

The Book of Ezekiel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 20: The Glory Returns and Worship Restored

Ezekiel 43:1–44:31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Show that the glory returning to the temple proclaims God's faithful, settled purpose to dwell among His people, fulfilled in Christ who dwelt among us, in the church indwelt by His Spirit, and forever in the eternal state.

Lead the class to read the restored altar, priesthood, and offerings as symbols of the old economy that point to the greater High Priest and His once-for-all sacrifice, not as a forecast of a literal future sacrificial system that would deny the cross.

Question 1

Student Question:

The glory of the LORD returns from the east and fills the house (43:1–5), the same glory that departed to the east in chapters 10 and 11. What does this return and indwelling reveal about God's covenant faithfulness and His settled purpose to dwell among His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel is brought to the eastern gate, and the glory of the God of Israel comes from the east, the very direction in which it had departed in chapters 10 and 11.

His voice is like the roar of many waters, and the earth shines with His glory, a theophany matching the vision Ezekiel saw by the Chebar and the vision of the city's destruction.

The glory enters the temple by the east gate, and the Spirit lifts Ezekiel and brings him to the inner court, where the glory fills the house.

What departed in sorrow because of sin now returns in glory to a measured, holy house. The structure of the whole vision turns on this return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The return from the east deliberately reverses the departure of chapters 10 and 11; God keeps covenant and comes back to dwell with His people.
- The glory filling the house recalls the tabernacle and Solomon's temple being filled, marking this as God's true dwelling among men.
- This indwelling presence, not the architecture, is the point of the entire vision and the thread that runs to Christ and the church.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the glory return from the same direction it departed?
- What does it mean that the glory fills the house?
- How does this return display God's covenant faithfulness?

Question 2

Student Question:

God's glory departed because of Israel's abominations and now returns to a holy house. What in your own life has driven the sense of God's nearness to the margins, and what would invite His presence back to the center?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

From within the house a voice declares, This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.

God calls the people to put away their spiritual harlotry and the corpses of their kings, the idolatry that had defiled His name.

The defilement is described as setting their threshold by His threshold, mingling the holy with the unclean, which provoked His departure.

Now God promises to dwell among them forever if they put away their abominations, binding His presence to their holiness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The declaration of God's throne and dwelling among His people forever is the heart of the vision, fulfilled in Christ (John 1:14) and in God's eternal presence with His people (Revelation 21:3).
- The word forever points beyond any stone temple, which could not be everlasting, to the abiding dwelling of God with His redeemed people.
- God's presence and the people's holiness are joined; He dwells among them as they put away the abominations that once drove Him away.

Discussion Prompts

- What does God mean by the place of my throne and the soles of my feet?
- How does the word forever shape the way we read this promise?
- Why does God tie His dwelling to the people's holiness?

Question 3

Student Question:

The voice declares, This is the place of my throne, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever (43:7). How does Scripture show this dwelling fulfilled when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) and in God's presence with His people forever (Revelation 21:3)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God tells Ezekiel to describe the house to Israel that they may be ashamed of their iniquities and measure the plan.

If they are ashamed, they are to be shown the design, the ordinances, and the whole form, that they may keep them and do them.

The law of the house is declared: the whole area on the mountaintop is most holy. This is the governing principle of the entire vision.

The vision is given as a moral and spiritual summons, meant to produce shame, repentance, and obedience, not merely to convey dimensions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Shame here is the godly grief that leads to repentance, contrasted with worldly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10.
- The purpose clause, that they may keep them, shows the vision aims at transformed lives, not architectural ambition.
- The law of the house, that the whole place is most holy, interprets every measurement as a declaration of holiness rather than a building code.

Discussion Prompts

- How can a vision of God's house produce healthy shame?
- What is the difference between godly grief and worldly sorrow?
- What does it mean that the whole place is most holy?

Question 4

Student Question:

God tells Ezekiel to describe the house to Israel that they may be ashamed of their iniquities (43:10–11). When is shame a healthy, godly response, and how is that godly grief different from the worldly sorrow that only crushes (2 Corinthians 7:10)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The altar is measured in detail, with its base, ledges, and the hearth at the top where the offerings are presented.

Steps face east so the priest ascends to minister, and the altar rises in tiers toward the place of fire.

The dimensions echo the careful measuring of the whole vision, now focused on the place where God and the worshiper meet through sacrifice.

The altar stands before the house as the appointed place of approach, the meeting point between a holy God and a sinful people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The altar, the place of atoning approach, is described in old-covenant terms as the means by which the unclean may come near the holy.
- Its prominence prepares for the consecration that follows and points beyond itself to the cross, where the true and final approach to God was secured.
- The ascending tiers again picture the holiness and elevation that mark every part of God's dwelling.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the altar given such careful measurement?
- What does the altar as place of approach foreshadow?
- How does the cross fulfill what the altar pictured?

Question 5

Student Question:

The altar is consecrated through a prescribed ritual before it can be used (43:18-27). What does the careful consecration of the place of approach teach about the holiness required to come near to God, and how is that approach now opened to us through Christ (Hebrews 10:19-22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God gives ordinances for consecrating the altar: a young bull for a sin offering, then daily offerings over seven days to purify and dedicate it.

The sons of Zadok, the faithful priests, are appointed to offer at the altar and to come near to minister to the LORD.

After the days of consecration, the LORD promises to accept the people, a word of grace at the close of the ritual.

These offerings are cast in the categories of the Mosaic law, the only worship vocabulary Ezekiel's hearers possessed, and they point forward rather than predicting a literal restored sacrificial system.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The consecration ritual teaches that approach to a holy God requires cleansing, fulfilled in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:1–18).
- We must not read these offerings as a prophecy of reinstated animal sacrifice; such a return would deny the finality of the cross (Hebrews 9:11–14).
- The closing promise, I will accept you, anticipates the acceptance secured for us in Christ, in whom God receives His people fully and finally.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the altar consecrated before it is used?
- Why must we not read these offerings as a future literal sacrificial system?
- How does Christ fulfill the cleansing these offerings pictured?

Question 6

Student Question:

The eastern gate is shut because the LORD has entered by it, and it remains shut (44:1–3). What does it stir in you to know that God's presence so marks a place that it is set apart from common traffic? Where do you guard what God has set apart in your own life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The LORD brings Ezekiel back to the outer eastern gate, and it is shut.

The LORD explains that the gate shall remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.

Only the prince may sit in the gateway to eat bread before the LORD, entering and leaving by its porch.

The shut gate marks the place sanctified by God's entrance, set apart and not to be put to common use.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The shut gate testifies that God's presence permanently consecrates the place He has entered; what God has marked as holy is not for common traffic.
- The detail underscores the theme of separation between holy and common that pervades the whole temple vision.
- The reverence shown to the gate God entered models the reverence due to all that God sets apart, including His church and His people.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God's entrance permanently shut the gate?
- What does the shut gate teach about reverence?
- How do we guard what God has set apart in our own lives?

Question 7

Student Question:

The LORD rebukes the bringing of foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into His sanctuary, and the unfaithful Levites bear their punishment, while the faithful sons of Zadok draw near (44:6–16). What does this teach about who may approach God, and how is faithfulness, not mere lineage, the heart of acceptable service?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ezekiel is brought before the house, sees the glory filling it again, and falls on his face.

The LORD charges him to mark well the ordinances and the laws of the house, who may enter and who may not.

God rebukes Israel for bringing foreigners uncircumcised in heart and flesh into His sanctuary, profaning His house even as they offered His food.

The standard is set: no one uncircumcised in heart and flesh shall enter the sanctuary, for holiness governs access to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Falling on his face, Ezekiel models the reverence the returned glory demands of all who would draw near.
- Circumcised in heart, not mere outward ritual, is the true requirement, a principle the New Testament makes plain (Romans 2:28–29).
- Access to God's presence is governed by holiness, anticipating the truth that only those cleansed by Christ may draw near (Hebrews 10:22).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Ezekiel fall on his face?
- What does circumcised in heart mean for us?
- How does holiness govern access to God?

Question 8

Student Question:

The priests are charged to teach the people the difference between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean (44:23). Where do you need to grow in discerning that difference, and who in your life looks to you to model it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Levites who went astray after idols bear their punishment; they may serve in lesser duties but may not come near to minister as priests.

The sons of Zadok, who kept charge of the sanctuary when Israel went astray, are granted the privilege of drawing near to minister to the LORD.

The faithful are honored with nearness, while the unfaithful are restrained from the holiest service, a measured justice.

Faithfulness, not bare lineage, determines who draws near, a principle that runs throughout God's dealings with His servants.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The distinction between faithful and unfaithful priests teaches that God rewards faithfulness with nearness and restrains the unfaithful, a just and discriminating mercy.
- The sons of Zadok point ahead to the truth that those who draw near must be set apart and faithful, fully realized in Christ our faithful High Priest (Hebrews 7:26–28).
- The passage warns against presuming on heritage or position; only the faithful are entrusted with the holiest service.

Discussion Prompts

- Why are the wayward Levites restrained while the sons of Zadok draw near?
- What does this teach about faithfulness versus lineage?
- How does the faithful priesthood point to Christ?

Question 9

Student Question:

The vision restores an altar, priests, and offerings in the language of the old covenant. Why must we not read this as a prophecy of a future literal temple in Jerusalem with reinstated animal sacrifices? Show from Scripture that such a return would deny the once-for-all, final sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11–14; 10:1–18), and explain how these symbols instead point to our greater High Priest who entered the true sanctuary by His own blood (Hebrews 9:24–26).

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The priests are given ordinances for their garments, wearing linen and not wool, that they not sweat, and changing their garments before going out to the people.

They are not to drink wine when they enter the inner court, and they are to marry within careful bounds, keeping themselves set apart.

They are charged to teach the people the difference between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean.

In disputes they are to act as judges according to God's ordinances, and they are to keep His laws and feasts and Sabbaths holy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priestly regulations dramatize total separation between the holy and the common, the changing of garments preventing the holy from being carried out among the people in a careless way.
- The charge to teach the difference between holy and common (44:23) names a central duty of God's servants, still binding on those who teach His people today.
- These detailed ordinances belong to the symbolic vision in old-covenant dress, picturing the holiness God requires, fulfilled in Christ and applied to the church called to be holy.

Discussion Prompts

- Why must the priests change garments before mingling with the people?
- What does it mean to teach the difference between the holy and the common?
- How is this duty of discernment still ours today?

Question 10

Student Question:

If God has truly come to dwell among His people, and you yourself are His temple, how will the returning glory of God reshape your reverence, your holiness, and your worship in the days ahead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The LORD declares, I am their inheritance, the priests are to have no possession in Israel, for the LORD Himself is their portion.

They are provided for from the offerings and the first of the people's gifts, supported by those they serve.

They are forbidden to eat anything that has died of itself or been torn, keeping themselves ritually clean.

The section closes with the priests both provided for and bound to holiness, their portion being God Himself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- I am their inheritance is the high point: the privilege of those who serve God is God Himself, a truth fulfilled for all believers who possess God as their portion in Christ.
- The provision for the priests teaches that those who serve in holy things are to be supported, a principle Paul applies to gospel preachers (1 Corinthians 9:13-14).
- The continuing call to ritual cleanness underscores the whole vision's theme: those who dwell near a holy God must be holy, fulfilled in the church Christ has cleansed.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the LORD Himself is the priests' inheritance?
- How does this truth belong to every believer in Christ?
- How does the vision's call to holiness apply to the church today?