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A Message of Comfort and Hope to a Pilgrim People

Prior to fireworks being outlawed for July fourth, firecrackers were used to blow up all kinds of objects as well as childhood inventions. Now without question, the grand finale of the two to three weeks heading into the 4th of July was watching the fireworks display that took place at the end of our street. I loved not only hearing the large booms that resulted from the firework, but feeling them (we were that close)! That is why the Grand Finale of the fireworks display was indeed the Grand Finale of the entire three weeks. Boom after boom, the

multiple and brilliant flashes of lights, the response of the crowd... I simply loved it!

There is a degree in which Ezekiel 40-48 is the grand finale of the book of Ezekiel! For 39 chapters God has given direction and encouragement to His exiled people assuring them that they were right where He wanted them to be. Now, at the close of the book, this vision of the Temple of the Lord in Ezekiel 40-48- brings God's message to His people to an entirely different level.

This final section of Ezekiel begins with a message of comfort and hope to a pilgrim people. The final section, Ezekiel 40-48, ranks up there as one of the more challenging sections in the prophetic corpus. But that primarily is because we tend to approach the section with a flawed objective. Many assume that what was written here was intended to be understood as one might understand a didactic passage like Romans or Ephesians. However, family of God, Ezekiel 40-48 is NOT a narrative NOR a didactic passage. It is prophecy pure and simple. Like a picture, the individual verse/stroke does NOT make up the message. It is only as we take the section/painting as a whole that the glorious message is seen.

The over-arching theme of this section is found in its opening and closing words.

Ezekiel 40:2, "In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel, and set me on a very high mountain..."

Which in the Old Testament was understood to be the dwelling place of God. Think of Psalm 121.

Psalm 121:1-2, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence shall my help come? My help *comes* from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Psalm 113:5, "...God is enthroned on high."

That is purpose of an altar. It is the raising up of a high place/a mountain in a low land! With that, notice how this prophecy ends:

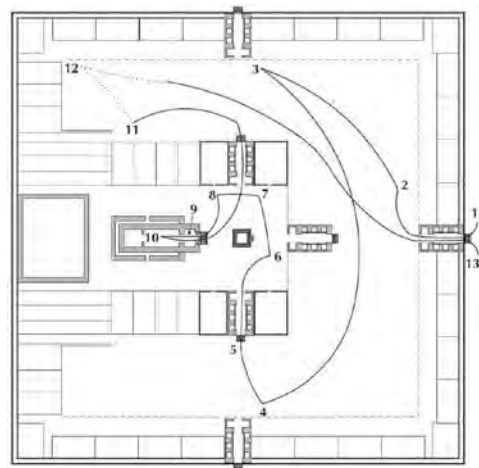
Ezekiel 48:35: "*The city shall be 18,000 cubits round about; and the name of the city from that day shall be, 'The Lord is there.'*"

We are going to return to this theme at the end because it is very important! Nevertheless the closing theme of this incredible book is that no matter how bad it may get for God's people, the Lord is with them!

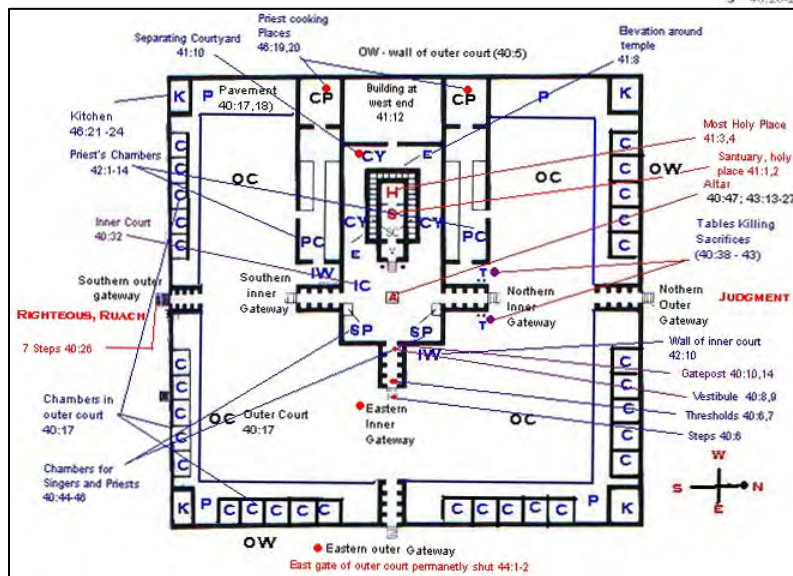
Ezekiel is transported to a high mountain near to the holy city (most likely Mount Zion) and there he meets an angelic figure who leads him throughout the temple area, measuring everything with a builder's measuring-rod and giving Ezekiel a glimpse at that to which God was/is bringing His people.

Making heads and tails of an incredibly “Blurred” Vision- there are numerous aids to help us grasp somewhat of the content and flow of Ezekiel 40-48. I have found the following helpful:

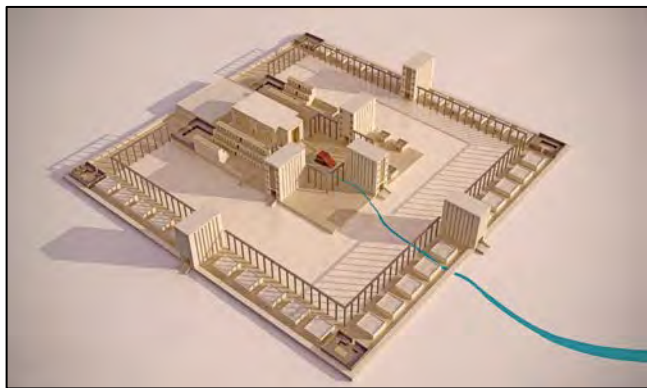
1. The first is taken from a commentary on Ezekiel by D. I. Block in the NICOT Bible commentary series.¹ It shows the movement of the angelic guide as he brings Ezekiel on a tour through this future temple. This week read Ezekiel 40-48 using the diagram; you will find it quite helpful.
2. I have no idea where I acquired the second picture. However, I also have found it most helpful as it details the elements of Ezekiel’s Temple along with their accompanying verses.



| Key | | | | | |
|-----|----------|---|----------|----|----------|
| 1 | 40:1-16 | 6 | 40:32-34 | 10 | 41:1-4 |
| 2 | 40:17-19 | 7 | 40:45-47 | 11 | 42:1-14 |
| 3 | 40:20-23 | 8 | 40:44-46 | 12 | 46:19-24 |
| | | 9 | 40:48-49 | 13 | 42:15-20 |



3. The final pictures also come from an unknown sources, but once again they have proved helpful to me when it came to visualizing the temple pictured here. A couple of notes are in order in this regard. As I'll reference in a bit, there has been enormous liberty taken in these pictures as there simply isn't enough detail given to us in Ezekiel to construct the temple described here. However as I am a visual person, I appreciate the attempts even though I know they have major flaws.



Four Main Approaches to this Section

The chief problem in seeking to understand these chapters is that of interpretation. How are we to understand what is written here? Is this a literal temple that God someday would build? Or is this simply a parable? While there have been many, many suggestions given, the vast majority can be categorized into four approaches.

1. The first may be called **The Literal Prophetic Approach**. According to this school, we have here the blueprints of a temple which was expected to be built when the exiles returned to Jerusalem. However, Ezekiel 40-48 was NOT written by an architect, BUT a prophet.² Accordingly, the structure as described here could not be built! Quote: J. B. Taylor wrote:

If this were an architect's specification we should have expected much more

detail about materials to be used, and even though many measurements are given, the ground-plan leaves dozens of details to the imagination of any prospective builder, as those who have tried to reconstruct Ezekiel's temple have found to their cost. (Taylor, 2009, p. 246)

If you are at all curious on this point, do a comparison sometime between the specifications God laid down for the Solomonic Temple and the specifications given here. Your conclusion will be one and the same as mine: The temple herein described could not have been built!

A second problem is that if God intended for His people to erect the structure of Ezekiel 40-48, it is most notable that when the exiles returned to Jerusalem they (1) DID NOT follow the pattern laid down here, and (2) God did not rebuke them (which is significant since He rebuked His people at this time for many things, cf. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah)!

It is clear that this temple was not intended to be built, but simply described/preached:

Ezekiel 40:4, "And the man said to me, 'Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show *it* to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see.'" - the word for "declare" means "to be in front" and so to be manifest and clear. It is translated 59 times as "to show" or "to explain."

It is used in Genesis 3:11 when God asked Adam, "Who told you you were naked?" - which involves the idea of putting the pieces together and so figuring something out. It is used in Judges 14:12 where Solomon invited the Philistines to declare or "figure out" the riddle. And it is used in Genesis 4:24 when Pharaoh said that there was no one could declare (that is, figure out) his dream.

That Ezekiel was to "declare" to the house of Israel what he saw, implies that he was to figure out the point of the revelation and preach it.

2. The second interpretation has been labeled as the **Symbolic Christian Approach** which holds that this vision has its fulfillment in the era of the New Testament, specifically in the Church. This is the position favored by many older commentators.

The main problem with this approach is that it totally neglects the fact that Ezekiel 40-48 was written to comfort and encourage the people of God living *AT THE TIME OF EZEKIEL*.

Furthermore if you are awake this morning, you will note that this is the same criticism leveled against many older approaches to Isaiah 7 and the Virgin Birth. This prophecy was given to encourage the people of God at the time it was given. That doesn't mean it did NOT have an ultimate reference to the coming of Christ. But it does mean that the approach we take must have application to the generation that first received this prophecy.

Now with Isaiah 7, for example, it is easy- as clearly there was a young maiden with child who was about to give birth. Yet as we just saw, such cannot be posited when it comes to the building of the temple of Ezekiel 40ff. Again, what Ezekiel describes here could NOT have built in his generation or any generation for that matter.

3. A variant of the previous is the **Dispensationalist Approach** which views this as a description of the temple that God intended to build during the Millennial age.

This combines the problems of the previous two approaches. Again, Ezekiel 40-48 was NOT written by an architect, BUT a prophet who was concerned with the heart, NOT the builder's hand. Accordingly and again, the structure here described could not be built!

Furthermore, this likewise neglects the fact that this vision had a real context for God's people in Ezekiel's day. The Dispensational Approach, like the Symbolic Christian Approach, ignores this.

Finally, this view completely misses/neglects the fulfilling work of Christ as it relates to the Ceremonial Laws (cf. Col. 2:16-17). In this regard, consider the words of J.B. Taylor:

If it follows from this that Old Testament festivals, blood sacrifices, priesthood and worship at a temple are to be reintroduced, after the New Testament revelation of Christ and his finished, fulfilling work, it shows how completely this view misinterprets the significance of Christ's salvation... (Taylor, 2009, p. 247)

4. The fourth and final view is the **Apocalyptic Approach**. It interprets these chapters according to the rules Apocalyptic literature. This I believe is the only feasible approach and so that which I will be using in our study the next couple of weeks.

There is much to be commended when it comes to this view. It holds that while Ezekiel 40-48 pertain largely to the future, yet as it is describing the future Messianic Kingdom, it necessarily held application to the present. Think of it: the promised Messiah was THE glorious hope which upheld God's people throughout the Old Testament (beginning as far back as Genesis 3:15). Accordingly, we understand this passage as another one of the many promises and foretastes that God gave His people when it came to the coming Messianic Kingdom!

Ezekiel 37:26-28, "And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."

Family of God, it is clear that Ezekiel 40-48 is describing this sanctuary!

It rightly reflects the flow and movement of God's Redemptive plan which finds its climax in the

Messianic reign and rule of Christ, which from the perspective of the Old Testament was a one-time event (yet which we know involved two movements: Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming). Furthermore, it does most justice to the self-identified genre of this section (Ezekiel 40:2), specifically that this is a compilation of “Divine visions from the Lord.”

Finally, it is most notable that God gave a commentary on Ezekiel’s temple in Revelation 21-22. The language of Revelation clearly came from Ezekiel. Clearly what Ezekiel saw was NOT a literal temple, but the Messianic reign of Christ as it will be manifest in the final state (though beginning in this state). Once again, J. B. Taylor wrote:

This was Ezekiel’s pattern for the Messianic age that was to come. It lay in the future, and yet it grew out of the present. It was expressed in tangible terms and yet these were merely the forms in which the general principles of God’s activity were enshrined. The vision of the temple was in fact a kind of incarnation of all that God stood for and all that he required and all that he could do for his people in the age that was about to dawn. (Taylor, 2009, p. 249)

Again, this will be the approach we will take as we examine this passage.

However, a major themes of Ezekiel 40-48 is the re-conquest of our Sovereign King!³ It is incredible to note that Ezekiel 40-48 carries with it a Conquest Theme paralleling the Books of Moses in which God details His plans for His people to bring them into the “Promised Land” (ultimately the New Heavens and Earth). Accordingly what we have in Ezekiel 40-48 is apocalyptic in nature (as with God’s redemptive program in the wilderness, it looks forward to the climax of Redemptive History when once again God brings His people into THE Promised Land)! In this regard, consider the following parallels that exist between Ezekiel and the Exodus narratives.

We begin with the parallels found in Ezekiel 40-48 (actually going back to chap. 33). Consider the chart which I’ve placed in your insert. The parallels are so numerous, there is no question that God intended Ezekiel to be a *Second Exodus* to His people. That means whereas Exodus contains a history of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt, Ezekiel was intended to detail the deliverance of God’s people ultimately from their sin with the crowning section being Ezekiel 40-48!

| Activity | Exodus Narrative | Ezekiel 40-48 |
|---|------------------|-----------------|
| Yahweh commissions a human agent. | Ex. 3-4 | Ezk. 33 |
| Yahweh separates Israel from the nations and delivers her from bondage. | Ex. 5-13 | Ezk. 34-37 |
| Enemy forces challenge Yahweh’s salvific work on his people’s behalf. | Ex. 14-15 | Ezk. 38-39 |
| Yahweh appears on a high mountain. | Ex. 19 | Ezk. 40:1-4 |
| Yahweh provides for his residence among his people. | Ex. 25-40 | Ezk. 40:5-43:27 |
| Yahweh prescribes the appropriate response to his grace. | Lev. 1:1ff. | Ezk. 44:1-46:24 |
| Yahweh provides for the apportionment of his land to his people. | Num. 34-35 | Ezk. 47-48 |

There are many similarities in the priestly prescriptions in both Exodus and Ezekiel. The book of Exodus and Ezekiel both have virtually identical linguistic textures. Both are preoccupied with Priestly concerns: the sanctuary and its furnishings, the offices of the cult personnel, the sacrificial system with its sin and guilt offerings, the relationship of the tribes of Israel to the cult and its center. Both recognize the Levites as religious functionaries, and yet both restrict the office of priesthood to a specific line within the tribe. Both prescriptions were directly revealed by Yahweh to his intermediary to be passed on to the people (cf. Exodus 19:3; 24:12 and Ezekiel 40:4; 44:6).

Both were revealed on a high mountain, the first on Mount Sinai, referred to as “the mountain of God” (Exodus 24:12–18); the second on an initially unnamed mountain (Ezekiel 40:2), but later identified as “Yahweh is there” (Ezekiel 48:35). In both, the revelation of the plans of the sanctuary follow the establishment of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. In both, the blessing of Yahweh is visibly demonstrated by the entrance of His presence in the sanctuary (Exodus 40:34–38; cf. Ezekiel 43:1–9).

The Redemptive Time Indicator of Ezekiel 40-48.

We are told in Ezekiel 40:1 that the vision occurred on “the tenth day of the first month”! If you were an Old Testament Jew, you couldn’t miss the significance of this date. It was first set in Exodus 12:3 as the day when the Israelite was to acquire his Passover Lamb. That Ezekiel received this vision on that date unites this vision once again with Exodus! Clearly, God/Ezekiel is intentionally connecting Ezekiel 40-48 with the Exodus/Conquest narratives! The Structure of Ezekiel 40-48 follows that which was given in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Consider the chart.

**Ezekiel
A Second Moses
A Second Conquest**

| | | |
|---|------------------------|------------|
| God's Residence- the Temple | Ex. 25:1-40 | Ezk. 40-43 |
| Israel's Response to God in their Midst | Leviticus & Numbers | Ezk. 44-46 |
| Distribution of the Land | Num. 34-35 | Ezk. 47-48 |

Scholars are quick to point out that the parallel here makes Ezekiel a “Second Moses” who like Moses would NOT enter the Promised Land (the Messianic Kingdom), BUT who would encourage God’s people as to what life would be like when the age of the Messiah arrived.

Finally, there are multiple parallels between Ezekiel 20 (which you will recall involves Christ’s Judgment of the nations surrounding Israel) and Ezekiel 40-48, so much so that Ezekiel 40-48 has been identified as example of “resumptive exposition” in Ezekiel.⁴

Ezekiel 20:33, “‘As I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you.’”

This is such an important declaration in Ezekiel 20 that it is shocking that it is NOT expanded upon in the intervening chapters, specifically Ezekiel 12-24. Yet there was a reason God didn’t

expand upon it then. His plan was to bring the theme into its own in Ezekiel 40-48.

Ezekiel 43:7a, "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 among the sons of Israel forever...'"

D. I. Block wrote:

Preceding the announcement of the renewal of the covenant and the restoration of the exiles to the land of Israel (20:37–38), Yahweh had declared, 'emlôk 'ălêkem, "I shall be king over you" (20:33). The notion of Yahweh's renewed kingship over Israel had been suggested by the 'divine shepherd' vocabulary in 34:7–22, but explicit references to him as 'king' over his people have been lacking- until 43:7, where Ezekiel witness the 'enthronement of Yahweh' and hears his declaration of kingship over Israel. (Block, 1998, p. 497)

From the many parallels between Ezekiel 40-48 and Exodus, there is no question that the Comfort and Hope that Ezekiel would extend to God's exiled people was the realization that they were right where their forefathers were years before in the wilderness just prior to God leading them into the Promised Land. Think about that just as the Old Testament people of God under Moses lost everything when God delivered them from their slavery to Egypt, so the people of God in the diaspora likewise lost everything when God set about the work of delivering them from their slavery to sin! Yet unlike the people of God under Moses, the Promised Land where God now was leading His people had six glorious characteristics which we are going to begin considering today.

In this regard I am reminded what we saw earlier. Ezekiel 40-48 is NOT a narrative NOR a didactic passage. It is Apocalyptic. And so like a picture, the individual verse/stroke does NOT make up the message. It is only as we take the section/painting as a whole that the glorious message is seen. With that let's fellowship around the first message which we already have seen from our study this morning...

Based on the parallels contained in this text with the Exodus/Conquest narrative, the first Word of Comfort and Hope is that The Lord is the Sovereign, Conquering King who Reigns with His People over the Earth! The clear theme of the Exodus was the Sovereignty of God which powerfully delivered Israel from slavery and brought them to the Promised Land. We don't have time to consider all the examples, but consider the plagues:

Exodus 12:12, "For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments- I am the Lord."

What an incredible verse! Each and every plague that God brought against Egypt was directed against an Egyptian deity to demonstrate the absolute power and sovereignty of God! When God's people were brought to the base of Mount Sinai and saw the lightening, heard the

thunder, and felt the earth shake, they were horribly frightened and so Moses instructed them thus:

Exodus 20:18, 20, "And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance... And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid [do not be terrified]; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.'"

The parting of the Red Sea, the wilderness wanderings, the trials and tribulations... ALL occurred to open the eyes of God's people that they might see the grandeur of the glory of the Being that was bringing them to the Promised Land! In fact, THE promise that God gave to His people at the very beginning of the wilderness wandering which was intended to be a comfort and encouragement to Israel in and through all things:

Exodus 14:14, "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."

THE Theme of the Exodus, the Wilderness Wanderings, and the Conquest was the Sovereignty of our Unthwartable God as He brought His people into the Promised Land!

That clearly is what emerges in Ezekiel 40-48 in view of the parallels between Ezekiel and the Exodus. That meant that where God's people were at that moment ultimately was NOT the result of fate or chance. Where they were was right where God deigned for them to be. Consider just one passage:

Ezekiel 43:1-7a, "Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. And *it was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. 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 among the sons of Israel forever.'"

Don't miss what God is communicating here; it is the same as what He communicated with the first Conquest:

God is the Great I Am... the Sovereign Lord of Eternity. His glory has and will always overwhelms the creature in this state! And that means, where His people were is exactly where He brought them accordingly to the kind intention of His will.

Remember the message God gave to the exiles through Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 29:4, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon..."

Remember the message Nebuchadnezzar sent throughout Babylon at this time:

Daniel 4:34-35, "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and *among* the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What hast Thou done?'"

This is the message of Ezekiel 40-48, And yet, God also is Immanuel; He is with us. He will never leave us or forsake us! He is with us always, even to the end of the age.

Ezekiel 43:7b, "...I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever..."

Because all of this is true, what does this mean practically for us this day? What did it mean for His struggling people in exile? Where they were is right where He wants them to be. There are no accidents... no surprises. We/they are part of a Kingdom that cannot be thwarted. So weep not... fret not... and worry not! We are "marching to Zion!"

Works Cited

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- Taylor, J. B. (2009). *Ezekiel (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*. Westmont: IVP Academic.

End Note(s)

¹ *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, NICOT, p. 510.

² E. W. Hengstenberg wrote, “This opinion forgets that we have here to do not with an architect, but with a prophet- with one whose department is not the hands, but the heart.” (Hengstenberg, 2017 1869 Translation Reprint)

³ Carrying the theme of “Conquest” a little further, it is significant that the dating of this material also corresponds with a major Babylonian holy day which celebrated the supremacy and enthronement of Marduk. In this celebration, the climax involved the king of Babylon “seizing” the hand of Marduk and conducting his image in procession to the *akītu* temple outside the city where the false god would be declared as Lord of all.

Isn't it interesting that it was at this particular time, April 28, 573 BC, that God revealed to His people a picture of His conquest NOT of a land, territory, or nation, BUT of all of creation?! Marduk may be said to reign supreme in Babylon by the Chaldeans, BUT let it be understood and known by all God's people that the day is going to come when God will reign supreme over all creation with this glorious mark/badge, “The Lord is there!”

=Ezekiel 43:3-5: “And *it was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house.”

...and so on top of the parallels with the Conquest under Moses, this passage serves the polemical purpose of proclaiming and celebrating the Kingdom of God which would do nothing less than inspire the hope and faith of the exiles!

⁴ *The Book of Ezekiel*, NICOT, p. 497).