

Handout: Ezekiel Lesson 16

Parallels between Ezekiel's visions of God in 1:4-3:11 and 43:1-5

1. The vision is accompanied by a sound like "many waters."
2. The vision is connected with the Chebar River.
3. Ezekiel responds to the vision by falling on his face.
4. The divine Spirit raises him to his feet.
5. There is a specific reference to God's throne.
6. Yahweh speaks to Ezekiel directly.
7. Yahweh commands Ezekiel to pass on His message to the exiles.

However, this time Ezekiel isn't only to speak the message, he is to write it down (verse 11).

There are three theological lessons associated with the vision of God's return to the visionary Temple in 43:11:

1. The vision proclaims God's holiness. It is because of God's grace and not because anything the people have done that God returns to dwell among His people in His glory.
2. The vision proclaims God's mercy. He invites sinners into a relationship and provides the means to express that relationship in the liturgy of worship but without contaminating His holiness or endangering the life of His faithful.
3. The vision exposes the sinfulness of human beings, even those who claim to be people of God.

A summary of Ezekiel's instructions for consecrating the altar in 43:19-27:

1. Select a young bull for a sin sacrifice to purify the officiating priests (verse 19).
2. Perform the blood-sprinkling ceremony (verse 20).
3. Participate in offering the bull sin sacrifice, performing the blood ritual (verse 21).
4. The next day, offer a male goat as a sin sacrifice to purify the altar, performing the blood ritual (verse 22).
5. Present an unblemished bull and ram, salted and offered in sacrifice (verses 23-24).
6. Offer a male goat, a bull, and an unblemished ram every day for seven days.
7. Participate in the ritual for seven days to expiate, purify and inaugurate the altar (verses 25-26).
8. On the eighth day and afterwards, the priests will offer burnt offerings and communion sacrifices (verse 27).

The ritual is similar to the desert Sanctuary altar purification and dedication ceremony where Moses officiated in Exodus 29:36-37 and Leviticus 8:10-29.

In 44:1-3 the closed gate is significant for two reasons:

1. Since Yahweh has passed through this gate, it will remain barred to all human traffic (as Yahweh explains in verse 2).
2. No profane human may walk in Yahweh's steps, suggesting that the closed gate symbolizes the sanctity of the permanent dwelling place of God among His people.

44:3 introduces the mysterious figure of “the prince:”

1. Only “the prince” can occupy the gateway through which Yahweh entered the Temple.
2. Only he can eat a communion meal in Yahweh’s presence within the gate.
3. However, since he is mortal, he cannot enter the east gate but must come and go another way.

The service and regulations concerning the priests in 44:15-31:

1. Their main duty is liturgical service in the Temple and Holy Place.
2. They must wear linen vestments, caps, and undergarments.
3. They must observe the regulation concerning the length of their hair and a prohibition against shaving the head (consider that this means Jesus would not have worn His hair long).
4. They will observe the prohibition against drinking wine when in service (see Lev 10:9).
5. They will observe the prohibition against marrying divorced women or widows unless the woman is the widow of a priest.
6. They will instruct the people in the ritual purity laws.
7. They will judge law-suits.
8. They will observe all God’s laws and ordinances, including observing all feasts and Sabbaths and the special ritual purity laws concerning contamination from the dead (see Lev 21:1-4; Num 5:1-3; 19:11-16).
9. They will not inherit ancestral lands since God is their heritage (Num 18:20-24; Dt 18:1-2; Josh 13:14). However, priests and Levites were assigned Levitical cities (Num 35:1-8; 1 Chr 6:39-66; Josh 21:1-42; Ez 45:6).
10. They will eat from the people’s offerings assigned to them, and, like all Israelites, they will not eat anything that is ritually unclean according to the Law (Lev 2:10; 6:9-11, 22-23; 7:6, 7-10, 24; 11:1-47).

For Christians, Ezekiel’s Torah foreshadows a glorious Gospel of God’s grace:

1. Yahweh did not return to enjoy a magnificent sanctuary fortress. The days of His wrath are forgotten, and He returned to expiate sins and to have fellowship with His people.
2. Yahweh provides a way to fellowship through liturgical worship. The Torah of Moses guided the people in a relationship with the Divine through a system of moral, civil, and cultic laws. In the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, it isn’t just the people reaching out to God but God reaching out to His people who are sinners in need of divine grace.
3. Even in the new order, defilement and moral impurity threaten fellowship with God. If the sacred precincts must receive cleansing, how much more do sinful mortals need cleaning to have a continuing relationship with God?