

Ezekiel Part 50 (Ezekiel 42 & 43)

1. **42:1–12** Ezekiel was led out of the temple sanctuary into the inner court and around the building to the north side.
2. This building had three levels and several galleries with a ten-cubit-wide passageway in front of the structure.
3. Across the ten-cubit-wide passageway on the side toward the sanctuary was another building that was one hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide.
4. On the south side of the temple was an exact duplicate of the buildings on the north. Their size and orientation were exactly the same with entrances that faced east toward the outer court.
5. **42:13–14** Use of these buildings and rooms was reserved for the priests when they ate communal offering meals.
6. The buildings and rooms were used for both dining and storage of offerings until they were needed.
7. According to the Mosaic Law, the priests received a portion of some offerings that were eaten.
8. From the whole burnt offering they received only the skin of the animal. (Leviticus 7:8)
9. A memorial portion of grain offerings was burned on the altar of burnt offering and the remainder given to the priests. (Leviticus 2:3, 10; 6:16–18; 7:14–15)
10. The fat of the sin offering and trespass offering was burned on the altar of burnt offering and the remainder eaten by the priests. (Leviticus 6:26; 7:6–7)
11. These regulations for the priests were observed in the tabernacle and temple. The offerings were types of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ the Messiah.
12. **42:15–20** After touring the inner and outer courts, Ezekiel was taken out the east gate to the outer perimeter of the sanctuary, where the angel-guide measured the outer wall of the entire complex.
13. It was a perfect square five hundred cubits on each side.
14. Ezekiel was shown by the angel the future temple that would exceed all former temples in size and beauty. He saw a temple that had perfect symmetry and was symbolic of the holiness of God.
15. The graduated levels and divisions that led to the holy of holies provided a line of demarcation and separation between the common and the holy.

16. This was a temple that was clearly designed for worship and sacrifice to Yahweh, who had promised to restore His people Israel to their land.
17. **43:1–12** Like several other visions in Ezekiel, this vision (43:1–5) is followed by an interpretation (43:6–12).
18. As the glory of God filled the tabernacle after its construction at the beginning of Israel's history (Exodus 40:34–38), and as it filled the temple following its construction by Solomon (1 Kings 8:10–11), - Ezekiel was assured in a vision that once again God's glory will reside with Israel.
19. As the exiles despaired at the departure of God's glory in Ezekiel's vision, the glory of the Lord will be restored to the new temple in the messianic age when the Davidic covenant is completely fulfilled.
20. A reminder of what Ezekiel had seen; the first vision was when he received his call to the ministry, Ezekiel saw the glory of God emerge from the storm that came from the north (1:4–28). In a later vision he saw the glory of God depart from the sanctuary (10:4, 18–19) and move to the east gate of the temple area and pause.
21. Then the glory moved from the east gate to the Mount of Olives (11:22–25). From there at some unspecified later time the glory of God disappeared.
22. **43:1–5** Ezekiel's guide brought him toward the east side of the city where the Mount of Olives lies just across the Kidron Valley from the temple mount.
23. But it was apparent to Ezekiel that the Lord's coming here was not a summons to ministry or a sign of judgment.
24. It was a sign of His covenant love bringing blessings to His people that would never be taken away.
25. As Ezekiel watched, God's glory entered the east gate by which it had departed, continued into the inner court, and then entered the sanctuary.
26. **43:6–12** God personally interpreted this vision for Ezekiel, thus adding even more importance to what Ezekiel saw (v. 6).
27. God wanted to be sure Ezekiel understood the significance of what he had seen, so He gave him a personal interpretation. God said, "This is the place of my throne... This is where I will live among the Israelites forever" (v. 7). God promised that his return would be a permanent return (vv. 7, 9).
28. Further, He promised that restored Israel would "never again" defile God's name or turn to idolatry.
29. Verses 6–12 not only contain a vision of the fulfillment of the promise of restoration found in chaps. 33–37 but they also provide an outline of the theological significance of the temple.

30. Ezekiel's future temple, like Solomon's temple, was to be the center of worship for Israel.
31. Its religious significance was presented by Ezekiel in five important theological statements in vv. 7-12, which form a conclusion to the section (40:1-43:12) and present a summary of the theology of the temple.
32. First, the temple was the throne of God (43:7). The ark in the most holy place of the temple of Solomon was considered to be the throne of God. When the ark of the covenant was placed there, God was understood to be taking possession and affirming His desire to dwell among His people.
33. A cloud filled Solomon's temple as a sign of God's presence and approval (1 Kings 8:10). This cloud was accompanied by the glory of God (1 Kings 8:11).
34. As a part of the restoration God promised that He would again dwell with them in a unique way. (Ezekiel 34:30)
35. The temple of Ezekiel's vision made that promise a reality by looking to a future day when God would personally dwell again with His people. (Rev 7:15-17; 21:3-4)
36. Second, the temple was a sign of God's choosing of Israel (43:7). God had chosen Israel as the people through whom His redemptive purpose would be realized for all humanity. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11; Ezekiel 34:30)
37. Third, the temple was a visible sign of the holiness of God (43:7c). God's name repeatedly had been profaned by Israel's "detestable practices." (43:8; cf. 5:11; 44:6-7, 13)
38. A corrupt temple was the sad witness of a corrupt nation (36:23). Ezekiel saw the millennial temple where God's holiness and name would again be established.
39. He also envisioned a new holiness among the people, suggesting a new order based on the holiness and righteousness of God, who would reign forever as the King of this coming kingdom (43:8-9).
40. Fourth, the temple was a visible witness of God's redemptive love. God promised he would gather Israel from among the nations and return them to their land.
41. God's determination to restore Israel, cleanse them, and permanently dwell with them was an affirmation of his redemptive love for them and for all humanity.
42. Fifth, the temple was a physical confirmation of the covenant of peace and of the future restoration.

(3) Vision of Restored Worship (43:13–46:24)

Reinstatement of the laws of the sacrificial system appeared to be a retrogression from the New Testament ideals in force before the beginning of the millennium. It seems to return to the more primitive typological pictures of redemption that the Mosaic system represented. Yet it should be no surprise that Ezekiel would have been shown sacrifices as a vital part of worship in the temple.

It must be remembered that chaps. 40–48 only present the Hebrew perspective of worship in the millennium. Still the question remains, How, then can the New Covenant in place today be set aside at some future time for a return to the Mosaic system?

When the descendants of Abraham were constituted as a nation at Mount Sinai, God appointed them to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:1–6). This role as a kingdom of priests included a missionary purpose that would involve all humanity. They were not simply to be a kingdom *with* priests to minister to themselves. They were to be priestly mediators of God’s covenant promises to all people. But from the time of their constitution as a nation to the present, Israel has never fulfilled that missionary mandate. Israel as a nation has never given witness to the truth that the Messiah was Jesus Christ. Zechariah 4:1–14 presented a prophecy of the fulfillment of Isa 60:1–3 in which the nation of Israel witnessed to the world concerning the Messiah, God’s true Light, Jesus Christ. Zechariah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (31:31–34) foretold a day when Israel would be a kingdom of priests mediating a new covenant of the saving grace of Yahweh through the Messiah. Ezekiel also had foreseen the promise of a new covenant in his earlier prophecies (34:24–25; 36:22–31; 37:26–28). In these temple visions he also saw a future day when Israel will witness to the Messiah’s salvation during the time of the tribulation. John the apostle received a similar message in Rev 7:1ff. that presented the conversion of 144,000 Jews who will go forth as witnesses of the Messiah. As a result of their work, a great unnumbered host will be saved (Rev 7:9–10). In Rev 12 Israel is portrayed as a sun-clad woman and is said to have the testimony of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Rev 12:17). John’s message seems to suggest that Israel’s testimony of Jesus as Messiah will be acquired during the time of the tribulation. From that time Israel will begin to fulfill their assignment to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation and to witness of Jesus as Messiah. In addition to this future prospect of Israel’s missionary zeal is another aspect of the covenant the nation was given that has never been fulfilled. Israel has never used the sacrificial system with the proper perspective, that is, with the person of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12), in view as the supreme sacrifice for sin. Israel rejected Jesus because they could not accept the idea of a nonpolitical, humble, self-sacrificing savior for their Messiah. The millennial kingdom will afford an opportunity for Israel to realize and practice its missionary purpose in the plan of God and practice the symbols of their covenant for the first time, in retrospect, to commemorate the redemptive work of Jesus as Messiah.

A return to the system of sacrifices has no place in the present church age. Why then would Israel in the millennium, after the church age, return to the sacrificial system of the time of Moses? The new covenant was sealed not with the blood of bulls and goats as was the old (Heb 10:1–8) but with the precious blood of Jesus (Matt 26:28). To commemorate his new covenant and this redemptive work, he established two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Rom 6:1–23; Matt 26:26–30; 1 Cor 11:17–34). These ordinances celebrate and commemorate, in retrospect, the redemptive work of Jesus. In like manner Israel will worship God with sacrifices of fellowship as a commemoration and confirmation, in retrospect, of the redemptive work of Jesus as their Messiah as well.

Both the church ordinances and the ordinances of the sacrificial system share a common purpose. They were commissioned to be instructive and commemorative. These systems of worship were intended to employ rituals to communicate spiritual truths. Both the covenant of law and the covenant of grace have similar goals: to lead worshipers to cast themselves on the mercy and grace of a loving, forgiving God (cf. Exod 34:6–7; Ps 51:1–13; Eph 2:11–16).

Since the church will be taken out of the world, or raptured, prior to the tribulation (Rev 4:1), the tribulation will be the era of conversion for Israel (Rev 7:1ff.), and the millennium will afford them the opportunity to reinstate their covenant to celebrate and commemorate the redemptive work of Jesus the Messiah. The existence of the millennial temple and the reinstatement of the sacrificial system is not only understandable but predictable. Ezekiel’s vision of a restored sacrificial system was really not so amazing after all. The millennium will afford Israel the opportunity for the first time in its history to use the symbols of their covenant with Jesus as Messiah in view. It will be their first time to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation showing forth to the world the redemptive work of Yahweh in the person of Jesus Christ the Messiah (Isa 53:7; 61:1–3; Zech 4:1; John 1:29; Acts 8:32–35; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 7:13–14; 5:9; 13:8; 15:3).

Dedication of the Altar and Restoration of Sacrifices (43:13–27)

There are two parts to this vision. First is the description of the altar (43:13–17). Second are the regulations for use of the altar (43:18–27).

Description of the Altar (43:13–17)

¹³ “These are the measurements of the altar in long cubits, that cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth: Its gutter is a cubit deep and a cubit wide, with a rim of one span around the edge. And this is the height of the altar: ¹⁴ From the gutter on the ground up to the lower ledge it is two cubits high and a cubit wide, and from the smaller ledge up to the larger ledge it is four cubits high and a cubit wide. ¹⁵ The altar hearth is four cubits high, and four horns project upward from the hearth. ¹⁶ The altar hearth is square, twelve cubits long and twelve cubits wide. ¹⁷ The upper ledge also is square, fourteen cubits long and fourteen cubits wide, with a rim of half a cubit and a gutter of a cubit all around. The steps of the altar face east.”

43:13–17 The first element of temple worship that Ezekiel described was the altar of burnt offering. The measurements of the altar were based on the longer royal cubit, approximately twenty-one inches (see 40:5). The altar was built in four stages consisting of a base plus three stages. Each stage was two cubits smaller than the one below. Around the base was a one-cubit gutter with a rim on the outer edge one cubit high (v. 13). The perimeter of the base was eighteen cubits. The lowest stage was two cubits high and sixteen cubits on each side (v. 14) and the second four cubits high and fourteen cubits on each side (v. 15); the third stage that was the hearth was four cubits high and twelve cubits on each side. On the four corners of the fourth stage hearth were horns or projections. The upper ledge on the edge of the second stage also had a rim one-half cubit high and a gutter one cubit wide (v. 17). There were steps on the east side of the altar for access to the hearth. The altar was a visible sign of the consequences of sin that encouraged people to confess and repent of deliberate sins (43:18–19; see discussion of 45:13–17).

Regulations for Use of the Altar (43:18–27)

¹⁸ Then he said to me, “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: These will be the regulations for sacrificing burnt offerings and sprinkling blood upon the altar when it is built: ¹⁹ You are to give a young bull as a sin offering to the priests, who are Levites, of the family of Zadok, who come near to minister before me, declares the Sovereign Lord. ²⁰ You are to take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar and on the four corners of the upper ledge and all around the rim, and so purify the altar and make atonement for it. ²¹ You are to take the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the designated part of the temple area outside the sanctuary.

22 “On the second day you are to offer a male goat without defect for a sin offering, and the altar is to be purified as it was purified with the bull. 23 When you have finished purifying it, you are to offer a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. 24 You are to offer them before the Lord, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the Lord.

25 “For seven days you are to provide a male goat daily for a sin offering; you are also to provide a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. 26 For seven days they are to make atonement for the altar and cleanse it; thus they will dedicate it. 27 At the end of these days, from the eighth day on, the priests are to present your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

43:18–27 The Lord continued to speak to Ezekiel and gave him regulations for sacrificing on the altar. Two purposes for the altar were specified: (1) it was to be used for offering whole burnt offerings, and (2) it was to be used for “sprinkling blood” (v. 18). Burnt offerings included all the five offerings in Lev 1–7. “Sprinkling blood” is literally “throwing blood” (Heb. text) and was associated with priestly ordination (Exod 29:16, 20), burnt offerings (Lev 1:5, 11; 9:12), and peace offerings (Lev 3:2, 8; 9:18).

Jewish interpreters believe the command for the prophet to give the “bull” to the priests (v. 19) was a prophetic sign that Ezekiel will be one of the priests to officiate in the messianic temple. But the best interpretation is that of Zimmerli, who views this section as similar to the charge given to Moses to see that worship procedures were carried out correctly (Exod 25:1ff.). Ezekiel was only officiating as an administrator in the vision that should not necessarily be taken as a prophetic promise that he will be a priest in the millennial temple.

The altar was a symbol of the consequences of sin. The wages of sin produced the death of the sacrificial animal (Rom 6:23). The altar also presented the grace and love of God, who provided a means to atone for unintentional sins (43:19). Blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar (v. 20). These projections on the four corners of the hearth were considered the most holy and sacred part of the altar (Exod 29:12) and a place of mercy and refuge (1 Kgs 1:50; 2:28). Excellent examples of altars have come to light in recent archaeological excavations. A small horned altar was found at Megiddo that may have been an incense altar. The most magnificent example of a horned sacrificial altar was found in the fifth season at Beersheba. This was the first time that the remnant of a horned sacrificial altar was discovered. This large dressed stone altar was approximately one and a half meters high and one and a half meters on each side. On each corner of the hearth were horns that were part of the cornerstones of the top. The author was a participant in the excavations in the Negev at Beer Sheba where the altar was discovered. It is on display at the museum of Beer Sheba, which houses the artifacts from the seven years of excavation at the site.⁸⁰

The horns of the altar that Ezekiel saw were sprinkled with blood to purify the altar and make atonement for it (v. 20). Also a bull was offered as a sin offering and burned outside the inner court but inside the temple complex (v. 21). On the second day of the dedication of the altar a male goat was offered outside the inner court and the altar purified as in v. 20. Then a bull and a ram were offered as a whole burnt offering mixed with salt (vv. 23–24). The use of salt with an offering has specific overtones and association with the idea of covenant (Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). Salt was used as part of sacrificial communal meals and was a sign of purification and preservation. This procedure was repeated for seven days, meaning until seven days had ended rather than for an additional seven days.⁸⁴ The seven days for these ceremonies were for the atonement, cleansing, and dedication of the altar (v. 26).

The theological significance of the altar and sacrifices is an important concept in Ezekiel. McConville considers this section on the altar to be the central section (“midpoint”) or peak of chaps. 40–48. He observes an “inward movement” in the chapters to this point and the beginning from here of an

“outward movement” as regulations are given for the temple (44:5), then measurements of the land belonging to the temple (chap. 45). He also observes a “change of idiom” in 43:13–27 so that rather than describing what Ezekiel saw it describes the altar and its regulations as the very words of God. At least seven theological concepts are associated with the altar and the sacrifices. First, the altar sometimes was regarded as the “table” of Yahweh (Ezek 44:16; Mal 1:7, 12). It was where the sacrifice was transformed by fire into smoke that rose to heaven and to God. Because it was burned, it became an irrevocable gift.

Second, since the temple was regarded as the “house” of God, a house normally had a hearth, which was a repository of fire. The altar was considered to be the “hearth” of God (Ezek 43:15–16). The fire of God was on the altar, and priests were admonished to keep the fire pure (see Lev 10:1–7). Fire is a symbol in Scripture for God’s presence (Exod 19:18), power (Exod 9:24), wrath (2 Kgs 1:9–12), approval (Lev 9:24), guidance (Exod 13:21–22), protection (Zech 2:5), purity (Isa 6:5–7), deliverance (2 Kgs 2:11), God’s word (Jer 5:14), the Messiah (Mal 3:2), the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:3), judgment (Matt 25:41), the return of Christ (2 Thess 1:8), and the end of the present age (2 Pet 3:10–12).

Third, the altar was a sign of God’s presence among his people (43:27). It was commemorative of a theophany (Gen 12:7; 26:24–25). Such manifestations of God were often accompanied by fire (Exod 19:18; Judg 13:16–22).

Fourth, the altar was associated with the idea of holiness, purity, and mercy, especially the horns of the altar (43:15, 20; 1 Kgs 1:50–51; 2:28). The sprinkling of blood on the horns of the altar was a rite of purification (43:18–21).

Fifth, the altar was an instrument of mediation (40:47; 43:19). Offerings were translated from the physical world by burning and given to God as they rose to heaven in smoke. By keeping the commandments, the offerings, sacrifices, and feast days, the covenant promises were maintained (Lev 1:1–7:38).

Sixth, sacrifices were considered a gift to God (Ps 50:1–2; Ezek 43:27). A domesticated animal that was needed for food and work was given to God. The sacrifice was burned for two reasons: (1) burning made the gift irrevocable, and (2) it translated it to the invisible world where God lived. Thus the sacrifice was a means of communication with God and was considered a form of prayer (Ps 141:2).

Seventh, sacrifice was for expiation of sins committed unknowingly and unintentionally (43:25–27; Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:3–4, 15, 18; Num 15:22–31).

When the altar had been properly dedicated and the seven days fulfilled, God said, “Then I will accept you.” From the eighth day onward the altar was used for the sacrifice of burnt offerings (v. 27). The beginning of the service of the altar of sacrifice from the eighth day has significant messianic overtones. The eighth day and the use of eight as a messianic number is an important part of the new temple of Ezekiel’s vision. The use of the number eight and especially the eighth day in Scripture is significant (Ezek 43:27).

First, every seventh year was considered a Sabbatical Year. During the Sabbatical Year all land was to lie untilled. The pattern of six days of work followed by a Sabbath of rest was fixed in the years just as in the weeks (Lev 23:3). This principle probably had some agricultural value, but it also was to help the Hebrews guard against covetousness. A year without tilling the ground or harvesting any crops required careful planning and storing in preparation for the Sabbatical Year. But the Sabbath Year was followed by the eighth year that was to be a year of new beginning. It was to be a time for plowing the ground, sowing seeds, and harvesting crops once again. Jesus the Messiah is the person of the eighth day and eighth year of new beginnings. He is our Sabbath rest who satisfied both the Sabbath Day and Sabbath Year of rest (Matt 11:28–29; Heb 4:1–13). He will lead his people to a final time of eternal rest (Rev 14:13).

Second, priests were chosen and prepared for a seven-day period (Lev 8:1). The eighth day was the day for consecration and beginning their priestly duties (Lev 9:1–2). Nazirites were people who made a special personal consecration to the Lord similar to the priests. They were cleansed and consecrated on the eighth day (Num 6:10). Every believer in the New Testament era is a priest who ministers on the eighth day. Ezekiel saw a time of worship when the priesthood of the Old Testament would be reestablished for Israel. The worship in the temple over which they will officiate will take place on the eighth day (43:27). This perhaps suggests that the millennial calendar will appropriate eight-day weeks including worship on both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

Third, the sign of the covenant of Abraham, circumcision, to be received by all male Jews was to be administered on the eighth day after birth (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3; Rom 2:28–29). The signs of the new covenant such as baptism, worship, and faith in Christ are part of the new eighth day of worship called the Lord's Day, made possible by the Messiah and envisioned by Ezekiel (43:27). Fourth, those who were healed of sickness were to present themselves to the priest to be examined and pronounced clean. This ritual of purification took place on the eighth day following the healing. Lepers were pronounced clean in such eighth-day ceremonies (Lev 14:10, 23); cleansing of running sores was done on the eighth day (Lev 15:14, 29).

Fifth, the eighth day was a day of holy convocation and gathering. A holy convocation was called on the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and an offering was made unto the Lord (Lev 23:36, 39; Num 29:35). When the law was reinstated after the Babylonian exile, it was done by Ezra and Nehemiah in a holy convocation on the eighth day (Neh 8:18). The Sabbath of the Old Testament was not a day of gathering for worship but a day of rest from work. The eighth day convocations beautifully anticipated the observance of the Lord's Day as a day of worship.

Sixth, animals to be used for sacrifice had to be at least eight days old (Lev 22:26–27). The grace of God could be sought through obedience to the sacrificial system from the eighth day and beyond. The eighth day was the beginning point of grace and mercy anticipating the messianic work of Jesus in providing salvation by grace (Eph 2:8–9) by being our perfect sacrifice (Heb 10:1–18; esp. v. 10).