

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
November 2, 2014

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 43:1-12
Lesson Title: God's Glory Returns

Introduction

The Book of Ezekiel is named for its author, "*Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi*" (Ezekiel 1:3). Ezekiel was a prophet of Israel and along with Jeremiah and Zechariah, they were the only prophet-priests among Israel's prophets. All three prophesied during the exile or post-exile periods. Ezekiel's priestly background explains in part his emphasis and focus on the temple in Jerusalem, the glory of the Lord, the actions of the priests in Jerusalem, and God's future temple in the Millennial Kingdom described in Ezekiel 40-48.

Ezekiel lived at a town on the Chebar, a canal which flowed from the Euphrates River. He was about 30 years of age when he began writing. His name is only mentioned twice in the book and nowhere else in the Bible (Ezekiel 1:3; 24:24). His name means "strengthened by God." His name is appropriate for the ministry to which God called him because he lived in a time of spiritual distress and change and he needed God's strength to endure (Ezekiel 3:8-9). He saw the collapse of one of the greatest revivals the people of God had ever known (2 Chronicles 34). When King Josiah reigned in Israel God sent a marvelous revival through him. It was in that revival that Ezekiel was born. And as a child and young man he grew up in that wonderful spiritual climate. But that spiritual climate changed with the death of King Josiah and Ezekiel watched the nation return to idolatry and immorality. That must have been disheartening to God's prophet.

In 597 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and took King Jehoiachin and a group of 10,000, including Ezekiel, captive (2 Kings 24:11-18). Ezekiel's wife died the day the siege began (Ezekiel 24:1, 15-18). The 10,000 captives and Ezekiel lived in exile in Babylon under somewhat good conditions having land to farm and houses in which to dwell (Jeremiah 29; Ezekiel 3:24; 20:1). There were false prophets among them who prophesied that the captivity would be short lived and that they would be returning home soon. Ezekiel warned that their prophecies were false, that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and there was no hope of immediate return.

Ezekiel's ministry was two-fold, to remind the exiles of their sins and to encourage them concerning God's future blessings. Although the first 32 chapters of Ezekiel deals with God's judgments against Jerusalem and the nations, chapter 33 and following gives instructions for repentance and Israel's future restoration. Chapters 40-48 is the final section of Ezekiel's prophesy.

The prophet, in the visions of God, was brought to the land of Israel, and there he was given a picture of how it would be when God's people are spiritually, morally, and physically restored. The first part of God's vision to Ezekiel is of the restored order of the Temple as the center of the life of the people. In chapters 40-42, we have the description of the courts round about the Temple and of the porch leading to the house itself. The emphasis of our text in Ezekiel 43 is the return of God's glory to the temple.

For the Jewish exiles listening to Ezekiel's description of a new temple and the return of God's glory, there must have been renewed hope. To remember how the glory of God once dwelt in Jerusalem but departed due to their sin was painful. The prophet's vision, however, encouraged the people that God had not forgotten them and that His glory would return one day.

God's Prophet and the Returning Glory (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Verse 1-2

"Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: 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."

"Afterward" refers to the time after Ezekiel had completed his tour of the Temple recorded in Ezekiel 40-42. In Ezekiel 8-11, Ezekiel recorded the departure of God's glory from the temple signifying God's removal of His manifest presence from among His people. In this vision, not yet fulfilled, Ezekiel sees the "glory of the God of Israel" return.

"He" is a reference to "*a man*" first mentioned in Ezekiel 40:3. This "*man*" was a heavenly guide originally sent to give Ezekiel a guided tour of the Temple through Ezekiel's visions. Evidently, the "*man*" of Ezekiel 40:3, which is "He" in verse 1 of our text, is the angel of the Lord, or the Lord Himself since "He" is called "*LORD*" in Ezekiel 44:2.

When the glory of the Lord had departed from the Temple in Ezekiel 11:23, it departed from the east. Now, the glory returns "from the way of the east." "East" is mentioned some 50 times in the book of Ezekiel and is obviously an important directional word.

Ezekiel's escort, "he," brings him to the "gate that looketh toward the east" so he can witness the return of God's "glory." God's "glory" was coming back "from the way of the east" or from the way of the sunrise. This must have been encouraging for Ezekiel to see God's glory return in the same manner in which he had witnessed it depart.

The Hebrew word for “glory” is *kabod* {kaw-bode}. It means “weightiness.” “God’s glory” is the way God manifested Himself to the nation of Israel. It is the sum total of everything God is. The “glory of the God of Israel” is referred to 16 times in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23; 39:21; 43:2). God’s “glory” is the one thing He will not share with anyone (Isaiah 42:8).

God’s “voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.” The “voice” of Almighty God is heard in His glory and sounded like “many waters,” or like the rumbling of Niagara Falls. The thought is that of power and overwhelming authority.

“The earth shined with his glory” seems to indicate that as the “glory” of God returns it is more splendid and radiant than ever. It’s difficult to know if the “earth” Ezekiel is talking about is the entire world or the Promised Land. It seems most likely to refer the Promised Land. “Shined” is the Hebrew word *owr* {ore} which means “luminous” or “set on fire.” The thought is that this returning “glory” is more brilliant and overwhelming than the glory of the Lord manifested in the past in the tabernacle or Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:10-11).

Verse 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. “

“It” is the vision Ezekiel is now experiencing. He is identifying the vision he is now having as the same he had “by the river Chebar” when God gave him the vision that He was coming “to destroy the city” (Ezekiel 2:1-8). “When I came to destroy the city” doesn’t mean that Ezekiel was going to destroy Jerusalem but rather that his message to the city would be of coming destruction. So completely did the prophets identify themselves with God in whose name they spake, that it was as if the word from God was from them.

Just as in the other visions of God’s glory, Ezekiel said, “I fell upon my face” (Ezekiel 1:28; 9:8). Ezekiel’s response is a powerful commentary on what he saw and heard. By “falling upon his face” Ezekiel is reminding us that the manifest presence of God is beyond human comprehension.

Question: When was the last time an awareness of God’s presence caused you to bow down before Him? When was the last time an awareness of God’s presence caused you to do anything? What did you do? What changed in your life?

Verse 4

“And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.”

Ezekiel tells us that “the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.” That means the owner of the “house” now comes “into the house,” or, the “LORD” has come in His “glory” to take up residence in His “house,” the temple. Again, Ezekiel emphasizes the return of God’s glory from the “east,” the same direction in which it had departed.

Verse 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 is on his face as God’s glory begins to fill the temple. There he lay humbly until “the spirit” lifts him up and brings him “into the inner court” of the temple. “The spirit” is the Holy Spirit and the word “spirit” is used here to define the “wind” or “breath” of the Holy Spirit. The “Spirit” like wind is invisible yet powerful. The Holy Spirit like a wind came and lifted Ezekiel up and brought him “into the inner court” which basically means closer to God’s presence and in a more intimate communion with the Almighty. From the “inner court” Ezekiel would be able to see more clearly how the Lord’s presence would “fill the house.”

“Filled” is the Hebrew word *male’* {maw-lay} meaning “to be full.” It means that every part of the temple was occupied with God’s glory. This scene is the same as when God’s glory filled Solomon’s temple at its dedication in 1 Kings 8:10-11.

God’s People and the Returning Glory (Ezekiel 43:6-12)

Verse 6-7

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

Ezekiel is in the “inner court” which is a holy place. Here Ezekiel hears the Lord Himself speak to him while “the man” or his heavenly escort stands by. God addresses Ezekiel as “Son of man” a name God uses for Ezekiel numerous times throughout the book. The words, “Son of man” emphasizes Ezekiel’s humanity and his need to depend upon the Lord.

The Lord has now entered the temple and He clearly states His intentions. The temple is “the place of His throne, and the place of the soles of his feet, where He will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever, and his holy name.” Where God dwells and where He manifests Himself is a holy and sacred place. His presence demands holiness. The Lord said, “This place, my house, where I reign and manifest myself to my children shall never be defiled again.”

“Defiled” means “unclean” or “impure.” There will be no one in the future temple who will make it unclean by their “whoredom” or worship of false gods through temple prostitution and sexual sins. “Whoredom” and temple prostitution is known to be a part of the practices of those who worship fictitious gods such as Baal. Many of Israel’s kings had participated in that type of worship prior to the Babylonian captivity but the Lord says there is coming a future day when no more of that sinful worship will be present in His holy temple.

What a blessed day it will be for all of God’s redeemed people when we can worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and dwell with Him forever in a city where there is no sin. John the Revelator said, “*And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life*” (Revelation 21:27).

“Nor by the carcasses of their kings in their high places” describes the practice of burying dead kings near the temple. The “carcasses of their kings” is mentioned again in verse 9. Many kings of Judah are buried in Jerusalem, some near the temple. Also, some of their idols or idolatrous things may have been buried with them or near the temple. The Psalmist said, “*For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images*” (Psalm 78:58). The “high places” were places where idolatrous acts were carried out and it resulted in God’s anger. That will be no more in the future temple. God will tolerate no rivals!

Question: Is there anything in your personal life or church that is too close to Jehovah? Is there anything that is in competition with His glory?

Verse 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.”

The first “their” is a reference to the Israelites and their kings. The second “their” is a reference to the idols of the Israelites and their kings. The

“threshold” is the way of entrance into the temple. God is saying that the people and the kings set up their idols so close to me that there was nothing but a thin “wall between me and them.” That statement means everything was so close and similar that it was impossible to distinguish between Holy God and man-made idols. God called their actions an “abomination.” It was a “disgusting thing” to substitute the ordinances and man-made worship with the worship of God. To set man-made worship on the same level with God is disgusting.

“Wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger” is literally God saying, “That is why I became so angry and sent them into captivity.” There is always a reason why God does what He does.

Verse 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.”

God wanted the sexual sins and idolatrous worship to be “put away.” The words “put away” and “far from me” means “to be removed at a distance.” It stands in contrast to the closeness of their idols and man-made worship described in verse 8 as “the wall between me and them.”

“And I will dwell in the midst of them for ever.” Only when God’s people are holy will they experience God’s holy presence. If His people will “put away” He will “dwell in the midst of them for ever.” The word “dwell” means “settle down” and “abide.”

Verse 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.”

God told Ezekiel, “Son of man,” to “shew the house to the house of Israel.” That meant Ezekiel was to show the blueprint for the temple to the people of God. In seeing the blueprint of the future temple the people of God would “be ashamed of their iniquities.” To look at what God had in store for them compared to how they had sinned against would humiliate them. Perhaps by looking at what they had and how they had sinned would help them confess that they had no one to blame but themselves. Maybe they would also realize how good God was to them in giving them a future in spite of their sinful past.

“Let them measure the pattern” seems to indicate the Lord wanted them to deliberately go over the details of the temple. They were to pay close attention to what belonged in the temple and the purposes and placements of each and

every part. Maybe then they would never set their idols in places they did not belong.

Verse 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 laws thereof, and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.”

The “if” of this verse means that if the people are humiliated and show shame when Ezekiel shows them the temple blueprints, then he is to “shew them the form...and the fashion...and the goings out...and the comings...and all the forms...and all the ordinances...and all the laws. That means he is to go into greater detail about everything concerning the future temple.

Ezekiel is to “write it in their sight” or draw them a picture they can’t miss! He is to cover every detail so God’s people can worship and obey Him as He required.

Question: What would be your reaction to the way you worship if you were to carefully study the scriptures and understand the nature of true biblical worship? Do you think you would be ashamed?

Verse 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 “house” is referring to every aspect of the future millennial temple. The “law” or instructions for the coming temple is that everything “shall be most holy.” That’s the “law of this house.” “Whole limit” means “entire territory.” Everything around the temple is to be considered “most holy.” “Most holy” means “separated, set apart, sacred.” “Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about” is referring to everything around the temple.

Conclusion

What can Christians learn from Ezekiel’s vision of the future millennial temple? Prophetically, we know that God will one day restore His chosen people, Israel, and that there will be a future temple in the millennial kingdom. Personally, like Israel, God has saved us and called us to be His witnesses so the lost world can see His glory in us. Perhaps nothing would be more valuable to the world than for Christians to confess our failure in that regard and pray for God’s presence to shine in us and through us again.

Practically, the Apostle Paul said, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31). God wants to manifest Himself and His presence among His people. But for that to happen we must be a holy people. All of life is to be lived in a holy manner for God’s glory.

Someday we who have been saved by grace will experience God’s glory in its fullness as we arrive in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-11). We will see our risen and glorified Savior, the Lord Jesus as He is (1 John 3:2). This hope encourages us as Christians press on toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in God (Philippians 3:14).

Amen.