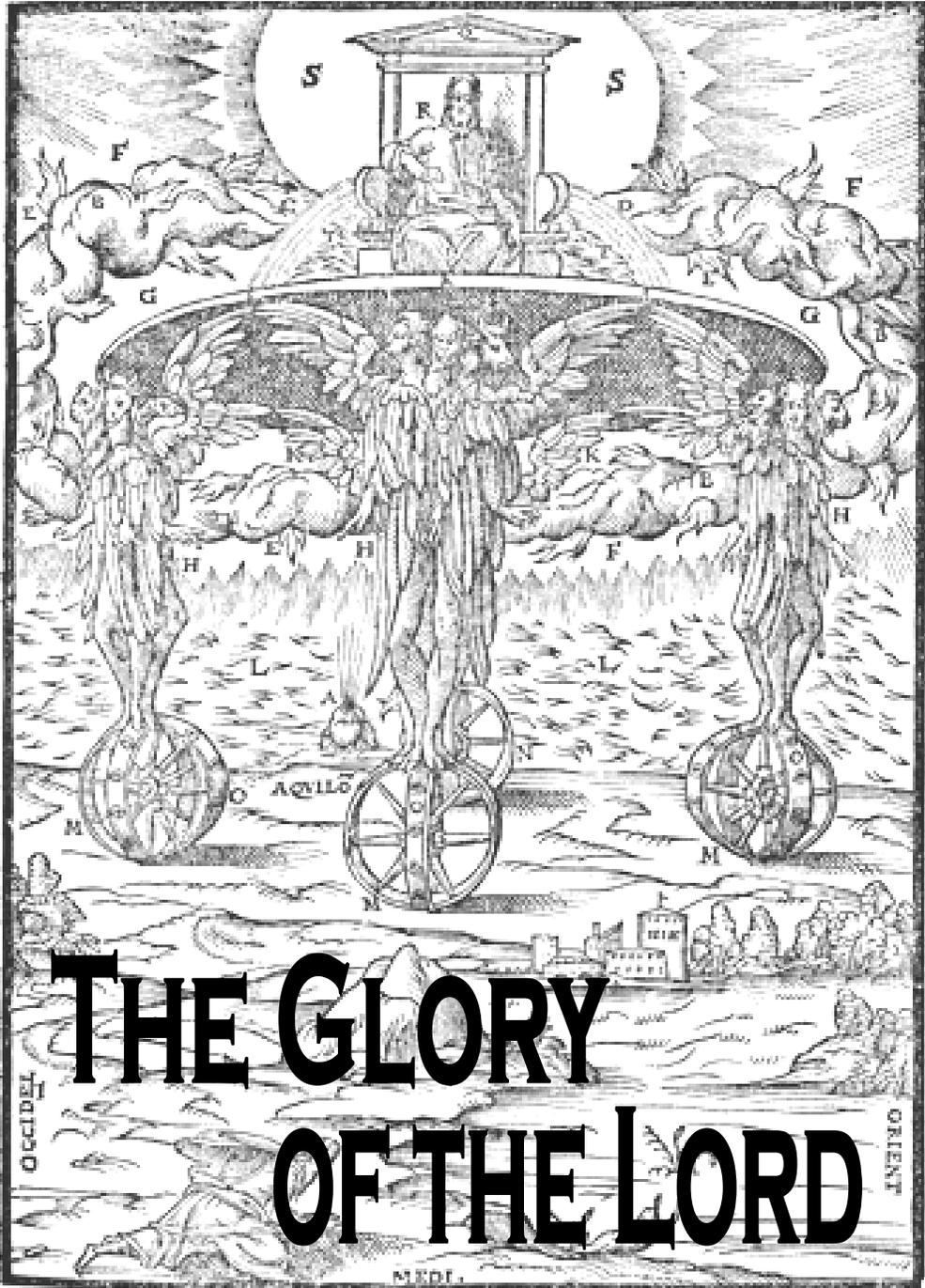


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**THE GLORY  
OF THE LORD**

**Teague McKamey**

## Introduction

**As long and as baffling as it seems—with its interminable judgments and fantastic visions—the book of Ezekiel nevertheless trumpets one clear message: the glory of the Lord. The book opens with a vivid description of that glory. We encounter the glory again in chapters eight through eleven when the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed. Then, in the final chapters of the book, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord return to Israel to dwell forever in a restored temple.**

**Like the apostles, Ezekiel was an eyewitness of His glory (John 2:11). That was the message he preached. Far from being merely esoteric or limited to the history of his time, the visions of God’s glory which Ezekiel received were deeply penetrating. The Spirit revealed to him the deep things of God, the thoughts of God, the things prepared for those that love Him (1 Cor. 2:9-12). Ezekiel saw—though didn’t necessarily understand—the eternal plan of God in Christ (Eph. 3:11). That plan—really, that Person, for God’s plan is the unfolding of Himself in Christ—is bound up with and expressed in three**

**different glories, or, rather, three visions that allow us to see God's glory in fullness.**

# **Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord**

## **The First Vision of Glory**

**Ezekiel 1:1-28**

### **Ministry to the Captives**

**Ezekiel opens with the prophet living among those in exile from the land of Israel (Ezek. 1:1). God imposed the exile (also called the captivity) because His people were mired in a state of idolatry and eroded morality. Israel didn't reach this state overnight but slid into captivity by degrees. Scripture says Solomon loved many foreign women. His affection for his wives led him to participate in their religions (1 Kings 11:1-6). The Israelites followed suit. Their unfaithfulness manifested in sexual immorality, callousness toward the poor, greed, and a general indifference toward God and His law. God disciplined His people by allowing Assyria to conquer northern Israel. Judah, in the south, fell to Babylon about 130 years later. The Babylonians broke Judah through a long, merciless siege (2 Kings 24:10-12; 25:1-4). At**

**different times during the siege, people were forcibly relocated to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14-16; 25:11). Ezekiel was taken to Babylon early on, before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.**

**But Babylon was merely the last stop in captivity. Because of their loss of spiritual vision, the Israelites had been in captivity for years, right there in the promised land, with the temple and glory of God in their midst. God's answer to captivity was to restore Israel's vision of His glory and, by extension, their purpose—to embody and manifest that glory in the earth. This was the goal of Ezekiel's ministry to the exiles.**

## **Heavenly Glory**

**When Ezekiel first sees the glory of the Lord, it is not associated with any temple. This is unique, for the other two visions involve temples: the earthly temple, the temple judged for Israel's sins, and the new temple, wherein all things are restored and brought to fullness. But in chapter one, Ezekiel does not see the glory in relation to**

**any temple. Instead, it is associated with the heavens: “While I was among the exiles by the Kebar river, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1).**

**When Ezekiel had this vision, there was a temple in Jerusalem where the glory usually dwelled. Why did God reveal His glory in the heavens instead? It seems God wanted to present Himself as He is, in and of Himself. As He prayed to His Father just before dying on the cross, Jesus referred to this heavenly glory as “the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). In the beginning, there was no temple, no dwelling of humanity for God. There was only the heavens, the spiritual realm. God wanted to bring His people back to the beginning, to the foundation of all things—Himself.**

**At first, we are struck by the theatrics of Ezekiel’s vision: the flashing windstorm, fire and thunder, sparkling wheels covered with eyes.... Yet, there is something else about this vision of glory, something whispered, something we will miss if we go no deeper than the special effects (1 Kings 19:11-13). In the midst of the fire, Ezekiel**

**sees four living creatures. Each has the face of a man, a lion, a calf, and an eagle. All move as one:**

**Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went (Ezek. 1:12).**

**Wherever the spirit would go, they would go.... When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels (Ezek. 1:20, 21).**

**In glory, nothing originates in self, no one moves independently. All proceed by one Spirit. One creature doesn't fly off on its own while another roars and runs around. Sometimes they all fly, and sometimes they all roar "Holy, holy, holy," but whatever they do, they do as one, by one Spirit (Ezek. 1:19; Rev. 4:8). This is a reflection of God's fundamental unity and of the selfless fellowship that defines the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The unity of God is not a unity of sameness. The members of the**

**Godhead are as individual as the creatures. Yet none of them lives to Himself. None moves based on His prerogative or power as God. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing out from himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (John 5:19). In saying this, Jesus was not referring to His human dependence on God. He was speaking about the divine nature. In the same vein, He said of the Spirit, “He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears” (John 16:13). This could not possibly refer to the Spirit’s human dependence on God for the Spirit never became man as did the Son. The glory of God, then, is marked by a fundamental denial of self and preferring of others.**

**If we go even further into this vision, there is something more yet. If we get close enough to hear God’s heartbeat (like John leaning against Jesus’s chest), we are affected by a sense of longing. This glory, we have seen, is associated with heaven. But it is not in earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). The vision shows no temple in which God’s glory may dwell and be displayed in all of creation. We have a throne but no**

**kingdom, and on that throne is a man but he is alone. In fact, we might say that the whole spirit of this first glory is, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God’s profound and eternal longing is for one with whom he can be one flesh, with whom He can share Himself completely. It is well and good for the Trinity to enjoy the glory of their selfless communion. Yet the very nature of that communion is expansive, wanting to draw others in, wanting the intimacy and fullness to be shared. Jesus prayed “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us” (John 17:21). This was God’s desire for the captives in Ezekiel’s time, and it is His desire for the church today.**

## **The Second Vision of Glory**

### **Ezekiel 8:3-11:25**

**God’s plan for drawing people into divine communion always involved the temple. After creation, His plan was to choose a people and a place for the building of His temple. Once built, the temple would house God’s glory “so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60). The pleasure God took in His temple—the place where all peoples could know Him—can be sensed in the record of what happened after the temple’s dedication:**

**When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple (1 Kings 8:10, 11).**

**The old covenant temple foreshadowed another temple: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came**

**from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus was chosen before time to be the house of God’s glory, to be the one through which God was seen and known (John 14:9, 17:6). God’s pleasure in this temple was also evident from His announcement at Jesus’s baptism: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Philippians 2:5-8 shows that in becoming the temple, Jesus was continuing in the self-emptying, deferential dependence of glory that we saw in Ezekiel’s first vision:**

**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.**

**It must be emphasized that Jesus was in the form of God when He limited and emptied Himself to become the temple. Becoming human changed**

**the nature of His willing dependence on the Godhead but not the fact of it. As a man He was able to function in perfect dependence because He continued to operate by His divine nature, the nature which denies self and moves by one Spirit instead of proceeding in one's own way by one's own ability (Isaiah 53:6).**

### **Defiling the Temple**

**Considering all that the temple meant as the house of God's glory and as a type of Christ to come, it is gut wrenching that Ezekiel's second vision of glory opens with a tour of pagan religious practices happening in the temple. Ezekiel, of course, didn't witness this directly because he was in Babylon. But he saw it in the spirit.**

**One variety of false religion involved people setting up private shrines devoted to their own personal idols (Ezek. 8:12). One might say this was a form of self-worship since people performed devotions to their own concepts of God. What an affront to the selfless, other-focused communion of God's glory. Ezekiel also**

saw women mourning for Tammuz, a fertility god worshiped through ritual sex acts (Ezek. 8:14). Again, this religion of self-gratification had no place in a temple intended for the self-denying glory of God.

After showing Ezekiel these and other rites going on in the temple, the Lord Himself gives the order for the unfaithful—including women, children, and the elderly—to be slaughtered without pity (Ezek. 9:6). Unable to watch, Ezekiel falls on his face and pleads with the Lord to show mercy (Ezek. 9:8). But instead of listening to Ezekiel, the Lord turns his attention to the temple, which He is about to destroy by fire.

A deep sense of grief permeates the account of the temple's destruction. The utter loss felt by the Lord is most poignantly expressed when He says, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain" (Ezek. 9:7). *Defile the temple? Defile the place chosen out of all creation as a dwelling for God? Why should the temple suffer for the sins of men?* The Lord's heartbreak seems to darken the skies and rumble beneath the earth. Then, the glory of the Lord departs from the temple in

**a sort of dance—rising up, pausing at the temple’s threshold, rising again, stopping at the east gate, finally rising to the mountains where it lingers as if to look back one last time (Ezek. 10:18-19, 11:23). There is a pageantry and ceremony in the way the glory departs that sharpens the bereavement, like a 21-gun salute or the folding of the flag after a burial at sea. Behind Him, God leaves an emptiness, a void such as has not existed since the creation of the world, a void filling, as it were, with the confused voice of the temple crying out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Gen. 1:2; Matt. 27:46).**

## **The Glory of the Cross**

**Jesus of Nazareth promised this sign to His detractors: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days’...the temple he had spoken of was his body” (John 2:19, 21). Ezekiel’s vision of the glory departing ultimately looks ahead to the cross, when God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus also tasted death for everyone, filling Himself with the slain,**

**swallowing up what is mortal, so that we might have life (Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 5:4). Having filled the temple of His Son with sin and death, God destroyed all of it at the cross.**

**Defiling the temple of His Son, however, meant God the Father had to withdraw from Him. His holiness could not be mingled with the sin which Jesus had willingly filled Himself. The original glory, the glory they had shared since before the world began, came to a sudden, violent end. The heartbreak at the end is even more acute when contrasted with the rapture the Word felt as the instrument of creation: “Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind” (Prov. 8:30, 31).**

**It is impossible to fathom the depth of pain and of loss that the Lord experienced that day. Even the sharpest human losses—such as suicide or the death of a child—are but shadows of that consummate grief. If we only consider what Jesus suffered at the cross (which was an unspeakable lot), we cannot appreciate the totality of God’s loving sacrifice. The torment of**

**the Father spills out of David uncontrollably when his son Absalom is killed: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Sam. 18:33). And of the Holy Spirit, the mournful moaning of doves is heard throughout the prophets when the hammer-stroke of judgment falls (Isaiah 38:14; 59:11; Nahum 2:7).**

**Yet, the monumental suffering of God—Father, Son, and Spirit—was a cost all understood, a cost that with one mind they were ready to pay (Luke 14:28-33). That God spared Himself nothing, that He gave up eternal fellowship and all that He is just to gain our friendship, shows how wide, high, and deep God’s love is (Eph. 3:18). There is no distance, no direction, He will not go for us. Like an anchor, Christ sank to the grave and then plumbed the depths of the universe in order to hold us fast in the maelstrom of this changing world. “He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe” (Eph. 4:10). It is glory, the same unity of selflessness we saw in Ezekiel’s first vision, that caused Father, Son, and Spirit to**

**set their face like flint toward the only outcome allowed by their nature—the cross (Luke 9:51).**

## **The Third Vision of Glory**

### **Ezekiel 40:1-43:12**

**Ezekiel received his final vision of glory on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month (Ezek. 40:1). This was significant because it was the day faithful Israelites would select a lamb for Passover (Ex. 12:2, 3). For four days they would feed and care for the lamb, then sacrifice it, apply its blood to their houses, and eat its roasted flesh with bitter herbs (Ex. 12:6-8).**

**As we have said, the Lord called Ezekiel to minister to the captives in Babylon. By giving Ezekiel this third vision at the beginning of Passover, the Lord wasn't promising a new exodus from Babylon. Instead, He was pledging that the first exodus from Egypt was sufficient. Their deliverance, their setting apart as a peculiar nation, their covenantal joining to Him—none of it had changed in God's mind. The Passover Lamb was still the only salvation Israel would ever need, as complete and efficacious as the day they left Egypt. Because of the lamb, and not Israel's faithfulness, they**

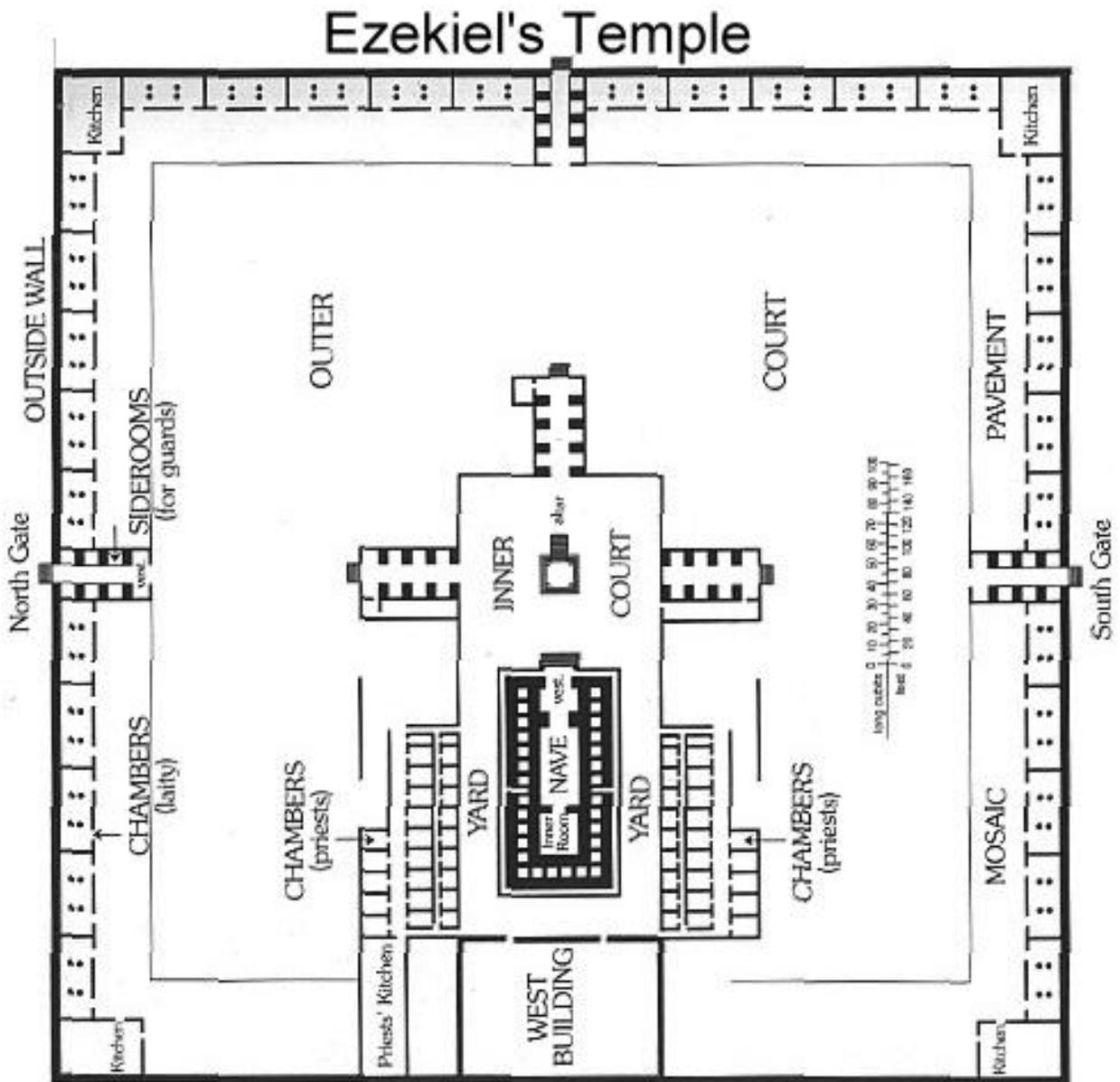
would be restored to the temple, the city, and the land from which they were exiled.

For us, the death of our Passover Lamb, Jesus, is the only deliverance we will ever need (1 Cor. 5:7, 8). His death joined us to God through a new covenant in His blood. If we find that we have wandered from God, if we find ourselves in some sort of captivity because we have followed the self-preferring of the fallen nature, we don't need a new deliverance. We need only remember that the deliverance wrought through the cross is as effective and sufficient today as it ever was. Because of Christ, none of God's thoughts toward us have changed. His love is constant. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 5:16).

## **The New Temple**

Before Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord, he is shown a new temple. As the temple's design is unfolded to Ezekiel, he sees that the altar lies at the heart and center of the temple. The temple's

gates stretch out from the altar to the north, south, and east. The sanctuary extends to the west. Through this architectural design, the entire temple area is marked by an enormous cross:



**The temple seen in Ezekiel’s vision was never built. Zerubbabel and Herod each undertook the building of temples but neither utilized the design shown to Ezekiel (Zech. 4:9; John 2:20). This suggests that Ezekiel’s vision looked forward to a temple made without hands, the one Jesus promised to raise if the temple of His body was destroyed (John 2:19-21). What most identifies the risen temple are the marks of the cross, the evidence of His destruction as revealed to Ezekiel in his second vision of God’s glory (John 20:20). The risen temple invites us to, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27). Those who believe are incorporated into Him and rise “to become a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 1:13, 2:21). The risen temple is Christ and all those in Him. Because we are part of Him, we are also marked by His cross: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).**

## Priests of the Cross

**As Ezekiel sees more of the temple, he learns that the altar is not only its architectural center but is the heart of its ministry as well. After coming into the outer court through the east gate, Ezekiel is brought to the gates leading to the inner court. Next to each gate Ezekiel finds a room where animal sacrifices are washed (Ezek. 40:38). On either side of the stairs leading up to the gate, the Lord shows Ezekiel tables where offerings are slaughtered (Ezek. 40:41). In this temple, priests worship and fellowship with God through continual sacrifice.**

**As new covenant priests, the cross of Christ is our altar and is at the heart of all we do. For Jesus, the cross was the culmination of a life lived on the altar, so to speak. In everything, from obeying His parents to healing the sick to rebuking Pharisees, Jesus gave His life as an offering to the Father. His prayer at Gethsemane—“not what I want, Father, but what you want”—was the motivation of His daily life (Matt. 26:39). Paul also urges us to “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to**

**God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1). Offering ourselves as living sacrifices may take many forms. We may stand so someone else can sit. We may give up money instead of fighting over it. We may lose sleep ministering to a friend or pray for someone that accuses us of heresy. Some may even endure physical harm or suffer death for Christ. Whatever the circumstances, we can live out our calling as “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). Just as Ezekiel’s temple was full of sacrificial ministry, so the new covenant temple fills herself with the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings (Php. 3:10).**

**This is not to say the life of a new covenant priest is one of continual deprivation. In Ezekiel’s temple, as in the law, the priest who offered a sacrifice received a portion of it for food (Ezek. 42:13; Lev. 7:7-10; Numb. 18:24). Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). The cross is implied in this statement because Jesus said, “It is finished” when He died (John 19:30). The giving up of self was not what depleted Him but**

**what fed, motivated, and sustained Him. Paul suggests that this way of living was not meant for our High Priest only but for the whole new covenant priesthood: “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). When we are stretched thin, when we have been emptied like a drink offering or burned-out to the point of ashes, we can trust that Christ’s power will be released to us (2 Cor. 12:9; Lev. 1:9; Php. 2:17). If we lose our life we find it (Matt. 16:25). If we sacrifice, the Lord will meet all our needs “according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Php. 4:18, 19).**

### **River of Life**

**Just south of the altar, Ezekiel sees water flowing (Ezek. 47:1). As it runs east, the water deepens in its course from ankle-deep to a torrent that can’t be crossed (Ezek. 47:3-5). The river’s path continues until it empties into the Dead Sea. Wherever it flows, it makes things live (Ezek.**

**47:8, 9). But the headwaters of this river of life are at the altar housed in the temple.**

**Paul said, “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. [...] So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you” (2 Cor. 4:10, 12). Christ crucified is in us—the new covenant temple—as God’s true altar. Paul describes how the pressures, confusions, conflicts, and (sometimes) persecutions of life can push us to the breaking point (2 Cor. 4:8, 9). It is tempting to fight situations, push back, take control, retaliate.... But if we yield to the altar, to the death of Christ within, these stressors will not destroy us but act as catalysts of divine power (2 Cor. 4:7). Christ’s death, whether in history or in our spirits, is always followed by His resurrection. Besides sustaining and carrying us, Christ’s resurrection flows out of us, bringing life to every person and circumstance it touches. Imagine the power of a church yielded to the altar of the cross. Imagine the torrent of resurrection life flooding out of her who is willing to be joined to Him at the altar. To this we are called (1 Peter 2:21).**

*“Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”  
(John 7:38).*

## **The Glory Returns**

**It is to this altar-centered, sacrificial temple that Ezekiel sees God’s glory return (Ezek. 43:5). The glory can return because the temple shares its self-denying, other-preferring nature. The temple, centered around the altar and marked by the cross, is the very image and likeness of glory. Since it is not a house divided, the glory fills the temple and remains. The Lord announces, “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” (Ezek. 43:7).**

**Romans 6:4 says, “Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father....” In fulfillment of Ezekiel’s third vision, the glory of the Father returned to the temple of His Son—the temple destroyed at the cross—and brought Him out of the grave in newness of life. In this way, Jesus was restored to the fellowship of glory**

**He had known from eternity. That being said, the way Jesus would share in glory was forever changed. In the beginning, Christ participated in glory as pure spirit, like the Father and the Holy Spirit. By becoming man, Jesus changed into a completely new being—a God-man, fully divine and fully human, a being of spirit and of body. The evangelists give us a sense of just how different this being of spirit-flesh is. The gospels record that the risen Christ could appear and vanish from sight yet eat and be felt by those who touched Him (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:30-31; John 20:26-27, 21:12-13). That spirit and flesh were joined in Christ meant that God and humanity were joined, almost like two families are joined via marriage.**

**To put this in the context of Ezekiel’s visions, Jesus will never again commune with the Godhead as pure spirit but will ever participate in glory as the temple. That He was willing to give up the essence of what He was and to accept an irrevocable change in His constitution is an incomprehensible sacrifice. The Father and the Spirit, too, had to accept a fundamental change in the dynamic of their fellowship. But we shouldn’t**

**imagine that this is a source of unending grief to the Trinity. It is probably more like the cliché so often uttered by parents at weddings: “We haven’t lost a son. We’ve gained a daughter.” God hasn’t lost His Son. He has gained a daughter in the church. To be sure, marriage completely changes the dynamics of a family. But hopefully, the happiness and love in a family are increased by a union and not diminished. Since it was the Trinity’s desire from the beginning to expand their fellowship, it is certainly the case that Jesus’s union with us has made the Trinity’s joy full (1 John 1:3, 4).**

**Since we have been united to the temple of the Son and to the cross that marks Him, we are also united with Him in His resurrection (Rom. 6:5). We are not mere spectators of glory, as the Israelites who looked on when God’s glory descended to speak with Moses (Exodus 33:8, 9). But as part of the temple of Christ, we house and participate in glory just as Jesus does: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me” (John 17:22, 23).**

**Participating in glory means we proceed as the creatures in Ezekiel’s first vision: we do not put ourselves forward, we do not operate by our own abilities or prerogatives. We defer to the Lord and to others. We move by one spirit. We limit ourselves so that Christ may become greater (John 3:30). We accept the mark of the cross and a life centered around the altar. But we also have food others know nothing of, we are sustained by the secret nourishment that comes from our portion of the sacrifice, and the Spirit flows like a river from within (John 4:32, 7:38, 39).**

### **Throne of Glory**

**We have just read the Lord’s proclamation that the temple is the place of His throne. The temple of Christ is the natural place for God’s throne because it shares the selfless motivation of glory. As if to punctuate this, Ezekiel sees the new temple on “a very high mountain” just as Christ was raised “in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to**

**come” (Ezek. 40:2; Eph. 1:21). Here, what rules is not the threat of force, but the depth of service (Mark 10:42-45). The Lamb is on the throne (Rev. 5:6). The crucified One is King (Luke 23:38). Again, this is a function of glory. Because Jesus emptied Himself and became obedient to the cross, “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow....” (Php. 2:6-10). As we move by one Spirit and not our own power, God will lift us up (1 Peter 5:6). If we suffer with Him, we will also reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:11).**

### **Many Sons Brought to Glory**

**When the glory returns to the temple, Ezekiel notes that “the land was radiant with his glory” (Ezek. 43:2). The Lord goes on to show Ezekiel how the land will be divided into inheritances for the tribes of Israel (Ezek. 47:13, 48:1-29).**

**Hebrews 2:10 says, “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Historically, the land of Israel has**

**never been settled in the way Ezekiel described. Instead, Ezekiel's vision is of many sons brought to glory in Christ. The defiling and destruction of the temple in Ezekiel's second vision of glory shows the suffering through which Christ brought us to glory.**

**It is vital to note that we have been brought to glory and not to heaven, per se. The popular view of heaven as part utopia, part family reunion, is not entirely unbiblical. But it tends to make personal wish fulfillment the focus of salvation instead of Christ. In fact, we could go so far as to say that for some, Christ is little more than the means by which their wishes will be fulfilled in the afterlife. Heaven is also presented as a reward for good behavior, a place where we are finally free from suffering. In the world to come, we will be freed from all forms of suffering caused by the effects of sin in this fallen world (Rev. 21:4). But we will not be freed from glory, from the self-sacrificing, other-centered fellowship that is the divine nature. Participating in the divine nature IS salvation (2 Peter 1:4). If we haven't had self-motivation eradicated but have only behaved until our desires are finally**

**gratified in heaven, from what have we been saved? By contrast, God has much more in mind than simply rewarding us. He wants all things to be full of glory, to be permeated by that selfless inter-relating—“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14).**

**What do we mean when we talk of all things being full of glory? Let’s put it this way: imagine a world where every last thing is Christ: every river, every stone, every blade of grass. This is something like what Ezekiel’s third vision shows us. Christ is the temple, the altar, and the offering. He is the priest presenting the offering, He is the sacrificial flesh eaten by those who minister. He is the land and each inheritance marked out. He is the 12 tribes and the nation of Israel. His Spirit is the river that makes everything live as it flows past trees of all kinds, which trees He is. “Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11). There is nothing in what Ezekiel sees that is not Christ. And this is where God has placed us. This is the One into whom we have been baptized (1 Cor. 1:30, 12:13). Despite the conditions through which we sojourn, despite the**

**lack of Christ we see around us and in us every day, God would have us know that our reality, the place where we live and move and have our being, is precisely this place where there is nothing but Christ, where Christ is the elemental composition of everything, where He is the length, the height, the breadth, and the depth (Eph. 3:18).**

**So Ezekiel's third vision is not of heaven. It is of those who are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, who share in God's glory (Rom. 8:17). Paul says we must share Christ's sufferings if we are to share His glory but we should not understand this to mean glory is earned through suffering (Rom. 8:17). Paul is not so much talking about something we need to do but about our participation in the divine nature. To know Jesus is to merge with Him, to have our experience suffused with the One who died and rose again (2 Tim. 2:11). We cannot refuse part of Christ anymore than we can be part of Ezekiel's temple while refusing the cross that marks its design. Similarly, the river of life will not flow from us if we reject the altar where its headwaters are. Death and resurrection are**

**inseparable facets of the divine fellowship in glory—one member limits and denies Himself (death), and another is released in power and in life (resurrection).**

## **Creation Liberated**

**While not of heaven, Ezekiel’s third vision of glory does give us a glimpse of a time that is coming and has now come (John 4:23, 5:25). All of the spiritual reality revealed to Ezekiel is now present in Christ yet will manifest more fully at Christ’s return. Throughout the Old Testament, as well as in Ezekiel, the Hebrew word “aretz” is used in reference to the land of Israel. “Aretz” can mean a specific area of land but can also be used to describe the entire earth. When God creates the earth in Genesis 1:1, the word used is “aretz.” In His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Jesus is here paraphrasing Psalm 37:11—“But the meek will inherit the land (‘aretz’)....” The fact that Jesus generalized this verse to the whole earth suggests the land of**

**Israel foreshadows “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).**

**Romans 8:18-21 says:**

**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**

**In his vision of Israel resettling the land, Ezekiel sees nothing less than the revelation of glory in the sons of God and the liberation of creation from its enslavement to decay. The Lord told Adam that he would die if he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17).**

**When Adam ate the fruit, his death spread to the entire creation because God had made him the head of it (Gen. 1:26). When Christ rose from the dead, He reversed this: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). Paul goes on from this verse to describe how Christ’s life is conquering death in the**

**church, the world, and in everything “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:23-28).**

## **Match Made in Heaven**

**The third vision of glory ends with a description of a restored city whose name is, “THE LORD IS THERE” (Ezek. 48:35). We are told that the city has twelve gates, three on each of its four sides. Each gate is named for one of the tribes of Israel (Ezek. 48:30-34).**

**This city is the same that John saw in his revelation—the New Jerusalem, the city called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9). Its twelve gates also bear the names of the tribes of Israel, and its twelve foundations are named for the apostles (Rev. 21:12-14). These things suggest that the New Jerusalem isn’t a literal city but is people of every century who have been married to the Lord through faith. After all, we can’t imagine that the Lord would have any interest in joining Himself to a geographical location or municipality. But He has desired the company of people who are in His image.**

**John tells us that this human edifice “shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel....” (Rev. 21:11). This indwelling of glory shows how intimate is the union between God and His people. As a spouse claims ownership over nothing, not even his or her own body, so the Lord has withheld nothing of Himself from us (1 Cor. 7:4). Our relationship to Him is marital, not martial. With Him, we are not distantly commanded, we are known nakedly and accepted without pretense (Heb. 4:12, 13). Ezekiel ends with this vision of wedded bliss, a match (literally) made in heaven between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32).**

### **Full Circle**

**The things Ezekiel sees in his final vision of glory comprehensively answer the longings of the first vision. God’s glory fills all things, making it in earth as in heaven. In the new temple, God finds a house and a place for His throne. Many sons have been brought to glory and drawn into its selfless relating. In the New Jerusalem, the Lord finds a help fit for Him, a bride who is His**

**glory as He is hers, one to whom He can entrust Himself without reservation (Gen. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 11:7).**

**These divine hopes were realized because Christ gave His life and rose from the dead, things portrayed in Ezekiel's second and third visions of glory. Beyond revealing the plan of salvation, the glory of the Lord unveils the heart of salvation: The eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God who limits, empties, and denies Himself; who submitted to the constraints of creation, society, a stable, a body, and the grave; whose profound motive of self-sacrifice shows the extent of His love for us. The humility and grace of Him who is the least in the kingdom will never be equaled (Matt. 11:11).**

### **The Likeness of Glory**

**Through these visions of glory, God hoped to restore the spiritual sight of those in captivity. Externally speaking, God's people were captives of the Babylonians. But in reality, they were captives of their independence from God. The Lord sent Ezekiel to turn the Israelites to Him. If**

**they would but turn, their blindness would be healed; the Spirit of God would transform and liberate them as He promised: “And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws...you will be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:27, 28).**

**Ezekiel’s visions allow us to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). His ministry to us is the same as his ministry to the Israelites—to turn us to the Lord. Paul says we can attend church and study the Bible yet remain blind to Christ (2 Cor. 3:14, 15). We may even operate in spiritual gifts and anointed ministry (Matt. 7:22; 1 Cor. 12:31-13:3). But to the extent we do not see the glory of God in the face of Christ, we are in captivity. If we turn to the Lord, we are promised spiritual sight and freedom: “And we, who with unveiled faces all look on the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The king of Babylon, it may be remembered, said in his heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God...I will make myself like the Most High”**

**(Isaiah 14:13, 14). As we spiritually look on the selfless inter-relating of God's glory—demonstrated through the death and resurrection of Christ—we are transformed into the likeness of glory by the Holy Spirit. This frees us from the self-reliance, self-motivation, and self-promotion that is Babylon and captivity.**

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Contact us:  
[thevoiceofone@gmx.com](mailto:thevoiceofone@gmx.com)