead kings and built monuments to them within the area of the temple grounds (v. 7). Of course, such detestable behaviour is due to the depravity of the human heart.

But the day is coming when God’s holy Name will never again be profaned by false worship or wicked behaviour (v. 7b-8). On that day, God’s judgment will never again fall upon His people. The holy presence of God’s promised Messiah will live among His people and bring the kingdom of God to earth.

- c. Third, the purpose of the new temple — the hope of God’s presence on earth — will be to stir the present generation to repent (v. 9). Note the wonderful promise to those who repent: the LORD will live with them forever. Earlier the LORD had promised that He would put His Spirit in His people, and the Holy Spirit of God would stir them to obey Him.

Eze 43:9 *Now let them put away from me their prostitution and the funeral offerings for their kings, and I will live among them forever.*

Eze 36:27 *And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

- d. Fourth, the purpose of the new temple will be to teach that God is holy and people are sinful. People must become ashamed of their sin, ashamed enough to approach God exactly as He says (vv. 10-12).
- 1). The very design of the temple — including the arrangement of the walls (barriers), entrances and doors — teaches the fact of God's holiness and man's sinful corruption (v. 11). The walls are symbols of the barrier, the alienation that exists between God and man due to sin. However, the gate into the temple symbolizes that God can be approached if a person enters the door. God Himself has provided the door of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:9; see note, Eze 40:1-16). God is holy. And His flaming holiness would consume any imperfect being who dared approach Him. For this reason people must be ashamed of their sins, confess them and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness. They must trust Him alone to make them acceptable to God. Once people truly understand the temple and its design, they can then grasp the fact that God is holy and they themselves are sinful.
- 2). The design of the temple is so important that people need a written record of the design (v. 11b). It was, and still is, essential that people be constantly reminded that God is holy and they are sinful. The very structure of the temple is a constant reminder that we are *short of God's glory* (Rom 3:23), and separated (alienated) from Him. Therefore, we must continually approach the LORD for forgiveness. By asking Him for forgiveness, we acknowledge His holiness. This and so much more should be learned from the temple and kept constantly in mind.
- 3). The temple will even have a law that permeates its hallowed grounds and that flows out to the whole world. What is the law? Holiness! Absolute, perfect, blameless holiness! Because of the LORD's presence in the temple, the very ground upon which the temple sits and all its surrounding area will become most holy. And the *law of holiness* will be pronounced by the LORD and govern the whole world. Holiness — the purity and righteousness of Christ Himself — will be the basic law controlling human behaviour in the Messiah's kingdom.

Thought 1. The Messiah's Temple emphasizes the huge wall of separation and alienation between God and us, between His glory and holiness and our sin and corruption. We desperately need to be spiritually cleansed. Our sins need to be washed away, forgiven forever by the blood of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 22:16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

2 Cor 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

2 Tim 2:20-21 *In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.*

Heb 9:14 *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

James 4:8 *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

1 Pet 1:18-19 *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Rev 1:5-6 *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. ■*