

# VISIONS OF GLORY

SERIES: KNOWING THE GOD OF  
JUSTICE AND HOPE



Catalog No. 20171210  
Ezekiel 43:1-11  
13th Message  
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December 10, 2017

*Ezekiel 43:1-11*

If you know something significant is going to happen in the future, that should affect how you think and act in the present, shouldn't it?

From the time that I graduated from college until I got married at the age of forty-two, I lived with a series of housemates, about forty all told. I had so many housemates that two of them had the same name: the same first name and the same last name. What are the odds? Well, the odds increase the more housemates you have, and I had a lot of housemates.

Anyway, I watched a lot of housemates get engaged, and I observed that once they got engaged, they began thinking and acting differently. They knew a day was coming that would change their lives, so they began getting ready for the change. One of the things I observed: instead of reading the sports section of the newspaper first, some of them began reading the business section first. Because they knew they were going to get married in the future, they started to get serious about finances in the present. (I, on the other hand, continued to happily read the sports section first when I got engaged. Why? I was marrying a woman with degrees in applied mathematics and economics!)

As believers, we're looking forward to "the day of the Lord," which will usher in the new and eternal creation. That day will change everything—literally. How then should we think and act in light of that day?

## **New temple, new city, new world**

Ezekiel 34-37 envisions the reconstitution and renewal of the Israel on the other side of judgment: the return from exile, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the reunification of the northern and southern tribes, and the renewal of the covenant.

Ezekiel 38-39 envisions an invasion against Israel by enemies from the north led by Gog from Magog. Whereas Babylon laid waste to the people of God, the Lord is seen as destroying these invaders. Gog is probably

not to be identified with any particular individual, nor is Magog probably to be identified with any particular land. More likely, Gog represents the enemies of God and his people.

The victory of God over Gog means that the new order that he promises in Ezekiel 34-37 will be irreversible. Enemies will attempt to overthrow the people of God, but they will be unsuccessful. The people of God will enjoy the presence of God forever.

Finally, Ezekiel 40-48 envisions nothing short of a new world, which is akin to a new Eden and which includes a new temple and a new city. In a vision, a man gives Ezekiel an elaborate and detailed tour of the new temple.

The details are most likely not a blueprint for the construction of some future temple. At no point is a command issued to use the design in Ezekiel's vision for the sake of building a new temple. When the exiles returned to the promised land, the Lord commanded them to rebuild the temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., but he didn't command them to build it according to Ezekiel's design. More likely, the vision represents the heavenly temple that will become the center around which God's new society will be constructed.

## **Now and not yet**

The renewal that Ezekiel envisioned has in part been fulfilled in Christ and the reconstituted people of God, both Jew and Gentile. Christ effected the true return from exile, not from captivity in Babylon but from captivity to evil: Satan, sin, and death. He has poured out his Spirit for the sake of his followers. He has unified not only north and south and Jews and Gentiles but also a whole world of followers. He has effected a new and eternal covenant.

Nevertheless, Gog and his hordes, representing opposition to God and his people, are still against us—and will be until the end, but they will not prevail. In another vision, in Revelation 20:7-10, Gog and Magog

and their hordes make a final assault against God's people, but fire comes down from heaven and consumes them. The people of God will enjoy the presence of God forever, starting now.

Jesus said that he would build his church and that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). He also says, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). Paul says, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). To Paul's list of what can't separate us from the love of God we might add "Gog" and "Magog."

The new world, new city, and new temple that Ezekiel sees surely will come, but also, in a very real sense, they have already come. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a "guarantee" of our eternal inheritance, which is the new creation (Ephesians 1:14). A guarantee is a down payment: it is, in the present, part of what will be fully experienced in the future. The writer of Hebrews says, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . ." (Hebrews 12:22). In some sense, we have already come to the new city, the heavenly Jerusalem. In the New Testament, the people of God become the temple of God (Ephesians 2:19-21). God dwells in us and among us.

God's purpose for the temple vision in the book of Ezekiel emerges in Ezekiel 43:1-11, which will be our focus today. It turns out that the temple vision is a teaching tool from which we can and should learn. The grand tour of the temple in Ezekiel 40-42 sets up the climax of the temple vision.

## Echoes of earlier visions

### Ezekiel 43:1-5:

**Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. 3 And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. 4 As**

**the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, 5 the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.**

Ezekiel references two earlier visions.

First, in 593 B.C., by the Chebar canal in Babylon, Ezekiel saw a vision of a divine chariot that was carrying the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1). The appearance of the glory of the Lord, in that case, presaged the Lord's command to Ezekiel to predict the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem (Ezekiel 4).

Second, a little more than a year later, in 592 B.C., Ezekiel was transported in a visionary experience from Babylon to Jerusalem. In the vision, he saw the glory of the Lord go up from his throne between the cherubim sculptures that were affixed to the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the temple. The most holy place was considered the Lord's throne room, and the ark of the covenant was considered his throne.

Then Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord fill the temple and move out to the gateway of the temple, whereupon the divine chariot made another appearance. In the vision, the chariot took the glory of the Lord to the east gate of the outer court of the temple, through Jerusalem, and to the mountain east of the city. At that point, Ezekiel's vision came to an end, with the glory of the Lord standing on the mountain (Ezekiel 8-11).

The vision of the departure of the glory of the Lord coincided with a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem. Without the presence of the Lord, the temple became just another building and Jerusalem became just another city. Because of Israel's persistent idolatry and all the evil that came from it, the Lord, in fact, destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 586 B.C. by raising up Babylon to lay siege against it.

## More judgment?

Now, in 573 B.C., some thirteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, in another vision, Ezekiel is led to the east gate of the heavenly temple, whereupon he sees the glory of God again. In the earlier vision, Ezekiel saw the glory of God depart to the east; now sees the glory of God approaching from the east. In the earlier vision, the departure of the glory of God was slow and halting, indicating that he didn't want to leave, though he had

to leave. It took four chapters to describe his departure. Not so his return. Moreover, the return of the glory of the Lord is marked by an audio-visual extravaganza: a sound like many waters and the earth ablaze with glory.

What's the purpose of this visit? The previous visions of the glory of God presaged judgment. When Ezekiel first saw the glory of the Lord by the Chebar canal, he fell on his face. Now he falls on his face again. Is more judgment in the offing? In this vision, the glory of the Lord fills the temple. When the glory of the Lord was departing, it filled the temple. Upon its return, it fills the temple again.

What's in the offing for us? Is God coming to judge us? If someone makes an appointment to talk with you and doesn't tell you what it's about, you can't help but wonder what's up. And, if you're like me, you might start wondering, "Okay, what did I do wrong?" In any event, we might use our imaginations to hear and see what Ezekiel heard and saw—a sound like many waters and the earth ablaze with glory—and then fall on our faces.

So, what will it be: judgment?

## A voice from out of the temple

**Ezekiel 43:6-9:**

**While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple, 7 and 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 in the midst of the people of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places, 8 by setting their threshold by my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger. 9 Now let them put away their whoring and the dead bodies of their kings far from me, and I will dwell in their midst forever.**

Ezekiel hears the voice coming from inside the temple. What just filled the temple? The glory of the Lord. Ezekiel hears the Lord speaking to him.

The Lord has come to this new temple to reign from it, in like manner to how he reigned from the first temple. This temple constitutes his throne. His arrival to this temple means that he will dwell with Israel "forever." He left the first temple because of Israel's sins, but he will never leave this temple. He will always dwell with his people.

The presence of the glory of the Lord this time means not judgment but restoration. He fills this temple not for the purpose of judgment, as in Ezekiel 8-11, but to take up residence in it, as when he filled the tabernacle and the temple when they were completed (Exodus 25-40, 1 Kings 6-8).

Israel's sins brought about the Lord's judgment against it, but the Lord envisions a time when Israel will no longer defile his name. Coming in for particular judgment in this vision is not only idolatry ("their whoring") but also a particular form of idolatry: the veneration of dead kings. Moreover, the Lord condemns the infringement of sacred space by kings. Because of such sins, the Lord "consumed" Israel in his anger.

Although the Lord envisions a time when Israel will no longer defile his name, he commands them in the present "to put away their whoring and the dead bodies of their kings" far from him. In verse nine, he makes it sound as if repentance from such idolatry is a precondition for his dwelling with them forever.

## Deserving of condemnation

However today we understand God's judgment of his people, most assuredly he does not judge us to condemn us. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If we were to hear the voice of God, as Ezekiel heard it, it would not be the voice of condemnation. His judgment of us, however, we experience it, is not for the purpose of condemnation but the purpose of discipline. He disciplines us because he loves us (Hebrews 12:6). He comes to us, then, even when he comes to us in judgment, to restore us.

Why, then, does Ezekiel set us up to wonder whether God is coming to judge? Because we need to understand that we deserve not only to be judged but also to be condemned for our "whoring": for worshiping ourselves and whatever we want. Instead of condemning us, God, in his grace, restores us. Ezekiel 43 then serves to disabuse us of the notion of entitlement that so many of us embrace in one way another.

We “deserve” the condemnation of God, but that’s not the way people usually use the word “deserve” today. When speaking of others who are suffering for wrongdoing, people will sometimes say that they are getting what they “deserve.” However, when people speak of what they themselves “deserve,” they usually mean that they don’t deserve the bad things that have happened to them and that they instead “deserve” something better. And if you do get something good that you think you deserve, then you eliminate the possibility of gratitude, for how can you be thankful for what you deserve? So many people live not in gratitude for what they do have but in resentment for what they don’t have. I’m sorry: whatever we have, and whatever we don’t have, we all deserve something worse. We deserve condemnation.

## Lucky man

Years ago, when my children were much younger, my wife and I took them to a beachfront restaurant. From the moment we sat at our table, I was on the alert, concerned that one of the girls would spill something or break something if I looked away for a moment. What I really wanted to do, as the sun set into the Pacific, was to alternately gaze into the eyes of my wife and out the window for the breathtaking view. I deserved to that at this moment, didn’t I?

I was stewing silently when I heard a voice coming from behind me. I had the sense that someone was speaking to me. As I turned around, I saw a man approaching me from the bar. “What?” I asked him.

“You’re a lucky man,” he said.

“What?”

“You’re a lucky man.”

He reached out to shake my hand.

I had what he wanted; I presume: a family. As soon as he shook my hand, he turned and walked away, out of the restaurant and into the night.

When I turned back to my family, I did so with a different perspective. I was out on the town with my family: my beautiful wife and my totally alive daughters. Indeed, I was a lucky man.

Instantly, my perspective changed. Instead of thinking that I deserved to enjoy a beautiful evening with my wife, I recognized that I didn’t deserve these two amazing daughters. In fact, I deserve something much worse: I deserve condemnation. In that moment, instead of being resentful, I was thankful.

Finally, the reason for the temple vision emerges.

## The purpose of the vision

### Ezekiel 43:10-11:

**“As for you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and they shall measure the plan. 11 And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple, its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, that is, its whole design; and make known to them as well all its statutes and its whole design and all its laws, and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe all its laws and all its statutes and carry them out.**

After giving Ezekiel a visionary tour of the temple, the Lord now reveals to the prophet his reason for doing so. The Lord commands Ezekiel to describe what he has seen to his countrymen so that they will be “ashamed of their iniquities.”

The vision of the temple, and the coming of the Lord to dwell in it, should cause his people to realize their unworthiness. It should cause them to fall on their faces, just as Ezekiel fell on his face when he encountered the glory of the Lord. That God would do this for them—return to dwell with them forever—when they deserve to be annihilated should lead them into deep repentance.

If the Israelites respond in such a way, then more revelation concerning the temple vision will be forthcoming. Additional revelation is designed to engender obedience to the Lord. Ezekiel’s vision of the temple, therefore, is designed to engender first shame, then obedience—or, to put it another way, first repentance, then worship.

## Treasure Christ

We deserve condemnation. We are not deserving of restoration. Yet because of Christ, God comes to us not to condemn us but to restore us. Amazing! In this light, we

should be “ashamed” of our “whoring”: the ways that we have treasured other things above Christ. Shame for our idolatrous ways, however, is our ally. It can and should lead us into a deeper repentance so that we “put away” our whoring and instead worship God from a deeper place, increasingly treasuring Christ. The combination of what we deserve (condemnation) and what we get instead (restoration) causes this kind of response.

Paul uses similar language to that of Ezekiel when he tells us to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 2:22-24). Put off the former manner of life and put on the new self: in other words, repent of your whoring and treasure Christ above all things.

There’s a lyric in a country-western song I appreciate: “You’re the good things I threw away / Coming back to me every day.” Although the singer isn’t singing of the Lord, when I think of the lyric, I think of the Lord. You see, he’s the good things you threw away coming back to you every day. He’s coming to you, every day, in fact, to restore you, and knowing that you don’t deserve him can and should cause you to be done with lesser things and treasure him all the more.

I lead a Bible Study for seniors here on Wednesday mornings, and every once in a while, we take a break from our Bible study and I make everyone in attendance share something about their relationship with the Lord. Wednesday of last week was such a time. It was an awesome experience for me to hear so many of them share how the Lord had been so good to them all these years even though many of them have suffered great hardships. It’s clear that they treasure the Lord. All Bob Thompson wanted to say, though he could barely get the words out because he suffered a stroke a few years back, was “God is so good.”

## Where God dwells

Ezekiel, with his vision of the heavenly temple, gives us a vantage point from which to consider where God has dwelt, where he is dwelling, and where he will dwell. First of all, he dwells in heaven, the unseen realm that is just as real as what can be detected with the senses. He always has dwelt, and he always will dwell, in heaven. But he also desires to dwell on earth.

First, he dwelt with the first humans in the garden of Eden. God walked “in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). But the first humans rejected him and were vanquished from the garden (Genesis 3:22-24).

Next, God dwelt with Israel, first in the tabernacle in the wilderness and then in the temple in the promised land. But the Israelites, like the first humans, rejected God, who vanquished them from the promised land and destroyed the temple. When the Israelites returned from exile, God commanded them to rebuild the temple, and they did, but God is never reported to have filled the rebuilt temple as he filled the tabernacle and the first temple.

However, when Jesus of Nazareth showed up, he began drawing the ministry of the temple onto himself, speaking and acting as if he were the temple. Indeed, John says of Jesus, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally “tabernacled”] among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father . . . ” (John 1:14). Paul says, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily . . . ” (Colossians 2:9). The writer of Hebrews says, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). God dwells in Jesus.

After Jesus ascended to the Father, he sent his Holy Spirit to dwell in and among his people (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22). Today, God dwells in the church.

But that’s not the end of the story. Like Ezekiel, John was given a vision of the future. Like Ezekiel, he saw a new world and a new city: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:1-2). Just as Ezekiel was given an elaborate and detailed vision of the new temple, John was given an elaborate and detailed vision of the new city (Revelation 21:9-22:5).

Unlike Ezekiel, John is not given a vision of the new temple. In fact, he doesn’t see the new temple at all. He sees the new Jerusalem, but he doesn’t see the new temple. What gives? Here’s what John says: “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Revelation 21:22). The new city doesn’t need a temple; it is a temple! The new world doesn’t need a temple; it is a temple! When John saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, he heard a loud voice saying, “Behold, the dwelling

place of God is with man” (Revelation 21:3). In the end, heaven and earth unite, and God will be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28).

In anticipation of that day, how then should we think and act? Repent of our idolatry and treasure Christ above all things. First, we should repent and treasure Christ because God restores us instead of condemning us. Second, we should repent and treasure Christ because of the glorious future in the new creation that awaits us.

## Get on with it

The hymn “This is My Father’s World” captures both the now and the not yet of God’s presence:

This is my Father’s world:  
Oh, let me ne’er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father’s world,  
The battle is not done:  
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and Heav’n be one.

In the new creation, we will “see his face.” In that place, “his servants will worship him” (Revelation 22:3-4).

I say, let’s get on with it. After all, we are the temple of the living God. What do you do in a temple? You worship! Treasure Christ above all things.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dumbrell, William J. *The Faith of Israel*. Baker Academic, 2002. 170.

<sup>2</sup> Bickhardt, Craig . *You Are What Love Means to Me*. Colgems-EMI Music, 1982.