

God's Glory Returns
Ezekiel 36-48

Turn to Ezekiel 36 please. This is called, "God's glory returns." Two weeks ago we read Ezekiel's vision in Ezk 8-11, God showing Ezekiel in a vision why he left, and how he left. Today we'll see that God returns to his people, and how it happened. But we will also see the big picture of how Ezekiel the prophet understands God.

What God Wants, and What God Will Do

Ezekiel shows us what God *wants* to do, and what God *is going* to do. What God *wants* to do is bless his people and live with them. That what he wants to do, where he wants this all to end up.

Many of us imagine heaven to be like this or like that. How would you like heaven to be? Let us ask God that question: "God, what's your view of heaven, what your perfect place to stay forever?" His answer: "living in the middle of my people. That's my perfect home. They'll love and thank me, and be all around me, and I will bless them with good things they never imagined. They'll enjoy me, and I'll enjoy them." That is his heaven, that's what he want to arrange..

What he's *going* to do, what he's determined to do, is guard the honour of his holy name. God will not give his enemies, or his people, a reason to mock him or dishonour him.

Ezekiel shows us how God does both. He guards the honour of his holy name, and he will yet bless his people and live with them, including us, forever.

God says he is holy and righteous. If his people defy him steadily, he must act. If his people worship other gods and attack each other, he will judge them. Moses was clear on that.

If he doesn't judge them, the nations will say he's not fair, and they will be right. Why can God's people get away with defying him, but not the nations? God has a name to protect, a reputation to guard. He is holy and righteous, so he judges his own people.

But he also wants to show that he's the best God ever, and that no gods treat their people as well as Yahweh treats his people. But how can he do that, if they defy him and ignore his will? Here's what he does: he heals their sinfulness, gives them a new heart and new spirit, and he sends his Holy Spirit, so that they will serve him and love him. Then he can bless them, be good to them.

And some of Israel did not want him, and they were expelled. God makes that clear in different places in Ezekiel (11:21; 20:32-38) that he separates among Israelites. Israelites who hearts are devoted to their idols will not enter into his blessing.

Is this God not holy and righteous? Is he not merciful and generous with his people? He is! God is determined that when it is all over, the nations who do not want him will have to agree that he was holy and just, and his people will know that too.

And he sent his Son to call everyone, Israelite and Gentile, and to give his life a sacrifice for their sins. Whoever would receive his Son would become one of his people, the people of his pasture, the sheep of his flock. Is this God not holy and just? Does he not treat his people faithfully and generously? God is determined to back his enemies into that corner.

And that is why 33 chapters of Ezekiel are devoted to the judgment of his deeply unfaithful people. And that is why, once that is done, God will keep all his promises to bless his people. He will show all who look on how good he is to his people. In Ezekiel, all this is what God's Name means, and all of this together is God's glory and holiness.

And through Jesus Christ, we who are Gentile believers have been brought into God's great restoration project. We read this a few weeks ago: *At that time, you Gentiles were excluded from citizenship in Israel. You were foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near, by the blood of Christ. ... Consequently, you Gentile believers are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.* Eph 2:12-13, 19. So this restoration of Israel includes us.

The Four Pillars of Israelite Faith Taken Away by God

Here again are the four pillars of Israelite faith: the covenant, the land, the king, and the temple. They had the *covenant* with God through Moses, God then gave the *land* through Joshua, God gave them a line of *kings* through David, and God put his *presence* in the *temple* that Solomon built, as God had put his presence in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

By the end of the third Babylonian invasion, 586 BC, Israel had lost all this. The reason they lost it goes back to Exodus 19, when God said, "If you obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession." And in Ezk 8 we read about the idolatry in the temple, and the bloodshed and violence in the city. They disobeyed God habitually, and left behind the covenant.

That's Ezk 1-33. But what God *wants* is to bless his people and live with them, he wants them to have these four pillars, and that's where we'll go now. God cannot give them back those things until he heals their sinfulness. So that's where he starts. Four paragraphs.

1, God heals the sinfulness of his people Ezk 36:25-28

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you

and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

Paul makes clear in 2 Corinthians 3 that this is part of our conversion. The gospel brings this. 1, God cleanses us, forgives our impurities. 2, God gives us a new heart and spirit, a heart and spirit that responds to him. 3, God will put his own Spirit in us, the Holy Spirit. 4, the result of this is that we want to do God's will, we want to serve him and live in his ways. We are not perfect, but this healing changes our lives. This God will do for Israel.

I will move you to follow my decrees and keep my laws. We fear this rules us out, because we still sin. That's not what this is about. We should compare ourselves to people who do not want our God at all. We could say to them, "God wants you to live differently."

They will answer, "Who cares? I don't care about your God or what he says. I don't want him and I don't want his ways." That's what people say who have not received this healing from sin. The very fact that we are troubled by our sins proves that God has healed us. We have a real interest in serving him in daily life. That means we've had this great healing.

We have sorrows in our bodies and souls that we'd like God to heal. But those are small compared to a heart that does not care about God. That sickness leads to second death, eternal death, which is far worse. If God had not healed you and me like this, we would not care. "Thank you, God, for the greatest healing of all, a heart and spirit that cares about you."

I will put my Spirit in you. That's God's Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes that the one unmistakable evidence of the Holy Spirit is that a person can genuinely say, "Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and has full rights to my life."

Producing that confession is the greatest work that the Holy Spirit ever does in anyone. Everything after that is fine tuning, and my brothers and sisters, that has happened to us. If we can say that genuinely, and we can, than we have solid proof that the Spirit is alive and well in us, and we are a part of this. God has healed our sinfulness so he could bless us and live with us.

2, God Restores the Four Pillars Ezk 37:23c-28

God healed their sinfulness, now he can restore the covenant, land, king, and temple presence. This paragraph at the end of Ezk 37 mentions each of the four a few times.

V23c (Covenant) They will be my people, and I will be their God.

V24 (King) "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. (Covenant) They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.

V25 (Land) They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever.

(King) And David my servant will be their prince forever.

V26 (Covenant) *I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant, I will establish them and increase their numbers.*

(Temple presence) *I will put my sanctuary among them forever.*

V27 (Temple presence again) *My dwelling place will be with them.*

(Covenant again) *I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

V28 (Temple presence again) *Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever. ”*

We Gentile believers have this covenant with God. We do not have our own land, we are exiles as Ezekiel himself was. But we love and serve Jesus the great David king. God's presence is with us now in a real way, but not at all like it will be when we see him.

Once God has forgiven their sins and healed their sinfulness, he can give them back the things they had at the start: covenant, land, king, and his sanctuary in their midst in the temple. And the high point of this paragraph is God will his people, three times near the end: *I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them. My sanctuary will be among them forever.* That's God's perfect home, what he misses most about Eden.

Let's summarize so far. In our first paragraph, Ezk 36, God tells us how he heals their and our sinfulness, and our second paragraph, Ezk 37, which we just read, describes God restoring the covenant, the land, the king, and the temple. These are both most about what God *wants* to do, to bless his people and live with them.

Ezekiel 40-48, the last 9 chapters of the book, are a detailed symbolic view that just expands this paragraph, a long vision of God restoring covenant, land, king, and sanctuary.

Our third paragraph tells us what he's going to do, what he's determined to do and must do.

3, God's Glory and Reputation Among All Nations Ezk 39:21-29

God tells us what he's going to do, which is guard the honour of his holy name, before the nations who reject him and before Israel who sinned. These nine verses summarize Ezekiel.

“I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict on them and the hand I lay on them. (The nations will see my glory when I punish them.)”²² From that day forward, the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God.²³ And the nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile for their sin, because they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from Israel, and handed them over to their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.²⁴ I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them. (Vv23-24 summarize the punishment of Israel in Ezk 1-33. But that's not the end.)

²⁵ *“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will now restore the fortunes of Jacob, and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name. 26 They*

will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. 27 When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will be proved holy through them in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. 29 I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord.”

“I will display my glory among the nations. Then people of Israel will know who I am. The nations will know who I am. I will be zealous for my holy name. I will be proved holy, through my people, in the sight of many nations. Then Israel will know who I am.”

This paragraph summarizes the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, this whole story is what God's name means, and this whole story is God displaying his glory.

God cares how he looks to his enemies as well as to his children, and he acts to guard his honour. God guards his name by doing three things: he will punish the nations for rebelling against him, he punished Israel for her rebellion, and he will have compassion on Israel and bless her. These three together display God's glory and his holy name.

So, that's the *summary* of Ezekiel, that's what God is going to do, but that's not where Ezekiel *ends*. Ezekiel *ends* with what God *wants*, to bless his people and life with them forever.

Ezk 40:1-2 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city—on that very day the hand of the Lord was on me and he took me there. 2 In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.

This is 20 years after Ezekiel was called (Ezk 1-3), 19 years after Ezekiel saw the vision of God's glory leaving the temple and Jerusalem (Ezk 8-11), and 13 years after God actually left, when that vision came true. Ezekiel was 30 when he was called, now he's 50. God takes him to Israel in the vision, and Ezekiel looks into the future, and sees new covenant, land, king, temple. We'll read just one paragraph from Ezk 40-48, the most important one.

4, The Glory Returns!

Ezk 43:1-7a Then the man (Ezekiel's guide in this vision) brought me to the gate facing east, ²and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. ³The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. ⁴The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. ⁵Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. ⁶While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the

temple. ⁷ He said: “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.

V3 The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. Ezekiel has seen this picture of God twice before, chs 1,10. This is God on his divine chariot-throne.

These are the four cherubim, each with four wings attached to some kind of living wheels, together a four-wheeled chariot. Above their heads is a crystal platform, and God's throne is above this platform, and God sits on his throne and rides on this divine four-wheeled chariot. It's fast. Ezekiel said those cherubim moved around like lightning, and he's not exaggerating.

Ezekiel watched God ride into the new temple on this chariot throne. *The glory of the Lord entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. ⁷ He said: “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.*

Nineteen years earlier, Ezekiel the priest had a heart-breaking vision: he watched God get on his four wheeled chariot throne, and ride out of the temple, and out of Jerusalem, leave it all behind.

And now, 19 years later, Ezekiel gets to watch God ride that same four wheeled chariot throne back into the temple, and park there, and say to us all, “I am here to stay, this is the place for me, I am never leaving this place again, I will live among my people forever.”

Ezekiel sees this temple in the middle of the city. Revelation has a city like this too, and calls it “New Jerusalem.” Ezekiel's city is the same city, the city which is the people of God. In Revelation it is the new Jerusalem, but that's not what it's called. Here is how Ezekiel ends:

And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE.

What God *wants* to do is bless his people and live with them forever. To do this he must heal us of our rebellion and sinfulness, and that he does. Gives us a new heart and spirit, and gives us his Spirit. Then he can bless us and live with us, as he wants.

What he's going to do is guard his reputation, he will show himself to friends and enemies alike to be righteous and honourable. He's zealous for his holy name. And that he does too. And in the process, we get to be his people. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, we Gentiles were outside all this. We were foreigners to these covenants and promises, we were without hope and without you. That's how our ancestors lived. And now, in Christ and by his blood, we've been brought close, we are fellow citizens and members of your household. We thank you and praise you.

God, you healed our sinfulness, and you forgave our sins. You changed us so that it matters to us if we keep your ways or not, you gave us different hearts and spirits, and you gave us your Holy Spirit. You cleansed us and you made us holy, made us yours.

And now *we* are among your covenant people, and *we* love and serve Jesus the great David king. We don't have your land yet, we are still foreigners and strangers here in Canada, because our citizenship is in heaven. We do have your presence with us in a real way, but not at all like we will have, when we see you.

Our great God, thank you for all of this. No one is as fortunate as those who have you as their God. Thank you for including us, thank you for your Son Jesus, and thank you for the Holy Spirit who moves in us. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.