

**EZEKIEL 40-43***Ezekiel 40:1-49, Ezekiel 41:1-26, Ezekiel 42:1-20, Ezekiel 43:1-27***THE IMPORT OF THE VISION**

We have now reached the last and in every way the most important section of the book of Ezekiel. The nine concluding chapters record what was evidently the crowning experience of the prophet's life. His ministry began with a vision of God; it culminates in a vision of the people of God, or rather of God in the midst of His people (*Rev 21:3*), reconciled to them, ruling over them, and imparting the blessings and glories of the final dispensation. Into that vision are thrown the ideals which had been gradually matured through twenty years of strenuous action and intense meditation. We have traced some of the steps by which the prophet was led towards this consummation of his work. We have seen how, under the idea of God which had been revealed to him, he was constrained to announce the destruction of that which called itself the people of Jehovah, but was in reality the means of obscuring His character and profaning His holiness (chapters 4-24). We have seen further how the same fundamental conception led him on in his prophecies against foreign nations to predict a great clearing of the stage of history for the manifestation of Jehovah (chapters 25-32). And we have seen from the preceding section what are the processes by which the divine Spirit breathes new life into a dead nation and creates out of its scattered members a people worthy of the God whom the prophet has seen.

But there is still something more to accomplish before his task is finished. All through, Ezekiel holds fast the truth that Jehovah and Israel are necessarily related to each other, and that Israel is to be the medium through which alone the nature of Jehovah can be fully disclosed to mankind. It remains, therefore, to sketch the outline of a perfect theocracy - in other words, to describe the permanent forms and institutions which shall express the ideal relation between God and men. To this task the prophet addresses himself in the chapters now before us. That great New Year's Vision may be regarded as the ripe fruit of all God's training of His prophet, as it is also the part of Ezekiel's work which most directly influenced the subsequent development of religion in Israel.

It cannot be doubted, then, that these chapters are an integral part of the book, considered as a record of Ezekiel's work. But it is certainly a significant circumstance that they are separated from the body of the prophecies by an interval of thirteen years. For the greater part of that time Ezekiel's literary activity was suspended. It is probable, at all events, that the first thirty-nine chapters had been committed to writing soon after the latest date they mentioned, and that the oracle on Gog, which marks the extreme limit of Ezekiel's prophetic vision, was really the conclusion of an earlier form of the book. And we may be certain that, since the eventful period that followed the arrival of the fugitive from Jerusalem, no new divine communication had visited the prophet's mind. But at last, in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity, and on the first day of a new year, he falls into a trance more prolonged than any he had yet passed through, and he emerged from it with a new message for his people.

In what direction were the prophet's thoughts moving as Israel passed into the midnight of her exile? That they have moved in the interval-that his standpoint is no longer quite identical with that represented in his earlier prophecies-seems to be shown by one slight modification of his previous conceptions, which has been already mentioned. *I refer to the position of the prince in the theocratic state.* We find that the king is still the civil head of the commonwealth, but that his position is hardly reconcilable with the exalted functions assigned to the Messianic king in chapter 34. The inference seems irresistible that Ezekiel's point of view has somewhat changed, so that the objects in his picture present themselves in a different perspective.

It is true that this change was effected by a vision, and it may be said that that fact forbids our regarding it as indicating a progress in Ezekiel's thoughts. But the vision of a prophet is never out of relation to his previous thinking. The prophet is always prepared for his vision; it comes to him as the answer to questions, as the solution of difficulties, whose force he has felt, and apart from which it would convey no revelation of God to his mind. It marks the point at which reflection gives place to inspiration, where the incommunicable certainty of the divine word lifts the soul into the region of spiritual and eternal truth. And hence it may help us, from our human point of view, to understand the true import of this vision, if from the answer we try to discover the questions which were of pressing interest to Ezekiel in the later part of his career.

Speaking generally, we may say that the problem that occupied the mind of Ezekiel at this time was the problem of a religious constitution. How to secure for religion its true place in public life, how to embody it in institutions which shall conserve its essential ideas and transmit them from one generation to another, how a people may best express its national responsibility to God-these and many kindred questions are real and vital today amongst the nations of Christendom, and they were far more vital in the age of Ezekiel. The conception of religion as an inward spiritual power, moulding the life of the nation and of each individual member, was at least as strong in him as in any other prophet; and it had been adequately expressed in the section of his book dealing with the formation of the new Israel. But he saw that this was not for that time sufficient. The mass of the community were dependent on the educative influence of the institutions under which they lived, and there was no way of impressing on a whole people the character of Jehovah except through a system of laws and observances which should constantly exhibit it to their minds. The time was not yet come when religion could be trusted to work as a hidden leaven, transforming life from within and bringing in the kingdom of God silently by the operation of spiritual forces. Thus, while the

last section insists on the moral change that must pass over Israel, and the need of a direct influence from God on the heart of the people, that which now lies before us is devoted to the religious and political arrangements by which the sanctity of the nation must be preserved.

Starting from this general notion of what the prophet sought, we can see, in the next place, that his attention must be mainly concentrated on matters belonging to public worship and ritual. Worship is the direct expression in word and act of man's attitude to God, and no public religion can maintain a higher level of spirituality than the symbolism which gives it a place in the life of the people. That fact had been abundantly illustrated by the experience of centuries before the Exile. The popular worship had always been a stronghold of false religion in Israel. The high places were the nurseries of all the corruptions against which the prophets had to contend, not simply because of the immoral elements that mingled with their worship, but because the worship itself was regulated by conceptions of the deity which were opposed to the religion of revelation. Now the idea of using ritual as a vehicle of the highest spiritual truth is certainly not peculiar to Ezekiel's vision. But it is there carried through with a thoroughness which has no parallel elsewhere except in the priestly legislation of the Pentateuch. And this bears witness to a clear perception on the part of the prophet of the value of that whole side of things for the future development of religion in Israel. No one was more deeply impressed with the evils that had flowed from a corrupt ritual in the past, and he conceives the final form of the kingdom of God to be one in which the blessings of salvation are safeguarded by a carefully regulated system of religious ordinances. It will become manifest as we proceed that he regards the Temple ritual as the very centre of theocratic life, and the highest function of the community of the true religion.

But Ezekiel was prepared for the reception of this vision, not only by the practical reforming bent of his mind, but also by a combination in his own experience of the two elements which must always enter into a conception of this nature. If we may employ philosophical language to express a very obvious distinction, we have to recognise in the vision a material and a formal element. The matter of the vision is derived from the ancient religious and political constitution of the Hebrew state. All true and lasting reformations are conservative at heart; their object never is to make a clean sweep of the past, but so to modify what is traditional as to adapt it to the needs of a new era. *Now Ezekiel was a priest, and possessed all a priest's reverence for antiquity, as well as a priest's professional knowledge of ceremonial and of consuetudinary law.* No man could have been better fitted than he to secure the continuity of Israel's religious life along the particular line on which it was destined to move. Accordingly we find that the new theocracy is modelled from beginning to end after the pattern of the ancient institutions which had been destroyed by the Exile. If we ask, for example, what is the meaning of some detail of the Temple building, such as the cells surrounding the main sanctuary, the obvious and sufficient answer is that these things existed in Solomon's Temple, and there was no reason for altering them. On the other hand, whenever we find the vision departing from what had been traditionally established, we may be sure that there is a reason for it, and in most cases we can see what that reason was. In such departures we recognise the working of what we have called the formal element of the vision, the moulding influence of the ideas which the system was intended to express. What these ideas were we shall consider in subsequent chapters; here it is enough to say that they were the fundamental ideas which had been communicated to Ezekiel in the course of his prophetic work, and which have found expression in various forms in other parts of his writings. That they are not peculiar to Ezekiel, but are shared by other prophets, is true, just as it is true on the other hand that the priestly conceptions which occupy so large a place in his mind were an inheritance from the whole past history of the nation. Nor was this the first time when an alliance between the ceremonialism of the priesthood and the more ethical and spiritual teaching of prophecy had proved of the utmost advantage to the religious life of Israel. The unique importance of Ezekiel's vision lies in the fact that the great development of prophecy was now almost complete, and that the time was come for its results to be embodied in institutions which were in the main of a priestly character. And it was fitting that this new era of religion should be inaugurated through the agency of one who combined in his own person the conservative instincts of the priest with the originality and the spiritual intuition of the prophet.

It is not suggested for a moment that these considerations account for the inception of the vision in the prophet's mind. We are not to regard it as merely the brilliant device of an ingenious man, who was exceptionally qualified to read the signs of the times, and to discover a solution for a pressing religious problem. In order that it might accomplish the end in view, it was absolutely necessary that it should be invested with a supernatural sanction and bear the stamp of divine authority. Ezekiel himself was well aware of this, and would never have ventured to publish his vision if he had thought it all out for himself. He had to wait for the time when "the hand of the Lord was upon him," *and he saw in vision the new temple and the river of life proceeding from it, and the renovated land, and the glory of god taking up its everlasting abode in the midst of his people.* Until that moment arrived he was without a message as to the form which the life of the restored Israel must assume. Nevertheless the psychological conditions of the vision were contained in those parts of the prophet's experience which have just been indicated. Processes of thought which had long occupied his mind suddenly crystallised at the touch of the divine hand, and the result was the marvellous conception of a theocratic state which was Ezekiel's greatest legacy to the faith and hopes of his countrymen.

That this vision of Ezekiel's profoundly influenced the development of post-exilic Judaism may be inferred from the fact that all the best tendencies of the restoration period were towards the realisation of the ideals which the vision sets forth with surpassing clearness. It is impossible, indeed, to say precisely how far Ezekiel's influence extended, or how far the returning exiles consciously aimed at carrying out the ideas contained in his sketch of a theocratic constitution. That they did so to some extent is inferred from a consideration of some of the arrangements established in Jerusalem soon after the return from Babylon. But it is certain that from the nature of the case the actual institutions of the restored community must have differed very widely in many points from those described in the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. When we look more closely at the composition of this vision, we see that it contains features which neither then nor at any subsequent time have been historically fulfilled. The most remarkable thing about it is that it unites in one picture two characteristics which seem at first sight difficult to combine. On the one hand it bears the aspect of a rigid legislative system intended to regulate human conduct in all matters of vital moment to the religious standing of the community; on the other hand it assumes a miraculous transformation of the physical aspect of the country, a restoration of all the twelve tribes of Israel under a native king, and a return of Jehovah in visible glory to dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever. Now these supernatural conditions of the perfect theocracy could not be realised by any effort on the part of the people, and as a matter of fact were never literally fulfilled at all. It must have been plain to the leaders of the Return that for this reason alone the details of Ezekiel's legislation were not binding for them in the actual circumstances in which they were placed. Even in matters clearly within the province of human administration we know that they considered themselves free to modify his regulations in accordance with the requirements of the situation in which they found themselves. It does not follow from this, however, that they were ignorant of the book of Ezekiel, or that it gave them no help in the difficult task to which they addressed themselves. It furnished them with an ideal of national holiness, and the general outline of a constitution in which that ideal should be embodied; and this outline they seem to have striven to fill up in the way best adapted to the straitened and discouraging circumstances of the time.

But this throws us back on some questions of fundamental importance for the right understanding of Ezekiel's vision. Taking the vision as a whole, we have to ask whether a fulfilment of the kind just indicated was the fulfilment that the prophet himself anticipated. Did he lay stress on the legislative or the supernatural aspect of the vision-on man's agency or on God's? In other words, does he issue it as a programme to be carried out by the people as soon as the opportunity is presented by their return to the land of Canaan? or does he mean that Jehovah Himself must take the initiative by miraculously preparing the land for their reception, and taking up His abode in the finished Temple, the "place of His throne, and the place of the soles of His feet"? The answer to that question is not difficult, if only we are careful to look at things from the prophet's point of view, and disregard the historical events in which his predictions were partly realised. It is frequently assumed that the elaborate description of the Temple buildings in chapters 40-42 is intended as a guide to the builders of the second Temple, who are to make it after the fashion of that which the prophet saw on the mount. It is quite probable that in some degree it may have served that purpose; but it seems to me that this view is not in keeping with the fundamental idea of the vision. The Temple that Ezekiel saw, and the only one of which he speaks, is a house not made with hands; it is as much a part of the supernatural preparation for the future theocracy as the "very high mountain" on which it stands, or the river that flows from it to sweeten the waters of the Dead Sea. In the important passage where the prophet is commanded to exhibit the plan of the house to the children of Israel, {[Eze 43:10-11](#)} there is unfortunately a discrepancy between the Hebrew and Greek texts which throws some obscurity on this particular point. According to the Hebrew there can hardly be a doubt that a sketch is shown to them which is to be used as a builder's plan at the time of the Restoration. But in the Septuagint, which seems on the whole to give a more correct text, the passage runs thus: "And, thou son of man, describe the house to the house of Israel (and let them be ashamed of their iniquities), and its form, and its construction: and they shall be ashamed of all that they have done. And do thou sketch the house, and its exits, and its outline; and all its ordinances and all its laws make known to them; and write it before them, that they may keep all its commandments and all its ordinances, and do them." There is nothing here to suggest that the construction of the Temple was left for human workmanship. The outline of it is shown to the people only that they may be ashamed of all their iniquities. When the arrangements of the ideal Temple are explained to them, they will see how far those of the first Temple transgressed the requirements of Jehovah's holiness, and this knowledge will produce a sense of shame for the dulness of heart which tolerated so many abuses in connection with His worship. No doubt that impression sank deep into the minds of Ezekiel's hearers, and led to certain important modifications in the structure of the Temple when it had to be built; but that is not what the prophet is thinking of. At the same time we see clearly that he is very much in earnest with the legislative part of his vision. Its laws are real laws, and are given that they may be obeyed-only they do not come into force until all the institutions of the theocracy, natural and supernatural alike, are in full working order. And apart from the doubtful question as to the erection of the Temple, that general conclusion holds good for the vision as a whole. Whilst it is pervaded throughout by the legislative spirit, the miraculous features are after all its central and essential elements. When these conditions are realised, it will be the duty of Israel to guard her sacred institutions by the most scrupulous and devoted obedience; but till then there is no kingdom of God established on earth, and therefore no system of laws to conserve a state of salvation, which can only be brought about by the direct and visible interposition of the Almighty in the sphere of nature and history.

*This blending of seemingly incongruous elements reveals to us the true character of the vision with which we have to deal. It is in the strictest sense a messianic prophecy-that is, a picture of the kingdom of god in its final state as the prophet was led to conceive it.* It is common to all such representations that the human authors of them have no idea of a long historical development gradually leading up to the perfect manifestation of God's purpose with the world. The impending crisis in the affairs of the people of Israel is always regarded as the consummation of human history and the establishment of God's kingdom in the plenitude of its power and glory. In the time of Ezekiel the next step in the unfolding of the divine plan of redemption was the restoration of Israel to its own land; and in so far as his vision is a prophecy of that event, it was realised in the return of the exiles with Zerubbabel in the first year of Cyrus. But to the mind of Ezekiel this did not present itself as a mere step towards something immeasurably higher in the remote future. It is to include everything necessary for the complete and final inbringing of the Messianic dispensation, and all the powers of the world to come are to be displayed in the acts by which Jehovah brings back the scattered members of Israel to the enjoyment of blessedness in His own presence.

The thing that misleads us as to the real nature of the vision is the emphasis laid on matters which seem to us of merely temporal and earthly significance. We are apt to think that what we have before us can be nothing else than a legislative scheme to be carried out more or less fully in the new state that should arise after the Exile. The miraculous features in the vision are apt to be dismissed as mere symbolisms to which no great significance attaches. Legislating for the millennium seems to us a strange occupation for a prophet, and we are hardly prepared to credit even Ezekiel with so bold a conception. But that depends entirely on his idea of what the millennium will be. If it is to be a state of things in which religious institutions are of vital importance for the maintenance of the spiritual interests of the community of the people of God, then legislation is the natural expression for the ideals which are to be realised in it. And we must remember, too, that what we have to do with is a vision. *Ezekiel is not the ultimate source of this legislation, however much it may bear the impress of his individual experience. He has seen the city of god, and all the minute and elaborate regulations with which these nine chapters are filled are but the exposition of principles that determine the character of a people amongst whom Jehovah can dwell.*

At the same time we see that a separation of different aspects of the vision was inevitably effected by the teaching of history. The return from Babylon was accomplished without any of those supernatural adjuncts with which it had been invested in the rapt imagination of the prophet. No transformation of the land preceded it; no visible presence of Jehovah welcomed the exiles back to their ancient abode. They found Jerusalem in ruins, the holy and beautiful house a desolation, the land occupied by aliens, the seasons unproductive as of old. Yet in the hearts of these men there was a vision even more impressive, than that of Ezekiel in his solitude. To lay the foundations of a theocratic state in the dreary, discouraging daylight of the present was an act of faith as heroic as has ever been performed in the history of religion. The building of the Temple was undertaken amidst many difficulties, the ritual was organised, the rudiments of a religious constitution appeared, and in all this we see the influence of those principles of national holiness that had been formulated by Ezekiel. But the crowning manifestation of Jehovah's glory was deferred. Prophet after prophet appeared to keep alive the hope that this Temple, poor in outward appearance as it was, would yet be the centre of a new world, and the dwelling-place of the Eternal. Centuries rolled past, and still Jehovah did not come to His Temple, and the eschatological features which had bulked so largely in Ezekiel's vision remained an unfulfilled aspiration. And when at length in the fulness of time the complete revelation of God was given, it was in a form that superseded the old economy entirely, and transformed its most stable and cherished institutions into adumbrations of a spiritual kingdom which knew no earthly Temple and had need of none.

This brings us to the most difficult and most important of all the questions arising in connection with Ezekiel's vision-What is its relation to the Pentateuchal Legislation? It is obvious at once that the significance of this section of the book of Ezekiel is immensely enhanced if we accept the conclusion to which the critical study of the Old Testament has been steadily driven, that in the chapters before us we have the first outline of that great conception of a theocratic constitution which attained its finished expression in the priestly regulations of the middle books of the Pentateuch. The discussion of this subject is so intricate, so far-reaching in its consequences, and ranges over so wide a historical field, that one is tempted to leave it in the hands of those who have addressed themselves to its special treatment, and to try to get on as best one may without assuming a definite attitude on one side or the other. But the student of Ezekiel cannot altogether evade it. Again and again the question will force itself on him as he seeks to ascertain the meaning of the various details of Ezekiel's legislation, How does this stand related to corresponding requirements in the Mosaic law? It is necessary, therefore, in justice to the reader of the following pages, that an attempt should be made, however imperfectly, to indicate the position which the present phase of criticism assigns to Ezekiel in the history of the Old Testament legislation.



We may begin by pointing out the kind of difficulty that is felt to arise on the supposition that Ezekiel had before him the entire body of laws contained in our present Pentateuch. We should expect in that case that the prophet would contemplate a restoration of the divine institutions established under Moses, and that his vision would reproduce with substantial fidelity the minute provisions of the law by which these institutions were to be maintained. But this is very far from being the case. It is found that while Ezekiel deals to a large extent with the subjects for which provision is made by the law, there is in no instance perfect correspondence between the enactments of the vision and those of the Pentateuch, while on some points they differ very materially from one another. How are we to account for these numerous and, on the supposition, evidently designed divergencies? It has been suggested that the law was found to be in some respects unsuitable to the state of things that would arise, after the Exile, and that Ezekiel in the exercise of his prophetic authority undertook to adapt it to the conditions of a late age. The suggestion is in itself plausible, but it is not confirmed by the history. For it is agreed on all hands that the law as a whole had never been put in force for any considerable period of Israel's history previous to the Exile. On the other hand, if we suppose that Ezekiel judged its provisions unsuitable for the circumstances that would emerge after the Exile, we are confronted by the fact that where Ezekiel's legislation differs from that of the Pentateuch it is the latter and not the former that regulated the practice of the post-exilic community. So far was the law from being out of date in the age of Ezekiel that the time was only approaching when the first effort would be made to accept it in all its length and breadth as the authoritative basis of an actual theocratic polity. Unless, therefore, we are to hold that the legislation of the vision is entirely in the air, and that it takes no account whatever of practical considerations, we must feel that a certain difficulty is presented by its unexplained deviations from the carefully drawn ordinances of the Pentateuch.

But this is not all. The Pentateuch itself is not a unity. It consists of different strata of legislation which, while irreconcilable in details, are held to exhibit a continuous progress towards a clearer definition of the duties that devolve on different classes in the community, and a fuller exposition of the principles that underlay the system from the beginning. The analysis of the Mosaic writings into different legislative codes has resulted in a scheme which in its main outlines is now accepted by critics of all shades of opinion. The three great codes which we have to distinguish are:

- (1) *The so-called Book of the Covenant; ([Exo 20:24](#) - [Exo 23:1-33](#), with which may be classed the closely allied code of [Exo 34:10-28](#))*
- (2) *The Book of Deuteronomy; and*
- (3) *The Priestly Code (found in [Exo 25:1-40](#); [Exo 26:1-37](#); [Exo 27:1-21](#); [Exo 28:1-43](#); [Exo 29:1-46](#); [Exo 30:1-38](#); [Exo 31:1-18](#); [Exo 35:1-35](#); [Exo 36:1-38](#); [Exo 37:1-29](#); [Exo 38:1-31](#); [Exo 39:1-43](#); [Exo 40:1-38](#), the whole book of Leviticus, and nearly the whole of the book of Numbers).*

Now of course the mere separation of these different documents tells us nothing, or not much, as to their relative priority or antiquity. But we possess at least a certain amount of historical and independent evidence as to the times when some of them became operative in the actual life of the nation. We know, for example, that the Book of Deuteronomy attained the force of statute law under the most solemn circumstances by a national covenant in the eighteenth year of Josiah. The distinctive feature of that book is its impressive enforcement of the principle that there is but one sanctuary at which Jehovah can be legitimately worshipped. When we compare the list of reforms carried out by Josiah, as given in the twenty-third chapter of 2 Kings, with the provisions of Deuteronomy, we see that it must have been that book and it alone that had been found in the Temple and that governed the reforming policy of the king. Before that time the law of the one sanctuary, if it was known at all, was certainly more honoured in the breach than the observance. Sacrifices were freely offered at local altars throughout the country, not merely by the ignorant common people and idolatrous kings, but by men who were the inspired religious leaders and teachers of the nation. Not only so, but this practice is sanctioned by the Book of the Covenant, which permits the erection of an altar in every place where Jehovah causes His name to be remembered, and only lays down injunctions as to the kind of altar that might be used. {[Exo 20:24-26](#)} The evidence is thus very strong that the Book of Deuteronomy, at whatever time it may have been written, had not the force of public law until the year 621 B.C., and that down to that time the accepted and authoritative expression of the divine will for Israel was the law embraced in the Book of the Covenant.

To find similar evidence of the practical adoption of the Priestly Code we have to come down to a much later period. It is not till the year 444 B.C., in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, that we read of the people pledging themselves by a solemn covenant to the observance of regulations which are clearly those of the finished system of Pentateuchal law. {[Neh 8:1-18](#); [Neh 9:1-38](#); [Neh 10:1-39](#)} It is there expressly stated that this law had not been observed in Israel up to that time, {[Neh 9:34](#)} and in particular that the great Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated in accordance with the requirements of the law since the days of Joshua. {[Neh 8:17](#)} This is quite conclusive as to actual practice in Israel; and the fact that the observance of the law was thus introduced by instalments, and on occasions of epoch-making importance in the history of the community, raises a strong presumption against the hypothesis that the Pentateuch was an inseparable literary unit, which must be known in its entirety where it was known at all.

Now the date of Ezekiel's vision (572) lies between these two historic transactions—the inauguration of the law of Deuteronomy in 621, and that of the Priestly Code in 444; and in spite of the ideal character which belongs to the vision as a whole, it contains a system of legislation which admits of being compared point by point with the provisions of the other two

codes on a variety of subjects common to all three. Some of the results of this comparison will appear as we proceed with the exposition of the chapters before us. But it will be convenient to state here the important conclusion to which a number of critics have been led by discussion of this question. It is held that Ezekiel's legislation represents on the whole a transition from the law of Deuteronomy to the more complex system of the Priestly document. The three codes exhibit a regular progression, the determining factor of which is a growing sense of the importance of the Temple worship and of the necessity for a careful regulation of the acts which express the religious standing and privileges of the community. On such matters as the feasts, the sacrifices, the distinction between priests and Levites, the Temple dues, and the provision for the maintenance of ordinances, it is found that Ezekiel lays down enactments which go beyond those of Deuteronomy and anticipate a further development in the same direction in the Levitical legislation. The legislation of Ezekiel is accordingly regarded as a first step towards the codification of the ritual laws which regulated the usage of the first Temple. It is not of material consequence to know how far these laws had been already committed to writing, or how far they had been transmitted by oral tradition. The important point is that down to the time of Ezekiel the great body of ritual law had been the possession of the priests, who communicated it to the people in the shape of particular decisions as occasion demanded. Even the book of Deuteronomy, except on one or two points, such as the law of leprosy and of clean and unclean animals, does not encroach on matters of ritual, which it was the special province of the priesthood to administer. But now that the time was drawing near when the Temple and its worship were to be the very centre of the religious life of the nation, it was necessary that the essential elements of the ceremonial law should be systematised and published in a form understood of the people. The last nine chapters of Ezekiel, then, contain the first draft of such a scheme, drawn from an ancient priestly tradition which in its origin went back to the time of Moses. It is true that this was not the precise form in which the law was destined to be put in practice in the post-exilic community. But Ezekiel's legislation served its purpose when it laid down clearly, with the authority of a prophet, the fundamental ideas that underlie the conception of ritual as an aid to spiritual religion. And these ideas were not lost sight of, though it was reserved for others, working under the impulse supplied by Ezekiel, to perfect the details of the system, and to adapt the principles of the vision to the actual circumstances of the second Temple. Through what subsequent stages the work was carried we can hardly hope to determine with exactitude; but it was finished in all essential respects before the great covenant of Ezra and Nehemiah in the year 444.

Let us now consider the bearing of this theory on the interpretation of Ezekiel's vision. It enables us to do justice to the unmistakable practical purpose which pervades its legislation. It frees us from the grave difficulties involved in the assumption that Ezekiel wrote with the finished Pentateuch before him. It vindicates the prophet from the suspicion of arbitrary deviations from a standard of venerable antiquity and of divine authority, which was afterwards proved by experience to be suited to the requirements of that restored Israel in whose interest Ezekiel legislated. And in doing so it gives a new meaning to his claim to speak as a prophet ordaining a new system of laws with divine authority. *Whilst perfectly consistent with the inspiration of the mosaic books, it places that of Ezekiel on a surer footing than does the supposition that the whole Pentateuch was of mosaic authorship.* It involves, no doubt, that the details of the Priestly law were in a more or less fluid condition down to the time of the Exile; but it explains the otherwise unaccountable fact that the several parts of the law became operative at different times in Israel's history, and explains it in a manner that reveals the working of a divine purpose through all the ages of the national existence. It becomes possible to see that Ezekiel's legislation and that of the Levitical books are in their essence alike Mosaic, as being founded on the institutions and principles established by Moses at the beginning of the nation's history. And an altogether new interest is imparted to the former when we learn to regard it as an epoch-making contribution to the task which laid the foundation of the post-exilic theocracy—the task of codifying and consolidating the laws which expressed the character of the new nation as a holy people consecrated to the service of Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel.

## THE SANCTUARY

*The fundamental idea of the theocracy as conceived by Ezekiel is the literal dwelling of Jehovah in the midst of his people. The temple is in the first instance Jehovah's palace, where he manifests his gracious presence by receiving the gifts and homage of his subjects. But the enjoyment of this privilege of access to the presence of god depends on the fulfillment of certain conditions which, in the prophet's view, had been systematically violated in the arrangements that prevailed under the first temple.* Hence the vision of Ezekiel is essentially the vision of a Temple corresponding in all respects to the requirements of Jehovah's holiness, and then of Jehovah's entrance into the house so prepared for His reception. And the first step towards the realisation of the great hope of the future was to lay before the exiles a full description of this building, so that they might understand the conditions on which alone Israel could be restored to its own land.

To this task the prophet addresses himself in the first four of the chapters before us, and he executes it in a manner which, considering the great technical difficulties to be surmounted, must excite our admiration. He tells us first in a brief introduction how he was transported in prophetic ecstasy to the land of Israel, and there on the site of the old Temple, now elevated into a "very high mountain," he sees before him an imposing pile of buildings like the building of a city ([Eze 40:2](#)). It is the future Temple, the city itself having been removed nearly two miles to the south. At the east gate he is met by an angel, who conducts him from point to point of the buildings, calling his attention to significant structural details, and measuring each part as he goes along with a measuring-line, which he carries in his hand. It is probable that the whole description would be

perfectly intelligible but for the state of the text, which is defective throughout and in some places hopelessly corrupt. This is hardly surprising when we consider the technical and unfamiliar nature of the terms employed; but it has been suspected that some parts have been deliberately tampered with in order to bring them into harmony with the actual construction of the second Temple. Whether that is so or not, the description as a whole remains in its way a masterpiece of literary exposition, and a remarkable proof of the versatility of Ezekiel's accomplishments. When it is necessary to turn himself into an architectural draughtsman he discharges the duty to perfection. No one can study the detailed measurements of the buildings without being convinced that the prophet is working from a ground plan which he has himself prepared; indeed his own words leave no doubt that this was the case. {see [Eze 43:10-11](#)} And it is a convincing demonstration of his descriptive powers that we are able, after the labours of many generations of scholars, to reproduce this plan with a certainty which, except with regard to a few minor features, leaves little to be desired. *It has been remarked as a curious fact that of the three temples mentioned in the Old Testament the only one of whose construction we can form a clear conception is the one that was never built; (Gautier, "La Mission du Prophete Ezekiel." p. 118). And certainly the knowledge we have of Solomon's Temple from the first book of Kings is very incomplete compared with what we know of the Temple which Ezekiel saw only in vision.*

It is impossible in this chapter to enter into all the minutiae of the description, or even to discuss all the difficulties of interpretation which arise in connection with different parts. Full information of these points will be found in short compass in Dr. Davidson's commentary on the passage. All that can be attempted here is to convey a general idea of the arrangements of the various buildings and courts of the sanctuary, and the extreme care with which they have been thought out by the prophet. After this has been done we shall try to discover the meaning of these arrangements in so far as they differ from the model supplied by the first Temple.

## I.

Let the reader, then, after the manner of Euclid, draw a straight line A B, and describe thereon a square A B C D. Let him divide two adjacent sides of the square (say A B and A D) into ten equal parts, and let lines be drawn from the points of section parallel to the sides of the square in both directions. Let a side of the small squares represent a length of fifty cubits, and the whole consequently a square of five hundred cubits. It will now be found that the bounding lines of Ezekiel's plan run throughout on the lines of this diagram; and this fact gives a better idea than anything else of the symmetrical structure of the Temple and of the absolute accuracy of the measurements. The sides of the large square represent of course the outer boundary of the enclosure, which is formed by a wall six cubits thick and six high. Its sides are directed to the four points of the compass, and at the middle of the north, east, and south sides the wall is pierced by the three gates, each with an ascent of seven steps outside. The gates, however, are not mere openings in the wall furnished with doors, but covered gateways, similar to those that penetrate the thick wall of a fortified town. In this case they are large separate buildings projecting into the court to a distance of fifty cubits, and twenty-five cubits broad, exactly half the size of the Temple proper. On either side of the passage are three recesses in the wall six cubits square, which were to be used as guardrooms by the Temple police. Each gateway terminates towards the court in a large hall called "the porch," eight cubits broad (along the line of entry) by twenty long (across): the porch of the east gate was reserved for the use of the prince; the purpose of the other two is nowhere specified.

Passing through the eastern gateway, the prophet stands in the outer court of the Temple, the place where the people assembled for worship. It seems to have been entirely destitute of buildings, with the exception of a row of thirty cells along the three walls in which the gates were. The outer margin of the court was paved with stone up to the line of the inside of the gateways (i.e., fifty cubits, less the thickness of the outer wall); and on this pavement stood the cells, the dimensions of which, however, are not given. There were, moreover, in the four corners of the court rectangular enclosures forty cubits by thirty, where the Levites were to cook the sacrifices of the people. {[Eze 46:21-24](#)} The purpose of the cells is nowhere specified; but there is little doubt that they were intended for those sacrificial feasts of a semiprivate character which had always been a prominent feature of the Temple worship. From the edge of the pavement to the inner court was a distance of a hundred cubits; but this space was free only on three sides, the western side being occupied by buildings to be afterwards described.

The inner court was a terrace standing probably about five feet above the level of the outer, and approached by flights of eight steps at the three gates. It was reserved for the exclusive use of the priests. It had three gateways in a line with those of the outer court, and precisely similar to them, with the single exception that the porches were not, as we might have expected, towards the inside, but at the ends next to the outer court. The free space of the inner court, within the line of the gateways, was a square of a hundred cubits, corresponding to the four middle squares of the diagram. Right in the middle, so that it could be seen through the gates, was the great altar of burnt-offering, a huge stone structure rising in three terraces to a height apparently of twelve cubits and having a breadth and length of eighteen cubits at the base. That this, rather than the Temple, should be the centre of the sanctuary; corresponds to a consciousness in Israel that the altar was the one indispensable requisite for the performance of sacrificial worship acceptable to Jehovah. Accordingly, when the first exiles returned to Jerusalem, before they were in a position to set about the erection of the Temple, they reared the altar in its place, and at once instituted the daily sacrifice and the stated order of the festivals. And even in Ezekiel's vision we shall find that the sacrificial

consecration of the altar is considered as equivalent to the dedication of the whole sanctuary to the chief purpose for which it was erected. Besides the altar there were in the inner court certain other objects of special significance for the priestly and sacrificial service. By the side of the north and south gates were two cells or chambers opening towards the middle space. The purpose for which these cells were intended clearly points to a division of the priesthood (which, however, may have been temporary and not permanent) into two classes—one of which was entrusted with the service of the Temple, and the other with the service of the altar. The cell on the north, we are told, was for the priests engaged in the service of the house, and that on the south for those who officiated at the altar. {Eze 40:45-46} There is mention also of tables on which different classes of sacrificial victims were slaughtered, and of a chamber in which the burnt-offering was washed; {Eze 40:38-43} but so obscure is the text of this passage that it cannot even be certainly determined whether these appliances were situated at the east gate or the north gate, or at each of the three gates.

The four small squares immediately adjoining the inner court on the west are occupied by the Temple proper and its adjuncts. The Temple itself stands on a solid basement six cubits above the level of the inner court, and is reached by a flight of ten steps. The breadth of the basement (north to south) is sixty cubits: this leaves a free space of twenty cubits on either side, which is really a continuation of the inner court, although it bears the special name of the *gizra* ("separate place"). In length the basement measures a hundred and five cubits, projecting, as we immediately see, five cubits into the inner court in front. The inner space of the Temple was divided, as in Solomon's Temple, into three compartments, communicating with each other by folding-doors in the middle of the partitions that separated them. Entering by the outer door on the east, we come first to the vestibule, which is twenty cubits broad (north to south) by twelve cubits east to west. Next to this is the hall or "palace" (*hekal*), twenty cubits by forty. Beyond this again is the innermost shrine of the Temple, the Most Holy Place, where the glory of the God of Israel is to take the place occupied by the ark and cherubim of the first Temple. It is a square of twenty cubits; but Ezekiel, although himself a priest, is not allowed to enter this sacred space; the angel goes in alone, and announces the measurements to the prophet, who waits without in the great hall of the Temple. The only piece of furniture mentioned in the Temple is an altar or table in the hall, immediately in front of the Most Holy Place. {Eze 41:22} The reference is no doubt to the table on which the shewbread was laid out before Jehovah. {cf. Exo 25:23-30} Some details are also given of the wood-carving with which the interior was decorated, {Eze 41:16-20; Eze 41:25} consisting apparently of cherubs and palm trees in alternate panels. This appears to be simply a reminiscence of the ornamentation of the old Temple, and to have no direct religious significance in the mind of the prophet.

The Temple was enclosed first by a wall six cubits thick, and then on each side except the east by an outer wall of five cubits, separated from the inner by an interval of four cubits. This intervening space was divided into three ranges of small cells rising in three stories one over another. The second and third stories were somewhat broader than the lowest, the inner wall of the house being contracted so as to allow the beams to be laid upon it without breaking into its surface. We must further suppose that the inner wall rose above the cells and the outer wall, so as to leave a clear space for the windows of the Temple. The entire length of the Temple on the outside is a hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty cubits. This leaves room for a passage of five cubits broad round the edge of the elevated platform on which the main building stood. The two doors which gave access to the cells opened on this passage, and were placed in the north and south sides of the outer wall. There was obviously no need to continue the passage round the west side of the house, and this does not appear to be contemplated.

It will be seen that there still remains a square of a hundred cubits behind the Temple, between it and the west wall. The greater part of this was taken up by a structure vaguely designated as the "building" (*binya* or *binyan*), which is commonly supposed to have been a sort of lumber-room, although its function is not indicated. Nor does it appear whether it stood on the level of the inner court or of the outer. But while this building fills the whole breadth of the square from north to south (a hundred cubits), the other dimension (east to west) is curtailed by a space of twenty cubits left free between it and the Temple, the *gizra* (see *supra*) being thus continuous round three sides of the house.

The most troublesome part of the description is that of two blocks of cells situated north and south of the Temple building. {Eze 42:1-14} It seems clear that they occupied the oblong spaces between the *gizra* north and south of the Temple and the walls of the inner court. Their length is said to be a hundred cubits, and their breadth fifty cubits. But room has to be found for a passage ten cubits broad and a hundred long, so that the measurements do not exhibit in this case Ezekiel's usual accuracy. Moreover, we are told that while their length facing the Temple was a hundred cubits, the length facing the outer court was only fifty cubits. It is extremely difficult to gain a clear idea of what the prophet meant. Smend and Davidson suppose that each block was divided longitudinally into two sections, and that the passage of ten cubits ran between them from east to west. The inner section would then be a hundred cubits in length and twenty in breadth. But the other section towards the outer court would have only half this length, the remaining fifty cubits along the edge of the inner court being protected by a wall. This is perhaps the best solution that has been proposed, but one can hardly help thinking that if Ezekiel had had such an arrangement in view he would have expressed himself more clearly. The one thing that is perfectly unambiguous is the purpose for which these cells were to be used. Certain sacrifices to which a high degree of sanctity attached were consumed by the priests, and being "most holy" things they had to be eaten in a holy place. These chambers, then, standing within the sacred enclosure of the inner court, were assigned to the priests for this purpose. In them also the priests were to deposit the sacred garments in which they ministered, before leaving the inner court to mingle with the people.



## II.

Such, then, are the leading features presented by Ezekiel's description of an ideal sanctuary. What are the chief impressions suggested to the mind by its perusal? The fact no doubt that surprises us most is that our attention is almost exclusively directed to the ground-plan of the buildings. It is evident that the prophet is indifferent to what seems to us the noblest element of ecclesiastical architecture, the effect of lofty spaces on the imagination of the worshipper. It is no part of his purpose to inspire devotional feeling by the aid of purely aesthetic impressions. "The height, the span, the gloom, the glory" of some venerable Gothic cathedral do not enter into his conception of a place of worship. The impressions he wishes to convey, although religious, are intellectual rather than aesthetic, and are such as could be expressed by the sharp outlines and mathematical precision of a ground-plan. Now of course the sanctuary was, to begin with, a place of sacrifice, and to a large extent its arrangements were necessarily dictated by a regard for practical convenience and utility. But leaving this on one side, it is obvious enough that the design is influenced by certain ruling principles, of which the most conspicuous are these three: separation, gradation, and symmetry. And these again symbolise three aspects of the one great idea of holiness, which the prophet desired to see embodied in the whole constitution of the Hebrew state as the guarantee of lasting fellowship between Jehovah and Israel.

*In Ezekiel's teaching on the subject of holiness there is nothing that is absolutely new or peculiar to himself. That Jehovah is the one truly holy Being is the common doctrine of the prophets, and it means that He alone unites in Himself all the attributes of true Godhead.* The Hebrew language does not admit of the formation of an adjective from the name for God like our word "divine," or an abstract noun corresponding to "divinity." What we denote by these terms the Hebrews expressed by the words *qadosh*, "holy," and *qodesh*, "holiness." All that constitutes true divinity is therefore summed up in the Old Testament idea of the holiness of God. The fundamental thought expressed by the word when applied to God appears to be the separation or contrast between the divine and the human—that in God which inspires awe and reverence on the part of man, and forbids approach to Him save under restrictions which flow from the nature of the Deity. *In the light of the New Testament revelation we see that the only barrier to communion with God is sin; and hence to us holiness, both in God and man, is a purely ethical idea denoting moral purity and perfectness. But under the Old Testament access to God was hindered not only by sin, but also by natural disabilities to which no moral guilt attaches. The idea of holiness is therefore partly ethical and partly ceremonial, physical uncleanness being as really a violation of the divine holiness as offences against the moral law.* The consequences of this view appear nowhere more clearly than in the legislation of Ezekiel. His mind was penetrated with the prophetic idea of the unique divinity or holiness of Jehovah, and no one can doubt that the moral attributes of God occupied the supreme place in his conception of what true Godhead is. But along with this he has a profound sense of what the nature of Jehovah demands in the way of ceremonial purity. The divine holiness, in fact, contains a physical as well as an ethical element; and to guard against the intrusion of anything unclean into the sphere of Jehovah's worship is the chief design of the elaborate system of ritual laws laid down in the closing chapters of Ezekiel. Ultimately no doubt the whole system served a moral purpose by furnishing a safeguard against the introduction of heathen practices into the worship of Israel. But its immediate effect was to give prominence to that aspect of the idea of holiness which seems to us of least value, although it could not be dispensed with so long as the worship of God took the form of material offerings at a local sanctuary.

Now, in reducing this idea to practice, it is obvious that everything depends on the strict enforcement of the principle of separation that lies at the root of the Hebrew conception of holiness. The thought that underlies Ezekiel's legislation is that the holiness of Jehovah is communicated in different degrees to everything connected with His worship, and in the first instance to the Temple, which is sanctified by His presence. The sanctity of the place is of course not fully intelligible apart from the ceremonial rules which regulate the conduct of those who are permitted to enter it. Throughout the ancient world we find evidence of the existence of sacred enclosures which could only be entered by those who fulfilled certain conditions of physical purity. The conditions might be extremely simple, as when Moses was commanded to take his shoes off his feet as he stood within the holy ground on Mount Sinai. But obviously the first essential of a permanently sacred place was that it should be definitely marked off from common ground, as the sphere within which superior requirements of holiness became binding. A holy place is necessarily a place "cut off," separated from ordinary use and guarded from intrusion by supernatural sanctions. The idea of the sanctuary as a separate place was therefore perfectly familiar to the Israelites long before the time of Ezekiel, and had been exhibited in a lax and imperfect way in the construction of the first Temple. But what Ezekiel did was to carry out the idea with a thoroughness never before attempted, and in such a way as to make the whole arrangements of the sanctuary an impressive object lesson on the holiness of Jehovah.

How important this notion of separateness was to Ezekiel's conception of the sanctuary is best seen from the emphatic condemnation of the arrangement of the old Temple pronounced by Jehovah Himself on His entrance into the house:

*"Son of man, [hast thou seen] (So in the LXX) the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I shall dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever? No longer shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they and their kings, by their whoredom [idolatry], and by the corpses of their kings in their death; by placing their threshold alongside of My threshold, and their post beside My post, with only the wall between Me and them, and*

*defiling My holy name by their abominations which they committed; so that I consumed them in My anger. But now they must remove their whoredom and the corpses of their kings from Me, and I will dwell amongst them for ever". {Eze 43:7-9}*

There is here a clear allusion to defects in the structure of the Temple which were inconsistent with a due recognition of the necessary separation between the holy and the profane. {Eze 42:20} *It appears that the first Temple had only one court, corresponding to the inner court of Ezekiel's vision. What answered to the outer court was simply an enclosure surrounding, not only the Temple, but also the royal palace and the other buildings of state. Immediately adjoining the Temple area on the south was the court in which the palace stood, so that the only division between the dwelling-place of Jehovah and the residence of the kings of Judah was the single wall separating the two courts. This of itself was derogatory to the sanctity of the Temple, according to the enhanced idea of holiness which it was Ezekiel's mission to enforce.* But the prophet touches on a still more flagrant transgression of the law of holiness when he speaks of the dead bodies of the kings as being interred in the neighbourhood of the Temple. Contact with a dead body produced under all circumstances the highest degree of ceremonial uncleanness, and nothing could have been more abhorrent to Ezekiel's priestly sense of propriety than the close proximity of dead men's bones to the house in which Jehovah was to dwell. In order to guard against the recurrence of these abuses in the future it was necessary that all secular buildings should be removed to a safe distance from the Temple precincts. The "law of the house" is that "upon the top of the mountain it shall stand, and all its precincts round about shall be most holy". {Eze 43:12} And it is characteristic of Ezekiel that the separation is effected, not by changing the situation of the Temple, but by transporting the city bodily to the southward; so that the new sanctuary stood on the site of the old, but isolated from the contact of that in human life which was common and unclean.

The effect of this teaching, however, is immensely enhanced by the principle of gradation, which is the second feature exhibited in Ezekiel's description of the sanctuary. Holiness, as a predicate of persons or things, is after all a relative idea. That which is "most holy" in relation to the profane everyday life of men may be less holy in comparison with something still more closely associated with the presence of God. Thus the whole land of Israel was holy in contrast with the world lying outside. But it was impossible to maintain the whole land in a state of ceremonial purity corresponding to the sanctity of Jehovah. The full compass of the idea could only be illustrated by a carefully graded series of sacred spaces, each of which entailed provisions of sanctity peculiar to itself. First of all an "oblation" is set apart in the middle of the tribes; and of this the central portion is assigned for the residence of the priestly families. In the midst of this, again, stands the sanctuary with its wall and precinct, dividing the holy from the profane. {Eze 42:20} Within the wall are the two courts, of which the outer could only be trodden by circumcised Israelites and the inner only by the priests. Behind the inner court stands the Temple house, cut off from the adjoining buildings by a "separate place," and elevated on a platform, which still further guards its sanctity from profane contact. And finally the interior of the house is divided into three compartments, increasing in holiness in the order of entrance—first the porch, then the main hall, and then the Most Holy Place, where Jehovah Himself dwells. It is impossible to mistake the meaning of all this. The practical object is to secure the presence of Jehovah against the possibility of contact with those sources of impurity which are inseparably bound up with the incidents of man's natural existence on earth.

Before we pass on let us return for a moment to the primary notion of separation in space as an emblem of the Old Testament conception of holiness. What is the permanent religious truth underlying this representation? We may find it in the idea conveyed by the familiar phrase "draw near to God." What we have just seen reminds us that there was a stage in the history of religion when these words could be used in the most literal sense of every act of complete worship. The worshipper actually came to the place where God was; it was impossible to realise His presence in any other way. To us the expression has only a metaphorical value; yet the metaphor is one that we cannot dispense with, for it covers a fact of spiritual experience. It may be true that with God there is no far or near, that He is omnipresent, that His eyes are in every place beholding the evil and the good; But what does that mean? Not surely that all men everywhere and at all times are equally under the influence of the divine Spirit? No; but only that God may be found in any place by the soul that is open to receive His grace and truth, that place has nothing to do with the conditions of true fellowship with Him. Translated into terms of the spiritual life, drawing near to God denotes the act of faith or prayer or consecration, through which we seek the manifestation of His love in our experience. Religion knows nothing of "action at a distance"; God is near in every place to the soul that knows Him, and distant in every place from the heart that loves darkness rather than light.

Now when the idea of access to God is thus spiritualised the conception of holiness is necessarily transformed, but it is not superseded. At every stage of revelation holiness is that "without which no man shall see the Lord." {Heb 12:14} In other words, it expresses the conditions that regulate all true fellowship with God. So long as worship was confined to an earthly sanctuary these conditions were, so to speak, materialised. They resolved themselves into a series of "carnal ordinances"—gifts and sacrifices, meats, drinks, and divers washings—that could never make the worshipper perfect as touching the conscience. These things were "imposed until a time of reformation," the "Holy Ghost" thus signifying, that the way into the holy place had not been made manifest while as the first tabernacle was yet standing." {Heb 9:8-10} And yet when we consider what it was that gave such vitality to that persistent sense of distance from God, of His unapproachableness, of danger in contact with Him, what it was that inspired such constant attention to ceremonial purity in all ancient religions, we cannot but see that it was the obscure workings of the conscience, the haunting sense of moral defect cleaving to a man's common life and all his

common actions. In heathenism this feeling took an entirely wrong direction; in Israel it was gradually liberated from its material associations and stood forth as an ethical fact. And when at last Christ came to reveal God as He is, He taught men to call nothing common or unclean. But He taught them at the same time that true holiness can only be attained through His atoning sacrifice, and by the indwelling of that Spirit which is the source of moral purity and perfection in all His people. These are the abiding conditions of fellowship with the Father of our spirits; and under the influence of these great Christian facts it is our duty to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

### III.

No sooner has the prophet completed his tour of inspection of the sacred buildings than he is conducted to the eastern gate to witness the theophany by which the Temple is consecrated to the service of the true God.

"He (the angel) led me to the gate that looks eastward, and, lo, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east; its sound was as the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with its glory. The appearance which I saw was like that which I had seen when He came to destroy the city, and like the appearance which I saw by the river Kebar, and I fell on my face. And the glory of Jehovah entered the house by the gate that looks towards the east. The Spirit caught me up, and brought me to the inner court; and, behold, the glory of Jehovah filled the house. Then I heard a voice from the house speaking to me—the man was standing beside me—and saying, Son of man, hast thou seen the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I shall dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever?"'. {[Eze 43:1-7](#)}

This great scene, so simply described, is really the culmination of Ezekiel's prophecy. Its spiritual meaning is suggested by the prophet himself when he recalls the terrible act of judgment which he had seen in vision on that very spot some twenty years before ([Eze 9:1-11](#); [Eze 10:1-22](#); [Eze 11:1-25](#)). *The two episodes stand in clear and conscious parallelism with each other. They represent in dramatic form the sum of Ezekiel's teaching in the two periods into which his ministry was divided. On the former occasion he had witnessed the exit of Jehovah from a Temple polluted by heathen abominations and profaned by the presence of men who had disowned the knowledge of the Holy One of Israel. The prophet had read in this the death sentence of the old Hebrew state, and the truth of his vision had been established in the tale of horror and disaster which the subsequent years had unfolded. Now he has been privileged to see the return of Jehovah to a new Temple, corresponding in all respects to the requirements of His holiness; and he recognises it as the pledge of restoration and peace and all the blessings of the Messianic age. The future worshippers are still in exile bearing the chastisement of their former iniquities; but "the Lord is in His holy Temple," and the dispersed of Israel shall yet be gathered home to enter His courts with praise and thanksgiving.*

To us this part of the vision symbolises, under forms derived from the Old Testament economy, the central truth of the Christian dispensation. We do no injustice to the historic import of Ezekiel's mission when we say that the dwelling of Jehovah in the midst of His people is an emblem of reconciliation between God and man, and that his elaborate system of ritual observances points towards the sanctification of human life in all its relations through spiritual communion with the Father revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian interpreters have differed widely as to the manner in which the vision is to be realised in the history of the Church; but on one point at least they are agreed, that through the veil of legal institutions the prophet saw the day of Christ. And although Ezekiel himself does not distinguish between the symbol and the reality, it is nevertheless possible for us to see, in the essential ideas of his vision, a prophecy of that eternal union between God and man which is brought to pass by the work of Christ.

#### **EZEKIEL 44**

##### **Ezekiel 44:1-31**

#### **THE PRIESTHOOD**

##### [Eze 44:1-31](#)

In the previous chapters we saw how the principle of holiness through separation was exhibited in the plan of a new Temple, round which the *Theocracy of the future was to be constituted*. We have now to consider the application of the same principle to the personnel of the Sanctuary, the priests and others who are to officiate within its courts. The connection between the two is obvious. As has been already remarked, the sanctity of the Temple is not intelligible apart from the ceremonial purity required of the persons who are permitted to enter it. The degrees of holiness pertaining to its different areas imply an ascending scale of restrictions on access to the more sacred parts. We may expect to find that in the observance of these conditions the usage of the first Temple left much to be desired from the point of view represented by Ezekiel's ideal. Where the very construction of the sanctuary involved so many departures from the strict idea of holiness it was inevitable that a corresponding laxity should prevail in the discharge of sacred functions. Temple and priesthood in fact are so related that a reform of the one implies of necessity a reform of the other. It is therefore not in itself surprising that Ezekiel's legislation should include a scheme for the reorganisation of the Temple priesthood. But these general considerations hardly prepare us for the sweeping and drastic changes contemplated in the forty-fourth chapter of the book. It requires an effort of imagination

to realise the situation with which the prophet has to deal. The abuses for which he seeks a remedy and the measures which he adopts to counteract them are alike contrary to preconceived notions of the order of worship in an Israelite sanctuary. Yet there is no part of the prophet's programme which shows the character of the earnest practical reformer more clearly than this. If we might regard Ezekiel as a mere legislator we should say that the boldest task to which he set his hand was a reformation of the Temple ministry, involving the degradation of an influential class from the priestly status and privileges to which they aspired.

# I.

The first and most noteworthy feature of the new scheme is the distinction between priests and Levites. The passage in which this instruction is given is so important that it may be quoted here at length. It is an oracle communicated to the prophet in a peculiarly impressive manner. He has been brought into the inner court in front of the Temple, and there, in full view of the glory of God, he falls on his face, when Jehovah speaks to him as follows:-

"Son of man, give heed and see with thine eyes and hear with thine ears all that I speak to thee concerning all the ordinances and all the laws of Jehovah's house. Mark well the [rule of] entrance into the house, and all the outgoings in the sanctuary. And say to the house of rebellion, the house of Israel: *Thus saith the Lord Jehovah, It is high time to desist from all your abominations, O house of Israel, in that ye bring in aliens uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh to be in My sanctuary, profaning it, while ye offer My bread, the fat and the blood; thus ye have broken My covenant, in addition to all your (other) abominations; and ye have not kept the charge of My holy things, but have appointed them as keepers of My charge in My sanctuary.* Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, No alien uncircumcised in heart and flesh shall enter into My sanctuary, of all the foreigners who are amongst the Israelites. *But the Levites* who departed from Me when Israel went astray from Me after their idols, they shall bear their guilt, and shall minister in My sanctuary in charge *at the gates of the house and as ministers of the house; they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and stand before them to minister to them. Because they ministered to them before their idols, and were to the house of Israel an occasion of guilt, therefore I lift My hand against them, saith the Lord Jehovah, and they shall bear their guilt, and shall not draw near to Me to act as priests to Me or to touch any of My holy things, the most holy things, but shall bear their shame and the abominations which they have committed. I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all its servile work* and all that has to be done in it. *But the priest-Levites, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the Israelites strayed from Me- they shall draw near to Me to minister to Me, and shall stand before Me to present to Me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord Jehovah.* They shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall draw near to My table to minister to Me, and shall keep My charge." {[Eze 44:5-16](#)}

Now the first thing to be noticed here is that the new law of the priesthood is aimed directly against a particular abuse in the practice of the first Temple. It appears that down to the time of the Exile uncircumcised aliens were not only admitted to the Temple, but were entrusted with certain important functions in maintaining order in the sanctuary ([Eze 44:8](#)). It is not expressly stated that they took any part in the performance of the worship, although this is suggested by the fact that the Levites who are installed in their place had to slay the sacrifices for the people and render other necessary services to the worshippers ([Eze 44:2](#)). In any case the mere presence of foreigners while sacrifice was being offered ([Eze 44:7](#)) was a profanation of the sanctity of the Temple which was intolerable to a strict conception of Jehovah's holiness. It is therefore of some consequence to discover who these aliens were, and how they came to be engaged in the Temple.

For a partial answer to this question, we may turn first to the memorable scene of the coronation of the young king Joash as described in the eleventh chapter of the Second Book of Kings (*circa* B.C. 837). The moving spirit in that transaction was the chief priest Jehoiada, a man who was honourably distinguished by his zeal for the purity of the national religion. But although the priest's motives were pure he could only accomplish his object by a palace revolution, carried out with the assistance of the captains of the royal bodyguard. Now from the time of David the royal guard had contained a corps of foreign mercenaries recruited from the Philistine country; and on the occasion with which we are dealing we find mention of a body of Carians, showing that the custom was kept up in the end of the ninth century. During the coronation ceremony these guards were drawn up in the most sacred part of the inner court, the space between the Temple and the altar, with the new king in their midst ([Eze 44:2](#)). Moreover we learn incidentally that keeping watch in the Temple was part of the regular duty of the king's bodyguard, just as much as the custody of the palace ([Eze 44:5-7](#)). In order to understand the full significance of this arrangement, it must be borne in mind that the Temple was in the first instance the royal sanctuary, maintained at the king's expense and subject to his authority. Hence the duty of keeping order in the Temple courts naturally devolved on the troops that attended the king's person and acted as the palace guard. So at an earlier period of the history we read that as often as the king went into the house of Jehovah, he was accompanied by the guard that kept the door of the king's house. {[1Ki 14:27-28](#)}

Here, then, we have historical evidence of the admission to the sanctuary of a class of foreigners answering in all respects to the uncircumcised aliens of Ezekiel's legislation. That the practice of enlisting foreign mercenaries for the guard continued till the reign of Josiah seems to be indicated by an allusion in the Book of Zephaniah, where the prophet denounces a body of men in the service of the king who observed the Philistine custom of "leaping over the threshold." {[Zep 1:9](#) : cf. [1Sa 5:5](#)} We have



only to suppose that this usage, along with the subordination of the Temple to the royal authority, persisted to the close of the monarchy, in order to explain fully the abuse which excited the indignation of our prophet. It is possible no doubt that he had in view other uncircumcised persons as well, such as the Gibeonites, {[Jos 9:27](#)} who were employed in the menial service of the sanctuary. But we have seen enough to show at all events that pre-exilic usage tolerated a freedom of access to the sanctuary and a looseness of administration within it which would have been sacrilegious under the law of the second Temple. It need not be supposed that Ezekiel was the only one who felt this state of things to be a scandal and an injury to religion. We may believe that in this respect he only expressed the higher conscience of his order. Amongst the more devout circles of the Temple priesthood there was probably a growing conviction similar to that which animated the early Tractarian party in the Church of England, a conviction that the whole ecclesiastical system with which their spiritual interests were bound up fell short of the ideal of sanctity essential to it as a Divine institution. But no scheme of reform had any chance of success so long as the palace of the kings stood hard by the Temple, with only a wall between them. The opportunity for reconstruction came with the Exile, and one of the leading principles of the reformed Temple is that here enunciated by Ezekiel, that no "alien uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh" shall henceforth enter the sanctuary.

In order to prevent a recurrence of these abuses Ezekiel ordains that for the future the functions of the Temple guard and other menial offices shall be discharged by the Levites who had hitherto acted as priests of the idolatrous shrines throughout the kingdom ([Eze 44:11-14](#)). This singular enactment becomes at once intelligible when we understand the peculiar circumstances brought about by the enforcement of the Deuteronomic Law in the reformation of the year 621. Let us once more recall the fact that the chief object of that reformation was to do away with all the provincial sanctuaries and to concentrate the worship of the nation in the Temple at Jerusalem. It is obvious that by this measure the priests of the local sanctuaries were deprived of their means of livelihood. The rule that they who serve the altar shall live by the altar applied equally to the priests of the high places and to those in the Temple at Jerusalem. All the priests indeed throughout the country were members of a landless caste or tribe; the Levites had no portion or inheritance like the other tribes, but subsisted on the offerings of the worshippers at the various shrines where they ministered. Now the law of Deuteronomy recognises the principle of compensation for the vested interests that were thus abolished. Two alternatives were offered to the Levites of the high places: they might either remain in the villages or townships where they were known, or they might proceed to the central sanctuary and obtain admission to the ranks of the priesthood there. In the former case, the Lawgiver commends them earnestly, along with other destitute members of the community, to the charity of their well-to-do fellow townsmen and neighbours. If, on the other hand, they elected to try their fortunes in the Temple at Jerusalem, he secures their full priestly status and equal rights with their brethren who regularly officiated there. On this point the legislation is quite explicit. Any Levite from any district of Israel who came of his own free will to the place which Jehovah had chosen might minister in the name of Jehovah his God, as all his brethren the Levites did who stood there before Jehovah, and have like portions to eat. {[Deu 18:6-8](#)} In this matter, however, the humane intention of the law was partly frustrated by the exclusiveness of the priests who were already in possession of the sacred offices in the Temple. The Levites who were brought up from the provinces to Jerusalem were allowed their proper share of the priestly dues, but were not permitted to officiate at the altar. It is not probable that a large number of the provincial Levites availed themselves of this grudging provision for their maintenance. In the idolatrous reaction which set in after the death of Josiah the worship of the high places was revived, and the great body of the Levites would naturally be favourable to the reestablishment of the old order of things with which their professional interests were identified. Still, there would be a certain number who for conscientious motives attached themselves to the movement for a purer and stricter conception of the worship of Jehovah, and were willing to submit to the irksome conditions which this movement imposed on them. They might hope for a time when the generous provisions of the Deuteronomic Code would be applied to them; but their position in the meantime was both precarious and humiliating. They had to bear the doom pronounced long ago on the sinful house of Eli: "Every one that is left in thine house shall come and bow down to him (the high priest of the line of Zadok) for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread, and shall say, Thrust me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a morsel of bread." {[1Sa 2:36](#)}

We see thus that Ezekiel's legislation on the subject of the Levites starts from a state of things created by Josiah's reformation, and, let us remember, a state of things with which the prophet was familiar in his earlier days when he was himself a priest in the Temple. On the whole he justifies the exclusive attitude of the Temple priesthood towards the newcomers, and carries forward the application of the idea of sanctity from the point where it had been left by the law of Deuteronomy. That law recognises no sacerdotal distinctions within the ranks of the priesthood. Its regular designation of the priests of the Temple is "the priests, the Levites"; that of the provincial priests is simply "the Levites." All priests are brethren, all belong to the same tribe of Levi; and it is assumed, as we have seen, that any Levite, whatever his antecedents, is qualified for the full privileges of the priesthood in the central sanctuary if he choose to claim them. But we have also seen that the distinction emerged as a consequence of the enforcement of the fundamental law of the single sanctuary. There came to be a class of Levites in the Temple whose position was at first indeterminate. They themselves claimed the full standing of the priesthood, and they could appeal in support of their claim to the authority of the Deuteronomic legislation. But the claim was never conceded in practice, the influence of the legitimate Temple priests being strong enough to exclude them from the supreme privilege of ministering at the altar. This state of things could not continue. Either the disparity of the two orders must be effaced by the admission of the Levites to a footing of equality with the other priests, or else it must be emphasised and based on some higher principle than the jealousy of a close corporation for its traditional rights. Now such a principle is supplied by the section of Ezekiel's

vision with which we are dealing. The permanent exclusion of the Levites from the priesthood is founded on the unassailable moral ground that they had forfeited their rights by their unfaithfulness to the fundamental truths of the national religion. They had been a "stumbling-block of iniquity" to the house of Israel through their disloyalty to Jehovah's cause during the long period of national apostasy, when they lent themselves to the popular inclination towards impure and idolatrous worship. For this great betrayal of their trust they must bear the guilt and shame in their degradation to the lowest offices in the service of the new sanctuary. They are to fill the place formerly occupied by uncircumcised foreigners, as keepers of the gates and servants of the house and the worshipping congregation; but they may not draw near to Jehovah in the exercise of priestly prerogatives, nor put their hands to the most holy things. The priesthood of the new Temple is finally vested in the "sons of Zadok"-i.e., the body of Levitical priests who had ministered in the Temple since its foundation by Solomon. Whatever the faults of these Zadokites had been-and Ezekiel certainly does not judge them leniently {Cf. [Eze 22:26](#)} - they had at least steadfastly maintained the ideal of a central sanctuary, and in comparison with the rural clergy they were doubtless a purer and better-disciplined body. The judgment is only a relative one, as all class judgments necessarily are. There must have been individual Zadokites worse than an ordinary Levite from the country, as well as individual Levites who were superior to the average Temple priest. But if it was necessary that in the future the interest of religion should be mainly confided to a priesthood, there could be no question that as a class the old priestly aristocracy of the central sanctuary were those best qualified for spiritual leadership.

In Ezekiel's vision we thus seem to find the beginning of a statutory and official distinction between priests and Levites. This fact forms one of the arguments chiefly relied on by those who hold that the book of Ezekiel precedes the introduction of the Priestly Code of the Pentateuch. Two things, indeed, appear to be clearly established. In the first place the tendency and significance of Ezekiel's legislation are adequately explained by the historical situation that existed in the generation immediately preceding the Exile. In the second place the Mosaic books, apart from Deuteronomy, had no influence on the scheme propounded in the vision. It is felt that these results are difficult to reconcile with the view that the middle books of the Pentateuch were known to the prophet as part of a divinely ordained constitution for the Israelite theocracy. We should have expected in that case that the prophet would simply have fallen back on the provisions of the earlier legislation, where the division between priests and Levites is formulated with perfect clearness and precision. Or, looking at the matter from the divine point of view, we should have expected that the revelation given to Ezekiel would endorse the principles of the revelation that had already been given. It is equally hard to suppose that any existing law should have been unknown to Ezekiel, or to suggest a reason for his ignoring it if it was known. The facts that have come before us seem thus, so far as they go, to be in favour of the theory that Ezekiel stands midway between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code, and that the final codification and promulgation of the latter took place after his time.

*It is nearer our purpose, however, to note the probable effect of these regulations on the personnel of the second Temple. In the book of Ezra we are told that in the first colony of returning exiles there were four thousand two hundred and eighty-nine priests and only seventy-four Levites. {[Ezr 2:36-40](#)} One man in every ten was a priest, and the total number was probably in excess of the requirements of a fully equipped Temple.*

The number of Levites, on the other hand, would have been quite insufficient for the duties required of them under the new arrangements, had there not been a contingent of nearly four hundred of the old Temple servants to supply their lack of service. {[Ezr 2:58](#)} Again, when Ezra came up from Babylon in the year 458, we find that not a single Levite volunteered to accompany him. It was only after some negotiations that about forty Levites were induced to go up with him to Jerusalem; and again they were far outnumbered by the Nethinim or Temple slaves. {[Ezr 8:15-20](#)} These figures cannot possibly represent the proportionate strength of the tribe of Levi under the old monarchy. They indicate unmistakably that there was a great reluctance on the part of the Levites to share the perils and glory of the founding of the new Jerusalem. Is it not probable that the new conditions laid down by Ezekiel's legislation were the cause of this reluctance? That, in short, the prospect of being servants in a Temple where they had once claimed to be priests was not sufficiently attractive to the majority to lead them to break up their comfortable homes in exile, and take their proper place in the ranks of those who were forming the new community of Israel? And ought we not to spare a moment's admiration even at this distance of time for the public-spirited few who in self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of God willingly accepted a position which was scorned by the great mass of their tribesmen? If this was their spirit, they had their reward. Although the position of a Levite was at first a symbol of inferiority and degradation, it ultimately became one of very great honour. When the Temple service was fully organised, the Levites were a large and important order, second in dignity in the community only to the priests. Their ranks were swelled by the incorporation of the Temple musicians, as well as other functionaries; and thus the Levites are forever associated in our minds with the magnificent service of praise which was the chief glory of the second Temple.

## II.

The remainder of the forty-fourth chapter lays down the rules of ceremonial holiness to be observed by the priests, the duties they have to perform towards the community, and the provision to be made for their maintenance. A few words must here suffice on each of these topics.

1. The sanctity of the priests is denoted, first of all, by the obligation to wear special linen garments when they enter the inner court, which is the sphere of their peculiar ministrations. Vestries were provided, as we have seen from the description of the Temple, between the inner and outer courts, where these garments were to be put on and off as the priests passed to and from the discharge of their sacred duties. The general idea underlying this regulation is too obvious to require explanation. It is but an application of the fundamental principle that approach to the Deity, or entrance into a place sanctified by His presence, demands a condition of ceremonial purity which cannot be maintained and must not be imitated by persons of a lower degree of religious privilege. A strange but very suggestive extension of the principle is found in the injunction to put off the garments before going into the outer court, lest the ordinary worshipper should be sanctified by chance contact with them. That both holiness and uncleanness are propagated by contagion is of the very essence of the ancient idea of sanctity; but the remarkable thing is that in some circumstances communicated holiness is as much to be dreaded as communicated uncleanness. It is not said what would be the fate of an Israelite who should by chance touch the sacred vestments, but evidently he must be disqualified for participation in worship until he had purged himself of his illegitimate sanctity.

In the next place the priests are under certain permanent obligations with regard to signs of mourning, marriage, and contact with death, which again are the mark of the peculiar sanctity of their caste. The rules as to mourning-prohibition of shaving the head and letting the hair flow dishevelled {Cf. [Eze 24:17](#); [Lev 10:5](#); [Lev 21:5](#); [Lev 21:10](#)} -have been thought to be directed against heathen customs arising out of the worship of the dead. In marriage the priest may only take a virgin of the house of Israel or the widow of a priest. And only in the case of his nearest relatives-parent, child, brother, and unmarried sister-may he defile himself by rendering the last offices to the departed, and even these exceptions involve exclusion from the sacred office for seven days.

The relations of these requirements to the corresponding parts of the Levitical law are somewhat complicated. The great point of difference is that Ezekiel knows nothing of the unique privileges and sanctity of the high priest. It might seem at first sight as if this implied a deliberate departure from the known usage of the first Temple. It is certain that there were high priests under the monarchy, and indeed we can discover the rudiments of a hierarchy in a distribution of authority between the high priest, second priest, keepers of the threshold, and chief officers of the house. {Cf. [2Ki 12:11](#); [2Ki 13:14](#); [2Ki 25:18](#) [Jer 20:1](#)} But the silence of Ezekiel does not necessarily mean that he contemplated any innovation on the established order of things. The historical books afford no ground for supposing that the high priest in the old Temple had a religious standing distinguished from that of his colleagues. He was *primus inter pares*, the president of the priestly college and the supreme authority in the internal administration of the Temple affairs, but probably nothing more. Such an office was almost necessary in the interest of order and authority, and there is nothing in Ezekiel's regulations inconsistent with its continuance. On the other hand, it must be admitted that his silence would be strange if he had in view the position assigned to the high priest under the law. For there the high priest is as far elevated above his colleagues as these are above the Levites. He is the concentration of all that is holy in Israel, and the sole mediator of the nearest approach to God which the symbolism of Temple worship permitted. He is bound by the strictest conditions of ceremonial sanctity, and any transgression on his part has to be atoned for by a rite similar to that required for a transgression of the whole congregation. {[Lev 4:3](#); [Lev 4:13](#); cf. [Lev 16:6](#)} The omission of this striking figure from the pages of Ezekiel makes a comparison between his enactments concerning the priesthood and those of the law difficult and in some degree uncertain. Nevertheless there are points both of likeness and contrast which cannot escape observation. Thus the laws of this chapter on defilement by a dead body are identical with those enjoined in [Lev 21:1-3](#) (the "Law of Holiness") for ordinary priests; while the high priest is there forbidden to touch any dead body whatsoever. On the other hand Ezekiel's regulations as to priestly marriages seem as it were to strike an average between the restrictions imposed in the law on ordinary priests and those binding on the high priest. The former may marry any woman that is not violated or a harlot or a divorced wife; but the high priest is forbidden to marry any one but a virgin of his own people. Again, the priestly garments, according to [Exo 28:39-42](#); [Exo 39:27](#), are made partly of linen and partly of *byssus* (? cotton), which certainly looks like a refinement on the simpler attire prescribed by Ezekiel. But it is impossible to pursue this subject further here.

2. The duties of the priests towards the people are few, but exceedingly important. In the first place they have to instruct the people in the distinctions between the holy and the profane and between the clean and the unclean. It will not be supposed that this instruction took the form of set lectures or homilies on the principles of ceremonial religion. The verb translated "teach" in [Eze 44:23](#) means to give an authoritative decision in a special case; and this had always been the form of priestly instruction in Israel. The subject of the teaching was of the utmost importance for a community whose whole life was regulated by the idea of holiness in the ceremonial sense. To preserve the land in a state of purity befitting the dwelling-place of Jehovah required the most scrupulous care on the part of all its inhabitants; and in practice difficult questions would constantly occur which could only be settled by an appeal to the superior knowledge of the priest. Hence Ezekiel contemplates a perpetuation of the old ritual Torah or direction of the priests even in the ideal state of things to which his vision looks forward. Although the people are assumed to be all righteous in heart and responsive to the will of Jehovah, yet they could not all have the professional knowledge of ritual laws which was necessary to guide them on all occasions, and errors of inadvertence were unavoidable. Jeremiah could look forward to a time when none should teach his neighbour or his brother, saying, Know Jehovah, because the religion which consists in spiritual emotions and affections becomes the independent possession of every one who is the subject of saving grace. But Ezekiel, from his point of view, could not anticipate a time

when all the Lord's people should be priests; for ritual is essentially an affair of tradition and technique, and can only be maintained by a class of experts specially trained for their office. Ritualism and sacerdotalism are natural allies; and it is not wholly accidental that the great ritualistic Churches of Christendom are those organised on the sacerdotal principle.

But, secondly, the priests have to act as judges or arbitrators in cases of disagreement between man and man ([Eze 44:24](#)). This again was an important department of priestly Torah in ancient Israel, the origin of which went back to the personal legislation of Moses in the wilderness. ([Exo 18:25](#) ff) Cases too hard for human judgment were referred to the decision of God at the sanctuary, and the judgment was conveyed through the agency of the priest. It is impossible to overestimate the service thus rendered by the priesthood to the cause of religion in Israel; and Hosea bitterly complains of the defection of the priests from the Torah of their God as the source of the widespread moral corruption of his time. ([Hos 4:6](#)) In the book of Deuteronomy the Levitical priests of the central sanctuary are associated with the civil magistrate as a court of ultimate appeal in matters of controversy that arise within the community; and this is by no means a tribute to the superior legal acumen of the clerical mind, but a reassertion of the old principle that the priest is the mouthpiece of Jehovah's judgment. That the priests should be the sole judges in Ezekiel's ideal polity was to be expected from the high position assigned to the order generally; but there is another reason for it. We have once more to keep in mind that we are dealing with the Messianic community, when the people are anxious to do the right when they know it, and only cases of honest perplexity require to be resolved. The priests' decision had never been backed up by executive authority, and in the kingdom of God no such sanction will be necessary. By this simple judicial arrangement the ethical demands of Jehovah's holiness will be made effective in the ordinary life of the community.

Finally, the priests have complete control of public worship, and are responsible for the due observance of the festivals and for the sanctification of the Sabbath ([Eze 44:24](#)).

3. With regard to the provisions for the support of the priesthood, the old law continues in force that the priests can hold no landed property and have no possession like the other tribes of Israel ([Eze 44:28](#)). It is true that a strip of land, measuring about twenty-seven square miles, was set apart for their residence; ([2Ki 12:4-16](#)) but this was probably not to be cultivated, and at all events it is not reckoned as a possession yielding revenue for their maintenance. The priests' inheritance is Jehovah Himself, which means that they are to live on the offerings of the community presented to Jehovah at the sanctuary. In the practice of the first Temple this ancient rule appears to have been interpreted in a broad and liberal spirit, greatly to the advantage of the Zadokite priests. The Temple dues consisted partly of money payments by the worshippers; and at least the fines for ceremonial trespasses which took the place of the sin- and guilt-offerings were counted the lawful perquisites of the priests. Ezekiel knows nothing of this system; and if it remained in force down to his time, he undoubtedly meant to abolish it. The tribute of the sanctuary is to be paid wholly in kind, and out of this the priests are to receive a stated allowance. In the first place those sacrifices which are wholly made over to the Deity, and yet are not consumed on the altar, have to be eaten by the priests in a holy place. These are the meal-offering, the sin-offering, and the guilt-offering, of which more hereafter. For precisely the same reason all that is *herem*-i.e., "devoted" irrevocably to Jehovah-becomes the possession of the priests, His representatives, except in the cases where it had to be absolutely destroyed. Besides this they have a claim to the best (an indefinite portion) of the firstfruits and "oblations" (*terumah*) brought to the sanctuary in accordance with ancient custom to be consumed by the worshipper and his friends.

These regulations are undoubtedly based on pre-exilic usages, and consequently leave much to be supplied from the people's knowledge of use and wont. They do not differ very greatly from the enumeration of the priestly dues in the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. There, as in Ezekiel, we find that the two great sources from which the priests derive their maintenance are the sacrifices and the firstfruits. The Deuteronomic Code, however, knows nothing of the special class of sacrifices called sin- and guilt-offerings, but simply assigns to the priest certain portions of each victim, ([Deu 18:3](#)) except of course the burnt-offerings, which were consumed entire on the altar. The priest's share of natural produce is the "best" of corn, new wine, oil, and wool, ([Deu 18:4](#)) and would be selected as a matter of course from the tithe and *terumah* brought to the sanctuary; so that on this point there is practically complete agreement between Ezekiel and Deuteronomy. On the other hand the differences of the Levitical legislation are considerable, and all in the direction of a fuller provision for the Temple establishment. Such an increased provision was called for by the peculiar circumstances of the second Temple. The revenue of the sanctuary obviously depended on the size and prosperity of the constituency to which it ministered. The stipulations of [Deu 18:1-22](#), were no doubt sufficient for the maintenance of the priesthood in the old kingdom of Judah; and similarly those of Ezekiel's legislation would amply suffice in the ideal condition of the people and land presupposed by the vision. But neither could have been adequate for the support of a costly ritual in a small community like that which returned from Babylon, where one man in ten was a priest. Accordingly we find that the arrangements made under Nehemiah for the endowment of the Temple ministry are conformed to the extended provisions of the Priestly Code. ([Neh 10:32-39](#))

In conclusion, let us briefly consider the significance of this great institution of the priesthood in Ezekiel's scheme of an ideal theocracy. It would of course be an utter mistake to suppose that the prophet is merely legislating in the interests of the sacerdotal order to which he himself belonged. It was necessary for him to insist on the peculiar sanctity and privileges of the priests, and to draw a sharp line of division between them and ordinary members of the community. But he does this, not in



the interest of a privileged caste within the nation, but in the interest of a religious ideal which embraced priests and people alike and had to be realised in the life of the nation as a whole. That ideal is expressed by the word "holiness," and we have already seen how the idea of holiness demanded ceremonial conditions of immediate access to Jehovah's presence which the ordinary Israelite could not observe. But "exclusion" could not possibly be the last word of a religion which seeks to bring men into fellowship with God. Access to God might be hedged about by restrictions and conditions of the most onerous kind, but access there must be if worship was to have any meaning and value for the nation or the individual. Although the worshipper might not himself lay his victim on the altar, he must at least be permitted to offer his gift and receive the assurance that it was accepted. If the priest stood between him and God, it was not merely to separate but also to mediate between them, and through the fulfilment of superior conditions of holiness to establish a communication between him and the holy Being whose face he sought. Hence the great function of the priesthood in the theocracy is to maintain the intercourse between Jehovah and Israel which was exhibited in the Temple ritual by acts of sacrificial worship.

Now it is manifest that this system of ideas rests on the representative character of the priestly office. If the principal idea symbolised in the sanctuary is that of holiness through separation, the fundamental idea of priesthood is holiness through representation. It is the holiness of Israel, concentrated in the priesthood, which qualifies the latter for entrance within the inner circle of the divine presence. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the presence of Jehovah first sanctifies the priests in an eminent degree, and then through them, though in a less degree, the whole body of the people. The idea of national solidarity was too deeply rooted in the Hebrew consciousness to admit of any other interpretation of the priesthood than this. The Israelite did not need to be told that his standing before God was secured by his membership in the religious community on whose behalf the priests ministered at the altar and before the Temple. It would not occur to him to think of his personal exclusion from the most sacred offices as a religious disability; it was enough for him to know that the nation to which he belonged was admitted to the presence of Jehovah in the persons of its representatives, and that he as an individual shared in the blessings which accrued to Israel through the privileged ministry of the priests. Thus to a Temple poet of a later age than Ezekiel's the figure of the high priest supplies a striking image of the communion of saints and the blessing of Jehovah resting on the whole people:-

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
That they who are brethren should also dwell together!  
Like the precious oil on the head,  
That flows down on the beard,  
The beard of Aaron,  
That flows down on the hem of his garments-  
Like the Hermon-dew that descends on the hills of Zion  
For there hath Jehovah ordained the blessing,  
Life for evermore." {Psa 133:1-3}

#### **EZEKIEL 45-46**

**Ezekiel 45:1-25, Ezekiel 46:1-24**

#### **PRINCE AND PEOPLE**

Eze 44:1-31; Eze 45:1-25; Eze 46:1-24, PASSIM

*It was remarked in a previous chapter that the "prince" of the closing vision appears to occupy a less exalted position than the Messianic king of chapter 34 or chapter 37. The grounds on which this impression rests require, however, to be carefully considered, if we are not to carry away a thoroughly false conception of the theocratic state foreshadowed by Ezekiel. It must not be supposed that the prince is a personage of less than royal rank, or that his authority is overshadowed by that of a priestly caste. He is undoubtedly the civil head of the nation, owing no allegiance within his own province to any earthly superior. Nor is there any reason to doubt that he is the heir of the Davidic house and holds his office in virtue of the divine promise which secured the throne to David's descendants. It would therefore be a mistake to imagine that we have here an anticipation of the Romish theory of the subordination of the secular to the spiritual power. It may be true that in the state of things presupposed by the vision very little is left for the king to do, whilst a variety of important duties falls to the priesthood; but at all events the king is there and is supreme in his own sphere. Ezekiel does not show the road to Canossa. If the king is overshadowed, it is by the personal presence of Jehovah in the midst of His people; and that which limits his prerogative is not the sacerdotal power, but the divine constitution of the theocracy as revealed in the vision itself, under which both king and priests have their functions defined and regulated with a view to the religious ends for which the community as a whole exists.*

Our purpose in the present chapter is to put together the scattered references to the duties of the prince which occur in chapters 44-46 so as to gain as clear a picture as possible of the position of the monarchy in the theocratic state. It must be remembered, however, that the picture will necessarily be incomplete. National life in its secular aspects, with which the king is chiefly

concerned, is hardly touched on in the vision. Everything being looked upon from the point of view of the Temple and its worship, there are but few allusions in which we can detect anything of the nature of a civil constitution. And these few are introduced incidentally, not for their own sake, but to explain some arrangement for securing the sanctity of the land or the community. This fact must never be lost sight of in judging of Ezekiel's conception of the monarchy. From all that appears in these pages we might conclude that the prince is a mere ornamental figurehead of the constitution, and that the few real duties assigned to him could have been equally well performed by a committee of priests or laymen elected for the purpose. But this is to forget that outside the range of subjects here touched upon there is a whole world of secular interests, of political and social action, where the king has his part to play in accordance with the precedents furnished by the best days of the ancient monarchy.

Let us glance first of all at Ezekiel's institutes of the kingdom in its more political relations. The notices here are all in the form of constitutional checks and safeguards against an arbitrary and oppressive exercise of the royal authority. They are instructive, not only as showing the interest which the prophet had in good government and his care for the rights of the subject, but also for the light they cast on certain administrative methods in force previous to the Exile.

The first point that calls for attention is the provision made for the maintenance of the prince and his court. It would seem that the revenue of the prince was to be derived mainly, if not wholly, from a portion of territory reserved as his exclusive property in the division of the country among the tribes. {[Eze 45:7-8](#); [Eze 48:21-22](#)} These crown lands are situated on either side of the sacred "oblation" around the sanctuary, set apart for the use of the priests and Levites; and they extend to the sea on the west and to the Jordan Valley on the east. Out of these he is at liberty to assign a possession to his sons in perpetuity, but any estate bestowed on his courtiers reverts to the prince in the "year of liberty." The object of this last regulation apparently is to prevent the formation of a new hereditary aristocracy between the royal family and the peasantry. A life peerage, so to speak, or something less, is deemed a sufficient reward for the most devoted service to the king or the state. And no doubt the certainty of a revision of all royal grants every seventh year would tend to keep some persons mindful of their duty. The whole system of royal demesnes, which the king might dispose of as appanages for his younger children or his faithful retainers presents a curious resemblance to a well-known feature of feudalism in the Middle Ages; but it was never practically enforced in Israel. Before the Exile it was evidently unknown, and after the Exile there was no king to provide for. *But why does the prophet bestow so much care on a mere detail of a political system in which, as a whole, he takes so little interest? It is because of his concern for the rights of the common people against the high-handed tyranny of the king and his nobles.*

He recalls the bad times of the old monarchy when any man was liable to be ejected from his land for the benefit of some court favourite, or to provide a portion for a younger son of the king. The cruel evictions of the poorer peasant proprietors, which all the early prophets denounce as an outrage against humanity, and of which the story of Naboth furnished a typical example, must be rendered impossible in the new Israel; and as the king had no doubt been the principal offender in the past, the rule is firmly laid down in his case that on no pretext must he take the people's inheritance. And this, be it observed, is an application of the religious principle which underlies the constitution of the theocracy. The land is Jehovah's, and all interference with the ancient landmarks which guard the rights of private ownership is an offence against the holiness of the true divine King who has His abode amongst the tribes of Israel. This suggests developments of the idea of holiness which reach to the very foundations of social well-being. A conception of holiness which secures each man in the possession of his own vine and fig tree is at all events not open to the charge of ignoring the practical interests of common life for the sake of an unprofitable ceremonialism.

In the next place we come across a much more startling revelation of the injustice habitually practised by the Hebrew monarchs. Just as later sovereigns were wont to meet their deficits by debasing the currency, so the kings of Judah had learned to augment their revenue by a systematic falsification of weights and measures. We know from the prophet Amos {[Amo 8:5](#)} that this was a common trick of the wealthy landowners who sold grain at exorbitant prices to the poor whom they had driven from their possessions. They "made the ephah small and the shekel great, and dealt falsely with balances of deceit." But it was left for Ezekiel to tell us that the same fraud was a regular part of the fiscal system of the Judaeen kingdom. There is no mistaking the meaning of his accusation: "Have done, O princes of Israel, with your violent and oppressive rule; execute judgment and justice, and take away your exactions from My people, saith Jehovah God. Ye shall have just balances, and a just ephah, and a just bath." That is to say, the taxes were surreptitiously increased by the use of a large shekel (for weighing out money payments) and a large bath and ephah (for measuring tribute paid in kind). And if it was impossible for the poor to protect themselves against the rapacity of private dealers, poor and rich alike were helpless when the fraud was openly practised in the king's name. This Ezekiel had seen with his own eyes, and the shameful injustice of it was so branded on his spirit that even in a vision of the late days it comes back to him as an evil to be sedulously guarded against. It was eminently a case for legislation. If there was to be such a thing as fair dealing and commercial probity in the community, the system of weights and measurement must be fixed beyond the power of the royal caprice to alter it. It was as sacred as any principle of the constitution. Accordingly he finds a place in his legislation for a corrected scale of weights and measures, restored no doubt to their original values. The ephah for dry measure and the bath or liquid measure are each fixed at the tenth part of a homer. "The shekel shall be twenty geras: five shekels shall be five, and ten shekels shall be ten, and fifty shekels shall be your maneh." {[Eze 45:12](#)}

These regulations extend far beyond the immediate object for which they are introduced, and have both a moral and a religious bearing. They express a truth often insisted on in the Old Testament, that commercial morality is a matter in which the holiness of Jehovah is involved: "A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah, but a just weight is His delight." {[Pro 11:1](#)} In the Law of Holiness an ordinance very similar to Ezekiel's occurs amongst the conditions by which the precept is to be fulfilled: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." {[Lev 19:35-36](#)} It is evident that the Israelites had learned to regard with a religious abhorrence all tampering with the fixed standards of value on which the purity of commercial life depended. To overreach by lying words was a sin: but to cheat by the use of a false balance was a species of profanity comparable to a false oath in the name of Jehovah.

These rules about weights and measures required, however, to be supplemented by a fixed tariff, regulating the taxes which the prince might impose on the people. {[Eze 45:13-17](#)} It is not quite clear whether any part of the prince's own income was to be derived from taxation. The tribute is called an "oblation," and there is no doubt that it was intended principally for the support of the Temple ritual, which in any case must have been the heaviest charge on the royal exchequer. But the oblation was rendered to the prince in the first instance; and the prophet's anxiety to prevent unjust exactions springs from a fear that the king might make the Temple tax a pretext for increasing his own revenue. At all events the people's duty to contribute to the support of public ordinances according to their ability is here explicitly recognised. Compared with the provision of the Levitical law the scale of charges here proposed must be pronounced extremely moderate. The contribution of each householder varies from one-sixtieth to one-two-hundredth of his income, and is wholly paid in kind. The proper equivalent under the second Temple of Ezekiel's "oblation" was a poll-tax of one-third of a shekel, voluntarily undertaken at the time of Nehemiah's covenant "for the service of the house of our God; for the shew-bread and for the continual meal-offering, and for the continual burnt-offering, of the Sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin-offerings to make atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God." {[Neh 10:32-33](#) : cf. [Eze 45:15](#)} In the Priestly Code this tax is fixed at half a shekel for each man. But in addition to this money payment the law required a tenth of all produce of the soil and the flock to be given to the priests and Levites. In Ezekiel's legislation the tithes and firstfruits are still left for the use of the owner, who is expected to consume them in sacrificial feasts at the sanctuary. The only charge, therefore, of the nature of a fixed tribute for religious purposes is the oblation here required for the regular sacrifices which represent the stated worship rendered on behalf of the community as a whole.

This brings us now to the more important aspect of the kingly office-its religious privileges and duties. Here there are three points which require to be noticed.

1. In the first place it is the duty of the prince to supply the material of the public sacrifices offered in the name of the people. {[Eze 45:17](#)} Out of the tribute levied on the people for this purpose he has to furnish the altar with the stated number of victims for the daily service, the Sabbaths, and new moons, and the great yearly festivals. It is clear that some one must be charged with the responsibility of this important part of the worship, and it is significant of Ezekiel's relations to the past that the duty does not yet devolve directly on the priests. They seem to exercise no authority outside of the Temple, the king standing between them and the community as a sort of patron of the sanctuary. But the position of the prince is not simply that of an official receiver, collecting the tribute and then handing it over to the Temple as it was required. He is the representative of the religious unity of the nation, and in this capacity he presents in person the regular sacrifices offered on behalf of the community. Thus on the day of the Passover he presents a sin-offering for himself and the people, as the high priest does in the ceremonial of the Great Day of Atonement. And so all the sacrifices of the stated ritual are his sacrifices, officiating as the head of the nation in its acts of common worship. In this respect the prince succeeds to the rights exercised by the kings of Judah in the ritual of the first Temple, although on a different footing. Before the Exile the king had a proprietary interest in the central sanctuary, and the expense of the stated service was defrayed as a matter of course out of the royal revenues. Part of this revenue, as we see in the case of Joash, was raised by a system of Temple dues paid by the worshippers and expended on the repairs of the house; but at a much later date than this we find Ahaz assuming absolute control over the daily sacrifices, which were doubtless maintained at his expense.

Now the tendency of Ezekiel's legislation is to bring the whole community into a closer and more personal connection with the worship of the sanctuary, and to leave no part of it subject to the arbitrary will of the prince. But still the idea is preserved that the prince is the religious as well as the civil representative of the nation; and although he is deprived of all control over the performance of the ritual, he is still required to provide the public sacrifices and to offer them in the name of his people.

2. In virtue of his representative character the prince possesses certain privileges in his approaches to God in the sanctuary not accorded to ordinary worshippers. In this connection it is necessary to explain some details regulating the use of the sanctuary by the people. *The outer court might be entered by prince or people either through the north or south gate, but not from the east. The eastern gate was that by which Jehovah had entered His dwelling-place, and the doors of it are forever closed. No foot might cross its threshold.* But the prince-and this is one of his peculiar rights-might enter the gateway from the court to eat his sacrificial meals. It seems therefore to have served the same purpose for the prince as the thirty cells along the wall did for common worshippers. The east gate of the inner court was also shut, as a rule, and was probably never used as a passage

even by the priests. But on the Sabbaths and new moons it was thrown open to receive the sacrifices which the prince had to bring on these days, and it remained open till the evening. On days when the gate was open the worshipping congregation assembled at its door, while the prince entered as far as the threshold and looked on while the priests presented his offering; then he went out by the way he had entered. If on any other occasion he presented a voluntary sacrifice in his private capacity, the east gate was opened for him as before, but was shut as soon as the ceremony was over. On those occasions when the eastern gate was not opened, as at the great annual festivals, the people probably gathered round the north and south gates, from which they could see the altar; and at these seasons the prince enters and departs in the common throng of worshippers. A very peculiar regulation, for which no obvious reason appears, is that each man must leave the Temple by the gate opposite to that at which he entered; if he entered by the north, he must leave by the south, and vice versa.

Many of these arrangements were no doubt suggested by Ezekiel's acquaintance with the practice in the first Temple, and their precise object is lost to us. *But one or two facts stand out clearly enough, and are very instructive as to the whole conception of Temple worship. The chief thing to be noticed is that the principal sacrifices are representative. The people are merely spectators of a transaction with God on their behalf, the efficacy of which in no way depends on their co-operation. Standing at the gates of the inner court, they see the priests performing the sacred ministrations; they bow themselves in humble reverence before the presence of the Most High; and these acts of devotion may have been of the utmost importance for the religious life of the individual Israelite. But the congregation takes no real part in the worship; it is done for them, but not by them; it is an opus operatum performed by the prince and the priests for the good of the community, and is equally necessary and equally valid whether there is a congregation present to witness it or not. Those who attend are themselves but representatives of the nation of Israel, in whose interest the ritual is kept up. But the supreme representative of the people is the king, and we note how everything is done to emphasise his peculiar dignity within the sanctuary. It was necessary perhaps to do something to compensate for the loss of distinction caused by the exclusion of the royal body-guard from the Temple. The prince is still the one conspicuous figure in the outer court. Even his private sacrificial meals are eaten in solitary state, in the eastern gateway, which is used for no other purpose. And in the great functions where the prince appears in his representative character, he approaches nearer to the altar than is permitted to any other layman. He ascends the steps of the eastern gateway in the sight of the people, and passing through he presents his offerings on the verge of the inner court which none but the priests may enter. His whole position is thus one of great importance in the celebration of public ordinances. In detail his functions are no doubt determined by ancient prescriptive usages not known to us, but modified in accordance with the stricter ideal of holiness which Ezekiel's vision was intended to enforce.*

3. Finally, we have to observe that the prince is rigorously excluded from properly priestly offices. It is true that in some respects his position is analogous to that of the high priest under the law. But the analogy extends only to that aspect of the high priest's functions in which he appears as the head and representative of the religious community, and ceases the moment he enters upon priestly duties. So far as the special degree of sanctity which characterises the priesthood is concerned, the prince is a layman, and as such he is jealously debarred from approaching the altar, and even from intruding into the sacred inner court where the priests minister. Now this fact has perhaps a deeper historical importance than we are apt to imagine. There is good reason to believe that in the old Temple the kings of Judah frequently officiated in person at the altar. At the time when the monarchy was established it was the rule that any man might sacrifice for himself and his household, and that the king as the representative of the nation should sacrifice on its behalf was an extension of the principle too obvious to require express sanction. Accordingly we find that both Saul and David on public occasions built altars and offered sacrifice to Jehovah. The older theory indeed seems to have been that priestly rights were inherent in the kingly office, and that the acting priests were the ministers to whom the king delegated the greater part of his priestly functions. Although the king might not appoint any one to this duty without respect to the Levitical qualification, he exercised within certain limits the right of deposing one family and installing another in the priesthood of the royal sanctuary. The house of Zadok itself owed its position to such an act of ecclesiastical authority on the part of David and Solomon.

The last occasion on which we read of a king of Judah officiating in person in the Temple is at the dedication of the new altar of Ahaz, when the king not only himself sacrificed, but gave directions to the priests as to the future observance of the ritual. The occasion was no doubt unusual, but there is not a word in the narrative to indicate that the king was committing an irregular action or exceeding the recognised prerogatives of his position. It would be unsafe, however, to conclude that this state of things continued unchanged till the close of the monarchy. After the time of Isaiah the Temple rose greatly in the religious estimation of the people, and a very probable result of this would be an increasing sense of the importance of the ministration of the official priesthood. The silence of the historical books and of Deuteronomy may not count for much in an argument on this question; but Ezekiel's own decisions lack the emphasis and solemnity with which he introduces an absolute innovation like the separation between priests and Levites in chapter 44. It is at least possible that the later kings had gradually ceased to exercise the right of sacrifice, so that the privilege had lapsed through desuetude. Nevertheless it was a great step to have the principle affirmed as a fundamental law of the theocracy; and this Ezekiel undoubtedly does. If no other practical object were gained, it served at least to illustrate in the most emphatic way the idea of holiness, which demanded the exclusion of every layman from unhallowed contact with the most sacred emblems of Jehovah's presence.



It will be seen from all that has been said that the real interest of Ezekiel's treatment of the monarchy lies far apart from modern problems which might seem to have a superficial affinity with it. No lessons can fairly be deduced from it on the relations between Church and State, or the propriety of endowing and establishing the Christian religion, or the duty of rulers to maintain ordinances for the benefit of their subjects. Its importance lies in another direction. It shows the transition in Israel from a state of things in which the king is both *de jure* and *de facto* the source of power and the representative of the nation and where his religious status is the natural consequence of his civic dignity, to a very different state of things, where the forms of the ancient constitution are retained although the power has largely vanished from them. The prince now requires to have his religious duties imposed on him by an abstract political system whose sole sanction is the authority of the Deity. It is a transition which has no precise parallel anywhere else, although resemblances more or less instructive might doubtless be instanced from the history of Catholicism. Nowhere does Ezekiel's idealism appear more wonderfully blended with his equally characteristic conservatism than here. There is no real trace of the tendency attributed to the prophet to exalt the priesthood at the expense of the monarchy. *The prince is after all a much more imposing personage even in the ceremonial worship than any priest. Although he lacks the priestly quality of holiness, his duties are quite as important as those of the priests, while his dignity is far greater than theirs. The considerations that enter in to limit his power and importance come from another quarter. They are such as these: first, the loss of military leadership, which is at least to be presumed in the circumstances of the Messianic kingdom; second, the welfare of the people at large; and third, the principle of holiness, whose supremacy has to be vindicated in the person of the king no less than in that of his meanest subject.*

Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that the transition referred to was not actually accomplished even in the history of Israel itself. It was only in a vision that the monarchy was ever to be represented in the form which it bears here. From the time of Ezekiel no native king was ever to rule over Israel again save the priest-princes of the Asmonean dynasty, whose constitutional position was defined by their high-priestly dignity. Ezekiel's vision is therefore a preparation for the kingless state of post-exilic Judaism. The foreign potentates to whom the Jews were subject did in some instances provide materials for the Temple worship, but their local representatives were of course unqualified to fill the position assigned to the prince by the great prophet of the Exile. The community had to get along as best it could without a king, and the task was not difficult. The Temple dues were paid directly to the priests and Levites, and the function of representing the community before the altar was assigned to the High Priest. It was then indeed that the High Priesthood came to the front and blossomed out into all the magnificence of its legal position. It was not only the religious part of the prince's duties that fell to it, but a considerable share of his political importance as well. As the only hereditary institution that had survived the Exile, it naturally became the chief centre of social order in the community. By degrees the Persian and Greek kings found it expedient to deal with the Jews through the High Priest, whose authority they were bound to respect, and thus to leave him a free hand in the internal affairs of the commonwealth. The High Priesthood, in fact, was a civil as well as a priestly dignity. We can see that this great revolution would have broken the continuity of Hebrew history far more violently than it did but for the stepping-stone furnished by the ideal "prince" of Ezekiel's vision.

### THE RITUAL

Eze 45:1-25; Eze 46:1-24

*It is difficult to go back in imagination to a time when sacrifice was the sole and sufficient form of every complete act of worship. That the slaughter of an animal, or at least the presentation of a material offering of some sort, should ever have been considered of the essence of intercourse with the Deity may seem to us incredible in the light of the idea of God which we now possess. Yet there can be no doubt that there was a stage of religious development which recognised no true approach to God except as consummated in a sacrificial action. The word "sacrifice" itself preserves a memorial of this crude and early type of religious service. Etymologically it denotes nothing more than a sacred act.* But amongst the Romans, as amongst ourselves, it was regularly applied to the offerings at the altar, which were thus marked out as the sacred actions *par excellence* of religion. It would be impossible to explain the extraordinary persistence and vitality of the institution amongst races that had attained a relatively high degree of civilisation, unless we understand that the ideas connected with it go back to a time when sacrifice was the typical and fundamental form of primitive worship.

By the time of Ezekiel, however, the age of sacrifice in this strict and absolute sense may be said to have passed away, at least in principle. Devout Jews who had lived through the captivity in Babylon and found that Jehovah was there to them "a little of a sanctuary," {Eze 11:16} could not possibly fall back into the belief that their God was only to be approached and found through the ritual of the altar. And long before the Exile, the ethical teaching of the prophets had led Israel to appreciate the external rites of sacrifice at their true value.

*"Wherewithal shall I come before Jehovah, Or bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, With calves of a year old? Is Jehovah pleased with thousands of rams, With myriads of rivers of oil?"*

*"Shall I give my firstborn as an atonement for me, The fruit of my body as a sin-offering for my life? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; And what does Jehovah require of thee, But to do justice and to love mercy, And to walk humbly with thy God?" {Eze 11:16 Mic 6:6-8}*

This great word of spiritual religion had been uttered long before Ezekiel, as a protest against the senseless multiplication of sacrifices which came in in the reign of Manasseh. Nor can we suppose that Ezekiel, with all his engrossment in matters of ritual, was insensible to the lofty teaching of his predecessors, or that his conception of God was less spiritual than theirs. As a matter of fact the worship of Israel was never afterwards wholly absorbed in the routine of the Temple ceremonies. The institution of the synagogue, with its purely devotional exercises of prayer and reading of the Scriptures, must have been nearly coeval with the second Temple, and prepared the way far more than the latter for the spiritual worship of the New Testament. *But even the Temple worship was spiritualised by the service of praise and the marvellous development of devotional poetry which it called forth. "The emotion with which the worshipper approaches the second Temple, as recorded in the Psalter, has little to do with sacrifice, but rests rather on the fact that the whole wondrous history of Jehovah's grace to Israel is vividly and personally realised as he stands amidst the festal crowd at the ancient seat of God's throne, and adds his voice to the swelling song of praise."*

How then, it may be asked, are we to account for the fact that the prophet shows such intense interest in the details of a system which was already losing its religious significance? If sacrifice was no longer of the essence of worship, why should he be so careful to legislate for a scheme of ritual in which sacrifice is the prominent feature, and say nothing of the inward state of heart which alone is an acceptable offering to God? The chief reason no doubt is that the ritual elements of religion were the only matters, apart from moral duties, which admitted of being reduced to a legal system, and that the formation of such a system was demanded by the circumstances with which the prophet had to deal. The time was not yet come when the principle of a central national sanctuary could be abandoned, and if such a sanctuary was to be maintained without danger to the highest interests of religion it was necessary that its service should be regulated with a view to preserve the deposit of revealed truth that had 'been committed to the nation through the prophets. The essential features of the sacrificial institutions were charged with a deep religious significance, and there existed in the popular mind a great mass of sound religious impression and sentiment clustering around that central rite. To dispense with the institution of sacrifice would have rendered worship entirely impossible for the great body of the people, while to leave it unregulated was to invite a recurrence of the abuses which had been so fruitful a source of corruption in the past. Hence the object of the ritual ordinances which we are about to consider is twofold: in the first place to provide an authorised code of ritual free from everything that savoured of pagan usages, and in the second to utilise the public worship as a means of deepening and purifying the religious conceptions of those who could be influenced in no other way. Ezekiel's legislation has a special regard for the wants of the "common rude man" whose religious life needs all the help it can get from external observances. Such persons form the majority of every religious society; and to train their minds to a deeper sense of sin and a more vivid apprehension of the divine holiness proved to be the only way in which the spiritual teaching of the prophets could be made a practical power in the community at large. It is true that the highest spiritual needs were not satisfied by the legal ritual. But the irrepressible longings of the soul for nearer fellowship with God cannot be dealt with by rigid formal enactments. Ezekiel is content to leave them to the guidance of that Spirit whose saving operations will have changed the heart of Israel and made it a true people of God. The system of external observances which he foreshadows in his vision was not meant to be the life of religion, but it was, so to speak, the trellis-work which was necessary to support the delicate tendrils of spiritual piety until the time when the spirit of filial worship should be the possession of every true member of the Church of God.

Bearing these facts in mind, we may now proceed to examine the scheme of sacrificial worship contained in chapters 45 and 46. Only its leading features can here be noticed, and the points most deserving of attention may be grouped under three heads: the Festivals, the Representative Service, and the Idea of Atonement.

## I. THE YEARLY FEASTS

The most striking thing in Ezekiel's festal calendar {Eze 45:18-23} is the division of the ecclesiastical year into two precisely similar parts. Each half of the year commences with an atoning sacrifice for the purification of the sanctuary from defilement contracted during the previous half. Each contains a great festival-in the one case the Passover, beginning on the fourteenth day of the first month and lasting seven days, and in the other the Feast of Tabernacles (simply called the Feast), beginning on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and also lasting for seven days. The passage is chiefly devoted to a minute regulation of the public sacrifices to be offered on these occasions, other and more characteristic features of the celebration being assumed as well known from tradition.

It is difficult to see what is the precise meaning of the proposed rearrangement of the feasts in two parallel series. It may be due simply to the prophet's love of symmetry in all departments of public life, or it may have been suggested by the fact that at *this time the Babylonian calendar, according to which the year begins in spring, was superimposed on the old Hebrew year commencing in the autumn.* At all events it involved a breach with pre-exilic tradition, and was never carried out in practice. *The earlier legislation of the Pentateuch recognises a cycle of three festivals-Passover and Unleavened Bread, the Feast of*

*Harvest or of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering or of Tabernacles.* In order to carry through his symmetrical division of the sacred year Ezekiel has to ignore one of these, the Feast of Pentecost, which seems to have always been counted the least important of the three. It is not to be supposed that he contemplated its abolition, for he is careful not to alter in any particular the positive regulations of Deuteronomy; only it did not fall into his scheme, and so he does not think it of sufficient importance to prescribe regular public sacrifices for it. After the Exile, however, Jewish practice was regulated by the canons of the Priestly Code, in which, along with other festivals, the ancient threefold cycle is continued, and stated sacrifices are prescribed for Pentecost, just as for the other two. *Similarly, the two atoning ceremonies in the beginning of the first and seventh months, which are not mentioned in the older legislation, are replaced in the Priests' Code by the single Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month, whilst the beginning of the year is celebrated by the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the same month.* {Cf. Lev 23:23-32; Num 29:1-11}

But although the details of Ezekiel's system thus proved to be impracticable in the circumstances of the restored Jewish community, it succeeded in the far more important object of infusing a new spirit into the celebration of the feasts, and impressing on them a different character. The ancient Hebrew festivals were all associated with joyous incidents of the agricultural year. *The Feast of Unleavened Bread marked the beginning of harvest, when "the sickle first was put into the corn." At this time also the firstlings of the flock and herd were sacrificed. The seven weeks which elapse till Pentecost are the season of the cereal harvest, which is then brought to a close by the Feast of Harvest, when the goodness of Jehovah is acknowledged by the presentation of part of the produce at the sanctuary. Finally the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates the most joyous occasion of the year, the storing of the produce of the winepress and the threshing-floor.* {Deu 16:13} The nature of the festivals is easily seen from the events with which they are thus associated. They are occasions of social mirth and festivity, and the religious rites observed are the expressions of the nation's heartfelt gratitude to Jehovah for the blessing that has rested on the labours of husbandman and shepherd throughout the year. The Passover with its memories of anxiety and escape was no doubt of a more sombre character than the others, but the joyous and festive nature of Pentecost and Tabernacles is strongly insisted on in the book of Deuteronomy. By these institutions religion was closely intertwined with the great interests of everyday life, and the fact that the sacred seasons of the Israelites' year were the occasions on which the natural joy of life was at its fullest, bears witness to the simpleminded piety which was fostered by the old Hebrew worship. *There was, however, a danger that in such a state of things religion should be altogether lost sight of in the exuberance of natural hilarity and expressions of social good-will. And indeed no great height of spirituality could be nourished by a type of worship in which devotional feeling was concentrated on the expression of gratitude to God for the bountiful gifts of His providence. It was good for the childhood of the nation, but when the nation became a man it must put away childish things.*

The tendency of the post-exilic ritual was to detach the sacred seasons more and more from the secular associations which had once been their chief significance. This was done partly by the addition of new festivals which had no such natural occasion, and partly by a change in the point of view from which the older celebrations were regarded. No attempt was made to obliterate the traces of the affinity with events of common life which endeared them to the hearts of the people, but increasing importance was attached to their historic significance as memorials of Jehovah's gracious dealings with the nation in the period of the Exodus. At the same time they take on more and more the character of religious symbols of the permanent relations between Jehovah and His people. The beginnings of this process can be clearly discerned in the legislation of Ezekiel. Not indeed in the direction of a historic interpretation of the feasts, for this is ignored even in the case of the Passover, where it was already firmly established in the national consciousness. But the institution of a special series of public sacrifices, which was the same for the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, and particularly the prominence given to the sin-offering, obviously tended to draw the mind of the people away from the passing interest of the occasion, and fix it on those standing obligations imposed by the holiness of Jehovah on which the continuance of all His bounties depended. We cannot be mistaken in thinking that one design of the new ritual was to correct the excesses of unrestrained animal enjoyment by deepening the sense of guilt and the fear of possible offences against the sanctity of the divine presence. For it was at these festivals that the prince was required to offer the atoning sacrifice for himself and the people. Thus the effect of the whole system was to foster the sensitive and tremulous tone of piety which was characteristic of Judaism, in contrast to the hearty, if undisciplined, religion of the ancient Hebrew feasts.

## II. THE STATED SERVICE

In the course of this chapter we have had occasion more than once to touch on the prominence given in Ezekiel's vision to sacrifices offered in accordance with a fixed rubric in the name of the whole community. The significance of this fact may best be seen from a comparison with the sacrificial regulations of the book of Deuteronomy. These are not numerous, but they deal exclusively with private sacrifices. The person addressed is the individual householder, and the sacrifices which he is enjoined to render are for himself and his family. There is no explicit allusion in the whole book to the official sacrifices which were offered by the regular priesthood and maintained at the king's expense. In Ezekiel's scheme of Temple worship the case is exactly the reverse. Here there is no mention of private sacrifice except in the incidental notices as to the free-will offerings and the sacrificial meal of the prince, while on the other hand great attention is paid to the maintenance of the regular offerings provided by the prince for the congregation. This of course does not mean that there were no statutory sacrifices in the old

Temple, or that Ezekiel contemplated the cessation of private sacrifice in the new. Deuteronomy passes over the public sacrifices because they were under the jurisdiction of the king, and the people at large were not directly responsible for them; and similarly Ezekiel is silent as to private offerings because their observance was assured by all the traditions of the sanctuary. Still it is a noteworthy fact that of two codes of Temple worship, separated by only half a century, each legislates exclusively for that element of the ritual which is taken for granted by the other.

What it indicates is nothing less than a change in the ruling conception of public worship. Before the Exile the idea that Jehovah could desert His sanctuary hardly entered into the mind of the people, and certainly did not in the least affect the confidence with which they availed themselves of the privileges of worship. The Temple was there and God was present within it, and all that was necessary was that the spontaneous devotion of the worshippers should be regulated by the essential conditions of ceremonial propriety. But the destruction of the Temple had proved that the mere existence of a sanctuary was no guarantee of the favour and protection of the God who was supposed to dwell within it. Jehovah might be driven from His Temple by the presence of sin among the people, or even by a neglect of the ceremonial precautions which were necessary to guard against the profanation of His holiness. On this idea the whole edifice of the later ritual is built up, and here as in other respects Ezekiel has shown the way. In his view the validity and efficiency of the whole Temple service hangs on the due performance of the public rites which preserve the nation in a condition of sanctity and continually represent it as a holy people before God. Under cover of this representative service the individual may draw near with confidence to seek the face of his God in acts of private homage, but apart from the regular official ceremonial his worship has no reality, because he can have no assurance that Jehovah will accept his offering. His right of access to God springs from his fellowship with the religious community of Israel, and hence the indispensable presupposition of every act of worship is that the standing of the community before Jehovah be preserved intact by the rites appointed for that purpose. And, as has been already said, these rites are representative in character. Being performed on behalf of the nation, the obligation of presenting them rests with the prince in his representative capacity, and the share of the people in them is indicated by the tribute which the prince is empowered to levy for this end. In this way the ideal unity of the nation finds continual expression in the worship of the sanctuary, and the supreme interest of religion is transferred from the mere act of personal homage to the abiding conditions of acceptance with God symbolised by the stated service.

Let us now look at some details of the scheme in which this important idea is embodied. The foundation of the whole system is the daily burnt-offering - the *tamid*. Under the first Temple the daily offering seems to have been a burnt-offering in the morning and a meal-offering (*minhah*) in the evening, {[2Ki 16:15](#); cf [1Ki 18:29](#); [1Ki 18:36](#)} and this practice seems to have continued down to the time of Ezra. {[Ezr 9:5](#)} According to the Levitical law it consists of a lamb morning and evening, accompanied on each occasion by a *minhah* and a libation of wine. {[Num 28:3-8](#); [Exo 29:38-42](#)} Ezekiel's ordinance occupies a middle position between these two. Here the *tamid* is a lamb for a burnt-offering in the morning, along with a *minhah* of flour mingled with oil; and there is no provision for an evening sacrifice. {[Eze 46:14-15](#)} The presentation of this sacrifice on the altar in the morning, as the basis on which all other offerings through the day were laid, may be taken to symbolise the truth that the acceptance of all ordinary acts of worship depended on the representation of the community before God in the regular service. To the spiritual perception of a Psalmist it may have suggested the duty of commencing each day's work with an act of devotion:-

"Jehovah, in the morning shalt Thou hear my voice;  
In the morning will I set [my prayer] in order before Thee, and will look out."

The offerings for the Sabbaths and new moons may be considered as amplifications of the daily sacrifice. They consist exclusively of burnt-offerings. On the Sabbath six lambs are presented, perhaps one for each working-day of the week, together with a ram for the Sabbath itself (Smend). At the new moon feast this offering is repeated with the addition of a bullock. It may be noted here once for all that each burnt sacrifice is accompanied by a corresponding *minhah*, according to a fixed scale. For sin-offerings, on the other hand, no *minhah* seems to be appointed.

At the annual (or rather half-yearly) celebrations the sin-offering appears for the first time among the stated sacrifices. The sacrifice for the cleansing of the sanctuary at the beginning of each half of the year consists of a young bullock for a sin-offering, in addition of course to the burnt-offerings which were prescribed for the first day of the month. For the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles the daily offering is a he-goat for a sin-offering, and seven bullocks and seven rams for a burnt-offering during the week covered by these festivals. Besides this, at Passover, and probably also at Tabernacles, the prince presents a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and the people. We have now to consider more particularly the place which this class of sacrifices occupies in the ritual.

### III. ATONING SACRIFICES

It is evident, even from this short survey, that the idea of atonement holds a conspicuous place in the symbolism of Ezekiel's Temple. He is, indeed, the earliest writer (setting aside the Levitical Code) who mentions the special class of sacrifices known as sin- and guilt-offerings. Under the first Temple ceremonial offences were regularly atoned for at one time by money



payments to the priests, and these fines were called by the names afterwards applied to the expiatory sacrifices. {[2Ki 12:17](#)} It does not follow, of course, that such sacrifices were unknown before the time of Ezekiel, nor is such a conclusion probable in itself. The manner in which the prophet alludes to them rather shows that the idea was perfectly familiar to his contemporaries. But the prominence of the sin-offering in the public ritual may be safely set down as a new departure in the Temple service, as it is one of the most striking symptoms of the change that passed over the spirit of Israel's religion at the time of the Exile.

Of the elements that contributed to this change the most important was the deepened consciousness of sin that had been produced by the teaching of the prophets as verified in the terrible calamity of the Exile. We have seen how frequently Ezekiel insists on this effect of the Divine judgment; how, even in the time of her pardon and restoration, he represents Israel as ashamed and confounded, not opening her mouth any more for the remembrance of all that she had done. We are therefore prepared to find that full provision is made for the expression of this abiding sense of guilt in the revised scheme of worship. This was done not by new rites invented for the purpose, but by seizing on those elements of the old ritual which represented the wiping out of iniquity, and by so remodelling the whole sacrificial system as to place these prominently in the foreground. Such elements were found chiefly in the sin-offering and guilt-offering, which occupied a subsidiary position in the old Temple, but are elevated to a place of commanding importance in the new. The precise distinction between these two kinds of sacrifice is an obscure point of the Levitical ritual which has never been perfectly cleared up. In the system of Ezekiel, however, we observe that the guilt-offering plays no part in the stated service, and must therefore have been reserved for private transgressions of the law of holiness. And in general it may be remarked that the atoning sacrifices differ from others, not in their material, but in certain features of the sacred actions to be observed with regard to them. We cannot here enter upon the details of the symbolism, but the most important fact is that the flesh of the victims is neither offered on the altar as in the burnt-offering, nor eaten by the worshippers as in the peace-offering, but belongs to the category of most holy things, and must be consumed by the priests in a holy place. In certain extreme cases, however, it has to be burned without the sanctuary. {Cf. [Eze 43:21](#)}

*Now in the chapters before us the idea of sacrificial atonement is chiefly developed in connection with the material fabric of the sanctuary. The sanctuary may contract defilement by involuntary lapses from the stringent rules of ceremonial purity on the part of those who use it, whether priests or laymen. Such errors of inadvertence were almost unavoidable under the complicated set of formal regulations into which the fundamental idea of holiness branched out, yet they are regarded as endangering the sanctity of the Temple, and require to be carefully atoned for from time to time, lest by their accumulation the worship should be invalidated and Jehovah driven from His dwelling-place. But besides this the Temple (or at least the altar) is unfit for its sacred functions until it has undergone an initial process of purification. The principle involved still survives in the consecration of ecclesiastical buildings in Christendom, although its application had doubtless a much more serious import under the old dispensation than it can possibly have under the new.*

A full account of this initial ceremony of purification is given in the end of the forty-third chapter, and a glance at the details of the ritual may be enough to impress on us the conceptions that underlie the process. It is a protracted operation, extending apparently over eight days. The first and fundamental act is the offering of a sin-offering of the highest degree of sanctity, the victim being a bullock and the flesh being burned outside the sanctuary. The blood alone is sprinkled on the four horns of the altar, the four corners of the "settle," and the "border": this is the first stage in the dedication of the altar. Then for seven days a he-goat is offered for a sin-offering, the same rites being observed, and after it a burnt-offering consisting of a bullock and a ram. These sacrifices are intended only for the purification of the altar, and only on the day after their completion is the altar ready to receive ordinary public or private gifts-burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. Now four expressions are used to denote the effect of these ceremonies on the altar. The most general is "consecrate," literally "fill its hand" ([Eze 43:26](#))-a phrase used originally of the installation of a priest into his office, and then applied metaphorically to consecration or initiation in general. The others are "purify," "unsin," (the special effect of the sin-offering) and "expiate." Of these the last is the most important. It is the technical priestly term for atonement for sin, the reference being of course generally to persons. As to the fundamental meaning of the word, there has been a great deal of discussion, which has not yet led to a decisive result. The choice seems to lie between two radical ideas, either to "wipe out" or to "cover," and so render inoperative. But either etymology enables us to understand the use of the word in legal terminology. It means to undo the effect of a transgression on the religious status of the offender, or, as in the case before us, to remove natural or contracted impurity from a material object. And whether this is conceived as a covering up of the fault so as to conceal it from view, or a wiping out of it, amounts in the end to the same thing. The significant fact is that the same word is applied both to persons and things. It furnishes another illustration of the intimate way in which the ideas of moral guilt and physical defect are blended in the ceremonial of the Old Testament.

*The meaning of the two atoning services appointed for the beginning of the first and the seventh month is now clear. They are intended to renew periodically the holiness of the sanctuary established by the initiatory rites just described. For it is evident that no indelible character can attach to the kind of sanctity with which we are here dealing. It is apt to be lost, if not by mere lapse of time, at least by the repeated contact of frail men who with the best intentions are not always able to fulfil the conditions of a right use of sacred things. Every failure and mistake detract from the holiness of the Temple, and even unnoticed and altogether unconscious offences would in course of time profane it if not purged away. Hence "for every one that erreth and for him that is simple" atonement has to be made for the house twice a year. The ritual to be*

*observed on these occasions bears a general resemblance to that of the inaugural ceremony, but is simpler, only a single bullock being presented for a sin-offering. On the other hand, it expressly symbolises a purification of the Temple as well as of the altar. The blood is sprinkled not only on the "settle" of the altar, but also on the doorposts of the house, and the posts of the eastern gate of the inner court.*

We may now pass on to the second application made by Ezekiel of the idea of sacrificial atonement. These purifications of the sanctuary, which bulk so largely in his system, have their counterpart in atonements made directly for the faults of the people. For this purpose, as we have already seen, a sin-offering was to be presented at each of the great annual festivals by the prince, for himself and the nation which he represented. But it is important to observe that the idea of atonement is not confined to one particular class of sacrifices. It lies at the foundation of the whole system of the stated service, the purpose of which is expressly said to be "to make atonement for the house of Israel." Thus while the half-yearly sin-offering afforded a special opportunity for confession of sin on the part of the people, we are to understand that the holiness of the nation was secured by the observance of every part of the prescribed ritual which regulated its intercourse with God. And since the nation is in itself imperfectly holy and stands in constant need of forgiveness, the maintenance of its sanctity by sacrificial rites was equivalent to a perpetual act of atonement. Special offences of individuals had of course to be expiated by special sacrifices, but beneath all particular transgressions lay the broad fact of human impurity and infirmity; and in the constant "covering up" of this by a Divinely instituted system of religious ordinances we recognise an atoning element in the regular Temple service.

*The sacrificial ritual may therefore be regarded as a barrier interposed between the natural uncleanness of the people and the awful holiness of Jehovah seated in His Temple. That men should be permitted to approach Him at all is an unspeakable privilege conferred on Israel in virtue of its covenant relation to God. But that the approach is surrounded by so many precautions and restrictions is a perpetual witness to the truth that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and one with whom evil cannot dwell. If these precautions could have been always perfectly observed, it is probable that no periodical purification of the sanctuary would have been enjoined. The ordinary ritual would have sufficed to maintain the nation in a state of holiness corresponding with the requirements of Jehovah's nature. But this was impossible on account of the slowness of men's minds and their liability to err in their most sacred duties. Sin is so subtle and pervasive that it is conceived as penetrating the network of ordinances destined to intercept it, and reaching even to the dwelling-place of Jehovah Himself. It is to remove such accidental, though inevitable, violations of the majesty of God that the ritual edifice is crowned by ceremonies for the purification of the sanctuary. They are, so to speak, atonements in the second degree. Their object is to compensate for defects in the ordinary routine of worship, and to remove the arrears of guilt which had accumulated through neglect of some part of the ceremonial scheme. This idea appears quite clearly in Ezekiel's legislation, but it is far more impressively exhibited in the Levitical law, where different elements of Ezekiel's ritual are gathered up into one celebration in the Great Day of Atonement, the most solemn and imposing of the whole year.*

Hence we see that the whole system of sacrificial worship is firmly knit together, being pervaded from end to end by the one principle of expiation, behind which lay the assurance of pardon and acceptance to all who approached God in the use of the appointed means of grace. Herein lay the chief value of the Temple ritual for the religious life of Israel. It served to impress on the mind of the people the great realities of sin and forgiveness, and so to create that profound consciousness of sin which has passed over, spiritualised but not weakened, into Christian experience. Thus the law proved itself a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, in whose atoning death the evil of sin and the eternal conditions of forgiveness are once for all and perfectly revealed.

The positive truths taught or suggested by the ritual of atonement are too numerous to be considered here. It is a remarkable fact that neither in Ezekiel nor in any other part of the Old Testament is an authoritative interpretation given of the most essential features of the ritual. The people seem to have been left to explain the symbolism as best they could, and many points which are obscure and uncertain to us must have been perfectly intelligible to the least instructed amongst them. For us the only safe rule is to follow the guidance of the New Testament writers in their use of sacrificial institutions as types of the death of Christ. The investigation is too large and intricate to be attempted in this place. But it may be well in conclusion to point out one or two general principles, which ought never to be overlooked in the typical interpretation of the expiatory sacrifices of the Old Testament.

In the first place atonement is provided only for sins committed in ignorance; and moral and ceremonial offences stand precisely on the same footing in the eye of the law. In Ezekiel's system, indeed, it was only sins of inadvertence that needed to be considered. He has in view the final state of things in which the people, though not perfect nor exempt from liability to error, are wholly inclined to obey the law of Jehovah so far as their knowledge and ability extend. But even in the Levitical legislation there is no legal dispensation for guilt incurred through wanton and deliberate defiance of the law of Jehovah. To sin thus is to sin "with a high hand," and such offences have to be expiated by the death of the sinner, or at least his exclusion from the religious community. And whether the precept belong to what we call the ceremonial or to the moral side of the law, the same principle holds good, although of course its application is one-sided; strictly moral transgressions being for the most part voluntary, while ritual offences may be either voluntary or inadvertent. But for wilful and high-handed departure from any precept, whether ethical or ceremonial, no atonement is provided by the law; the guilty person "falls into the hands of the

living God," and forgiveness is possible only in the sphere of personal relations between man and God, into which the law does not enter.

*This leads to a second consideration. Atoning sacrifices do not purchase forgiveness. That is to say, they are never regarded as exercising any influence on God, moving Him to Mercy towards the sinner. They are simply the forms to which, by Jehovah's own appointment, the promise of forgiveness is attached. The whole sacrificial system, as we see quite clearly from Ezekiel's prophecy, presupposes redemption; the people are already restored to their land and sanctified by Jehovah's presence amongst them before these institutions come into operation. The only purpose that they serve in the system of religion to which they belong is to secure that the blessings of salvation shall not be lost. Both in this vision and throughout the Old Testament the ultimate ground of confidence in God lies in historic acts of redemption in which Jehovah's sovereign grace and love to Israel are revealed. Through the sacrifices the individual was enabled to assure himself of his interest in the covenant blessings promised to his nation and the promise in Gen 3:15. They were the sacraments of his personal acceptance with Jehovah, and as such were of the highest importance for his normal religious life. But they were not and could not be the basis of the forgiveness of sins, nor did later Judaism ever fall into the error of seeking to appease the Deity by a multiplication of sacrificial gifts. When the insufficiency of the ritual system to give true peace of conscience or to bring back the outward tokens of God's favour is dwelt upon, the ancient Church falls back on the spiritual conditions of forgiveness already enunciated by the prophets.*

"Thou desirest not sacrifice that I should give it,

Thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:

A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." { [Psa 51:16-17](#) }

Finally we have learned from Ezekiel that the idea of atonement is not lodged in any particular rite, but pervades the sacrificial system as a whole. Suggestive as the ritual of the sin-offering is to the Christian conscience, it must not be isolated from other developments of the sacrificial idea or taken to embody the whole permanent meaning of the institution. There are at least two other aspects of sacrifice which are clearly expressed in the ritual legislation of the Old Testament—that of homage, chiefly symbolised by the burnt-offering, and that of communion, symbolised by the peace-offering and the sacrificial feast observed in connection with it. And although, both in Ezekiel and the Levitical law, these two elements are thrown into the shade by the idea of expiation, yet there are subtle links of affinity between all three, which will have to be traced out before we are in a position to understand the first principles of sacrificial worship. The brilliant and learned researches of the late Professor Robertson Smith have thrown a flood of light on the original rite of sacrifice and the important place which it occupies in ancient religion. He has sought to explain the intricate system of the Levitical legislation as an unfolding, under varied historical influences, of different aspects of the idea of communion between God and men, which is the essence of primitive sacrifice. In particular he has shown how special atoning sacrifices arise through emphasising by appropriate symbolism the element of reconciliation which is implicitly contained in every act of religious communion with God. This at least enables us to understand how the atoning ritual with all its distinctive features yet resembles so closely that which is common to all types of sacrifice, and how the idea of expiation, although concentrated in a particular class of sacrifices, is nevertheless spread over the whole surface of the sacrificial ritual. It would be premature as well as presumptuous to attempt here to estimate the consequences of this theory for Christian theology. But it certainly seems to open up the prospect of a wider and deeper apprehension of the religious truths which are differentiated and specialised in the Old Testament dispensation, to be reunited in that great Atoning Sacrifice, in which the blood of the new covenant has been shed for many for the remission of sins.

#### **EZEKIEL 47-48 PARALLELED TO REV 21-22**

**Ezekiel 47:1-23 - Ezekiel 48:1-35**

#### **RENEWAL AND ALLOTMENT OF THE LAND**

[Eze 47:1-23](#); [Eze 48:1-35](#)

IN the first part of the forty-seventh chapter the visionary form of the revelation, which had been interrupted by the important series of communications on which we have been so long engaged, is again resumed. The prophet, once more under the direction of his angelic guide, sees a stream of water issuing from the Temple buildings and flowing eastward into the Dead Sea. Afterwards he receives another series of directions relating to the boundaries of the land and its division among the twelve tribes. With this the vision and the book find their appropriate close.

I.

*The Temple stream, to which Ezekiel's attention is now for the first time directed, is a symbol of the miraculous transformation which the land of Canaan is to undergo in order to fit it for the habitation of Jehovah's ransomed people. Anticipations of a renewal of the face of nature are a common feature of Messianic prophecy.* They have their roots in the religious interpretation of the possession of the land as the chief token of the Divine blessing on the nation. In the vicissitudes

of agricultural or pastoral life the Israelite read the reflection of Jehovah's attitude towards Himself and His people: fertile seasons and luxuriant harvests were the sign of His favour; drought and famine were the proof that He was offended. Even at the best of times, however, the condition of Palestine left much to be desired from the husbandman's point of view, especially in the kingdom of Judah. Nature was often stern and unpropitious, the cultivation of the soil was always attended with hardship and uncertainty, large tracts of the country were given over to irreclaimable barrenness. There was always a vision of better things possible, and in the last days the prophets cherished the expectation that that vision would be realised. When all causes of offence are removed from Israel and Jehovah smiles on His people, the land will blossom into supernatural fertility, the ploughman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed, the mountains dropping new wine and the hills melting. {[Amo 9:13](#)} Such idyllic pictures of universal plenty and comfort abound in the writings of the prophets, and are not wanting in the pages of Ezekiel. *We have already had one in the description of the blessings of the Messianic kingdom; and we shall see that in this closing vision a complete remodelling of the land is presupposed, rendering it all alike suitable for the habitation of the tribes of Israel.*

*The river of life is the most striking presentation of this general conception of Messianic felicity. It is one of those vivid images from Eastern life which, through the Apocalypse, have passed into the symbolism of Christian eschatology. "And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruits every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." {[Rev 22:1-2](#)} So writes the seer of Patmos, in words whose music charms the ear even of those to whom running water means much less than it did to a native of thirsty Palestine. But John had read of the mystic river in the pages of his favourite prophet before he saw it in vision. The close resemblance between the two pictures leaves no doubt that the origin of the conception is to be sought in Ezekiel's vision.* The underlying religious truth is the same in both representations, that the presence of God is the source from which the influences flow forth that renew and purify human existence. The tree of life on each bank of the river, which yields its fruit every month and whose leaves are for healing, is a detail transferred directly from Ezekiel's imagery to fill out the description of the glorious city of God into which the nations of them that are saved are gathered.

*But with all its idealism, Ezekiel's conception presents many points of contact with the actual physiography of Palestine; it is less universal and abstract in its significance than that of the Apocalypse.* The first thing that might have suggested the idea to the prophet is that the Temple mount had at least one small stream, whose "soft-flowing" waters were already regarded as a symbol of the silent and unobtrusive influence of the Divine presence in Israel. {[Isa 8:6](#)} The waters of this stream flowed eastward, but they were too scanty to have any appreciable effect on the fertility of the region through which they passed. Further, to the southeast of Jerusalem, between it and the Dead Sea, stretched the great wilderness of Judah, the most desolate and inhospitable tract in the whole country. There the steep declivity of the limestone range refuses to detain sufficient moisture to nourish the most meagre vegetation, although the few spots where wells are found, as at Engedi, are clothed with almost tropical luxuriance. To reclaim these barren slopes and render them fit for human industry, the Temple waters are sent eastward, making the desert to blossom as the rose. *Lastly, there was the Dead Sea itself, in whose bitter waters no living thing can exist, the natural emblem of resistance to the purposes of Him who is the God of life.* These different elements of the physical reality were familiar to Ezekiel, and come back to mind as he follows the course of the new Temple river, and observes the wonderful transformation which it is destined to effect. He first sees it breaking forth from the wall of the Temple at the right-hand side of the entrance, and flowing eastward through the courts by the south side of the altar. Then at the outer wall he meets it rushing from the south side of the eastern gate, and still pursuing its easterly course. At a thousand cubits from the sanctuary it is only ankle-deep, but at successive distances of a thousand cubits it reaches to the knees, to the loins, and becomes finally an impassable river. The stream is of course miraculous from source to mouth. Earthly rivers do not thus broaden and deepen as they flow, except by the accession of tributaries, and tributaries are out of the question here. Thus it flows on, with its swelling volume of water, through "the eastern circuit," "down to the Arabah" (the trough of the Jordan and the Dead Sea), and reaching the sea it sweetens its waters so that they teem with fishes of all kinds like those of the Mediterranean. Its uninviting shores become the scene of a busy and thriving industry; fishermen ply their craft from Engedi to Eneglaim, and the food supply of the country is materially increased. The prophet may not have been greatly concerned about this, but one characteristic detail illustrates his careful forethought in matters of practical utility. It is from the Dead Sea that Jerusalem has always obtained its supply of salt. The purification of this lake might have its drawbacks if the production of this indispensable commodity should be interfered with. Salt, besides its culinary uses, played an important part in the Temple ritual, and Ezekiel was not likely to forget it. Hence the strange but eminently practical provision that the shallows and marshes at the south end of the lake shall be exempted from the influence of the healing waters. "They are given for salt." ([Eze 47:11](#)).

We may venture to draw one lesson for our own instruction from this beautiful prophetic image of the blessings that flow from a pure religion. The river of God has its source high up in the mount where Jehovah dwells in inaccessible holiness, and where the white-robed priests minister ceaselessly before Him; but in its descent it seeks out the most desolate and unpromising region in the country and turns it into a garden of the Lord. *While the whole land of Israel is to be renewed and made to minister to the good of man in fellowship with God, the main stream of fertility is expended in the apparently hopeless task of reclaiming the Judean desert and purifying the Dead Sea. It is an emblem of the earthly ministry of Him who made*



*Himself the friend of publicans and sinners, and lavished the resources of His grace and the wealth of His affection on those who were deemed beyond ordinary possibility of salvation. It is to be feared, however, that the practice of most Churches has been too much the reverse of this. They have been tempted to confine the water of life within fairly respectable channels, amongst the prosperous and contented, the occupants of happy homes, where the advantages of religion are most likely to be appreciated.* That seems to have been found the line of least resistance, and in times when spiritual life has run low it has been counted enough to keep the old ruts filled and leave the waste places and stagnant waters of our civilisation ill provided with the means of grace. Nowadays we are sometimes reminded that the Dead Sea must be drained before the gospel can have a fair chance of influencing human lives, and there may be much wisdom in the suggestion. A vast deal of social drainage may have to be accomplished before the word of God has free course. Unhealthy and impure conditions of life may be mitigated by wise legislation, temptations to vice may be removed, and vested interests that thrive on the degradation of human lives may be crushed by the strong arm of the community. But the true spirit of Christianity can neither be confined to the watercourses of religious habit, nor wait for the schemes of the social reformer. Nor will it display its powers of social salvation until it carries the energies of the Church into the lowest haunts of vice and misery with an earnest desire to seek and to save that which is lost. Ezekiel had his vision, and he believed in it. He believed in the reality of God's presence in the sanctuary and in the stream of blessings that flowed from His throne, and he believed in the possibility of reclaiming the waste places of his country for the kingdom of God. When Christians are united in like faith in the power of Christ and the abiding presence of His Spirit, we may expect to see times of refreshing from the presence of God and the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

## II.

Ezekiel's map of Palestine is marked by something of the same mathematical regularity which was exhibited in his plan of the Temple. His boundaries are like those we sometimes see on the map of a newly settled country like America or Australia—that is to say, they largely follow the meridian lines and parallels of latitude, but take advantage here and there of natural frontiers supplied by rivers and mountain ranges. This is absolutely true of the internal divisions of the land between the tribes. Here the northern and southern boundaries are straight lines running east and west over hill and dale, and terminating at the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley, which form of course the western and eastern limits. As to the external delimitation of the country it is unfortunately not possible to speak with certainty. The eastern frontier is fixed by the Jordan and the Dead Sea so far as they go, and the western is the sea. But on the north and south the lines of demarcation cannot be traced, the places mentioned being nearly all unknown. The north frontier extends from the sea to a place called Hazar-enon, said to lie on the border of Hauran. It passes the "entrance to Hamath," and has to the north not only Hamath, but also the territory of Damascus. But none of the towns through which it passes—Hethlon, Berotha, Sibram—can be identified, and even its general direction is altogether uncertain.

From Hazar-enon the eastern border stretches southward till it reaches the Jordan, and is prolonged south of the Dead Sea to a place called Tamar, also unknown. From this we proceed westwards by Kadesh till we strike the river of Egypt, the Wady el-Arish, which carries the boundary to the sea. It will be seen that Ezekiel, for reasons on which it is idle to speculate, excludes the transjordanic territory from the Holy Land. Speaking broadly, we may say that he treats Palestine as a rectangular strip of country, which he divides into transverse sections of indeterminate breadth, and then proceeds to parcel out these amongst the twelve tribes.

*A similar obscurity rests on the motives which determined the disposition of the different tribes within the sacred territory. We can understand, indeed, why seven tribes are placed to the north and only five to the south of the capital and the sanctuary. Jerusalem lay much nearer the south of the land, and in the original distribution all the tribes had their settlements to the north of it except Judah and Simeon. Ezekiel's arrangement seems thus to combine a desire for symmetry with a recognition of the claims of historical and geographic reality. We can also see that to a certain extent the relative positions of the tribes correspond with those they held before the Exile, although of course the system requires that they shall lie in a regular series from north to south. Dan, Asher, and Naphtali are left in the extreme north, Manasseh and Ephraim to the south of them, while Simeon lies as of old in the south with one tribe between it and the capital. But we cannot tell why Benjamin should be placed to the south and Judah to the north of Jerusalem, why Issachar and Zebulun are transferred from the far north to the south, or why Reuben and Gad are taken from the east of the Jordan to be settled one to the north and the other to the south of the city. Some principle of arrangement there must have been in the mind of the prophet, and several have been suggested; but it is perhaps better to confess that we have lost the key to his meaning.*

The prophet's interest is centred on the strip of land reserved for the sanctuary and public purposes, which is subdivided and measured out with the utmost precision. It is twenty-five thousand cubits (about eight and one-third miles) broad, and extends right across the country. The two extremities east and west are the crown lands assigned to the prince for the purposes we have already seen.

In the middle a square of twenty-five thousand cubits is marked off; this is the "oblation" or sacred offering of land, in the middle of which the Temple stands. This again is subdivided into three parallel sections, as shown in the accompanying diagram. The most northerly, ten thousand cubits in breadth, is assigned to the Levites; the central portion, including the sanctuary, to the priests; and the remaining five thousand cubits is a "profane place" for the city and its common lands. The city itself is a square of four thousand five hundred cubits, situated in the middle of this southmost section of the oblation. With its free space of two hundred and fifty cubits in width belting the wall it fills the entire breadth of the section: the communal possessions flanking it on either hand, just as the prince's domain does the "oblation" as a whole. The produce of these lands is "for food to them that 'serve' (*i.e.*, inhabit) the city." ([Eze 48:18](#)) Residence in the capital, it appears, is to be regarded as a public service. The maintenance of the civic life of Jerusalem was an object in which the whole nation was interested, a truth symbolised by naming its twelve gates after the twelve sons of Jacob. Hence, also, its population is to be representative of all the tribes of Israel, and whoever comes to dwell there is to have a share in the land belonging to the city. ([Eze 48:19](#)) But evidently the legislation on this point is incomplete. How were the inhabitants of the capital to be chosen out of all the tribes? Would its citizenship be regarded as a privilege or as an onerous responsibility? Would it be necessary to make a selection out of a host of applications, or would special inducements have to be offered to procure a sufficient population? To these questions the vision furnishes no answer, and there is nothing to show whether Ezekiel contemplated the possibility that residence in the new city might present few attractions and many disadvantages to an agricultural community such as he had in view. It is a curious incident of the return from the Exile that the problem of peopling Jerusalem emerged in a more serious form than Ezekiel from his ideal point of view could have foreseen. We read that "the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine parts in [other] cities. And the people blessed all the men that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem." ([Neh 11:1-2](#)) There may have been causes for this general reluctance which are unknown to us, but the principal reason was doubtless the one which has been hinted at, that the new colony lived mainly by agriculture, and the district in the immediate vicinity of the capital was not sufficiently fertile to support a large agricultural population. The new Jerusalem was at first a somewhat artificial foundation, and a city too largely developed for the resources of the community of which it was the centre. Its existence was necessary more for the protection and support of the Temple than for the ordinary ends of civilisation; and hence to dwell in it was for the majority an act of self-sacrifice by which a man was felt to deserve well of his country. And the only important difference between the actual reality and Ezekiel's ideal is that in the latter the supernatural fertility of the land and the reign of universal peace obviate the difficulties which the founders of the post-exilic theocracy had to encounter.

This seeming indifference of the prophet to the secular interests represented by the metropolis strikes us as a singular feature in his programme. It is strange that the man who was so thoughtful about the salt-pans of the Dead Sea should pass so lightly over the details of the reconstruction of a city. But we have had several intimations that this is not the department of things in which Ezekiel's hold on reality is most conspicuous. We have already remarked on the boldness of the conception which changes the site of the capital in order to guard the sanctity of the Temple. And now, when its situation and form are accurately defined, we have no sketch of municipal institutions, no hint of the purposes for which the city exists, and no glimpse of the busy and varied activities which we naturally connect with the name. If Ezekiel thought of it at all, except as existing on paper, he was probably interested in it as furnishing the representative congregation on minor occasions of public worship, such as the Sabbaths and new moons, when the whole people could not be expected to assemble. The truth is that the idea of the city in the vision is simply an abstract religious symbol, a sort of epitome and concentration of theocratic life. Like the figure of the prince in earlier chapters, it is taken from the national institutions which perished at the Exile; the outline is retained, the typical significance is enhanced, but the form is shadowy and indistinct, the colour and variety of concrete reality are absent. It was perhaps a stage through which political conceptions had to pass before their religious meaning could be apprehended. And yet the fact that the symbol of the Holy City is preserved is deeply suggestive and indeed scarcely less important in its own way than the retention of the type of the king. Ezekiel can no more think of the land without a capital than of the state without a prince. The word "city"-synonym of the fullest and most intense form of life, of life regulated by law and elevated by devotion to a common ideal, in which every worthy faculty of human nature is quickened by the close and varied intercourse of men with each other-has definitely taken its place in the vocabulary of religion. It is there, not to be superseded, but to be refined and spiritualised, until the city of God, glorified in the praises of Israel, becomes the inspiration of the loftiest thought and the most ardent longing of Christendom. And even for the perplexing problems that the Church has to face at this day there is hardly a more profitable exercise of the Christian imagination than to dream with practical intent of the consecration of civic life through the subjection of all its influences to the ends of the Redeemer's kingdom.

*On the other hand we must surely recognise that this vision of a Temple and a city separated from each other-where religious and secular interests are as it were concentrated at different points, so that the one may be more effectually subordinated to the other-is not the final and perfect vision of the kingdom of God.* That ideal has played a leading and influential part in the history of Christianity. It is essentially the ideal formulated in Augustine's great work on the city of God, which ruled the ecclesiastical polity of the mediaeval Church. *The State is an unholy institution; it is an embodiment of the power of this present evil world: the true city of God is the visible Catholic Church, and only by subjection to the Church can the State be redeemed from itself and be made a means of blessing. That theory served a providential purpose in preserving the traditions of Christianity through dark and troubled ages, and training the rude nations of Europe in purity and righteousness and reverence for that by which God makes Himself known. But the Reformation was, amongst other*

*things, a protest against this conception of the relation of Church to State, of the sacred to the secular.* By asserting the right of each believer to deal with Christ directly, without the mediation of Church or priest it broke down the middle wall of partition between religion and everyday duty; it sanctified common life by showing how a man may serve God as a citizen in the family or the workshop better than in the cloister or at the altar. It made the kingdom of God to be a present power wherever there are lives transformed by love to Christ and serving their fellow men for His sake. *And if Catholicism may find some plausible support for its theory in Ezekiel and the Old Testament theocracy in general, Protestants may perhaps with better right appeal to the grander ideal represented by the new Jerusalem of the Apocalypse-the city that needs no Temple, because the Lord Himself is in her midst.*

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." {[Rev 21:2-3](#); [Rev 21:22-23](#)}

*Worship is an essential function of the Church of Christ; and so long as we are in our earthly abode worship will require external symbols and a visible organisation. But this at least we know, that the will of God must be done on earth as it is in heaven. The true kingdom of God is within us; and His presence with men is realised, not in special religious services which stand apart from our common life, but in the constant influence of His Spirit, forming our characters after the image of Christ, and permeating all the channels of social intercourse and public action, until everything done on earth is to the glory of our Father which is in heaven. That is the ideal set forth by the coming of the holy city of God, and only in this way. can we look for the fulfilment of the promise embodied in the new name of Ezekiel's city, Jehovah-shammah.*

THE LORD IS THERE.

**REVELATION 21-22 – LOOKING BACK TO EZEKIEL 47-48****Revelation 21:1-27, Revelation 22:1-5****THE NEW JERUSALEM**Rev 21:1-27; Rev 22:1-5.

THE first part of the final triumph of the Lamb has been accomplished, but the second has still to be unfolded. We are introduced to it by one of those preparatory or transition passages which have already frequently met us in the Apocalypse, and which connect themselves both with what precedes and with what follows: -

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God: and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more: the first things are passed away. And He that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He saith, Write: for these words are faithful and true. And He said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be My son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev 21:1-8)."

These words, like many others that have already met us, throw light upon the principles on which the Apocalypse is composed. They show in the clearest possible manner that down to the very end of the book chronological considerations must be put out of view. Chronology cannot be thought of when we find, on the one hand, allusions to the new Jerusalem which are only amplified and extended in the next vision of the chapter, or when we find, on the other hand, a description of the exclusion from the new Jerusalem of certain classes that have already been consigned to "the second death." By the first-mentioned allusions the passage connects itself with what is yet to come, by the second with what has gone before. For the same reason it is unnecessary to dwell upon the passage at any length. It contains either nothing new, or nothing that will not again meet us in greater fullness of detail. One or two brief remarks alone seem called for.

The Seer beholds *a new heaven and a new earth*. Two words in the New Testament are translated "new," but there is a difference between them. The one contemplates the object spoken of under the aspect of something that has been recently brought into existence, the other under a fresh aspect given to what had previously existed, but been outworn. \* The latter word is employed here, as it is also employed in the phrases a "new garment," that is, a garment not threadbare, like an old one; "new wine-skins," that is, skins not shriveled and dried; a "new tomb," that is, not one recently hewn out of the rock, but one which had never been used as the last resting-place of the dead. *The fact, therefore, that the heavens and the earth here spoken of are "new," does not imply that they are now first brought into being. They may be the old heavens and the old earth; but they have a new aspect, a new character, adapted to a new end.* Another expression in the passage deserves notice. In saying that the time is come when *the tabernacle of the Lord is with men, and He shall dwell with them, it is added, and they shall be His peoples*. *We are familiar with the Scripture use of the word "people" to denote the true Israel of God, and not less with the use of the word "peoples" to denote the nations of the earth alienated from Him. But here the word "peoples" is used instead of "people" for God's children; and the usage can only spring from this: that the Seer has entirely abandoned the idea that Israel according to the flesh can have the word "people" applied to it, and that all believers, to whatever race they belong, occupy the same ground in Christ, and are possessed of the same privileges. The "peoples" are the counterpart of the "many diadems" of Rev 19:12. (\* Trench, Synonyms, second series, p. 39)*

"And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal, having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. On the east went three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the



twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, is the temple thereof, and the Lamb. And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and the honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein; and His servants shall do Him service: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign forever and ever ([Rev 21:9-27](#); [Rev 22:1-5](#))."

The vision contained in these verses is shown the Seer by the angel forming the third of the second group associated with Him who had been described at [Rev 19:11](#) as the Rider upon the white horse, and who at that time rode forth to His final triumph. The first of this group of three had appeared at [Rev 19:17](#), and the second at [Rev 20:1](#). We have now the third; and it is not unimportant to observe this, for it helps to throw light upon the artificial structure of these chapters, while, at the same time, it connects the vision with Christ's victory upon earth rather than with any scene of splendor and glory in a region beyond the place of man's present abode. Thus it contributes something at least to the belief that there where the believer wars he also wears the crown of triumph.

The substance of the vision is a description of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, the true Church of God wholly separated from the false Church, as she comes down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Her marriage with the Lamb has taken place, - a marriage in which there shall be no unfaithfulness on the one side and no reproaches on the other, but in which, as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, the Lord shall forever rejoice in His people, and His people in Him. Then follows, to enhance the picture, a detailed account of the true Church under the figure of the city which had been already spoken of in the first vision of the chapter. The treasures of the Seer's imagination and language are exhausted in order that the thought of her beauty and her splendor may be suitably impressed upon our minds. Her *light* - that is, the light which she spreads abroad, for the word used in the original indicates that she is herself the luminary - is like that of the sun, only that it is of crystalline clearness and purity, *as it were a jasper stone*, the light of Him who sat upon the throne.<sup>1</sup> She is "the light of the world."<sup>2</sup> The city is also surrounded by *a wall great and high*. She is "a strong city." "Salvation has God appointed her for walls and bulwarks."<sup>3</sup> Her walls have *twelve gates*, and *at the gates twelve angels*, those to whom God gives charge over His people, to keep them in all their ways<sup>4</sup>; while, as was the case with the new Jerusalem beheld by the prophet Ezekiel, *names were written on the gates, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel*.<sup>5</sup> These gates are also harmoniously distributed, three on each side of the square which the city forms. The *foundations of the city*, a term under which we are not to think of foundations buried in the earth, but rather of courses of stones going round the city and rising one above another, are also twelve; and on them are *twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*. (<sup>1</sup> [Rev 4:3](#); <sup>2</sup> [Mat 5:14](#); <sup>3</sup> [Psa 31:21](#); [Isa 26:1](#); <sup>4</sup> [Psa 91:11](#); <sup>5</sup> *Comp. Eze 48:31*)

**The Seer, however, is not satisfied with this general picture of the greatness of the New Jerusalem. Like that in Ezekiel, the city must be measured.\* When this is done, her proportions are found, in spite of the absence of all verisimilitude, to be those of a perfect cube. As in the Holy of holies of the Tabernacle, the thought of which lies at the bottom of the description, the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. Twelve thousand furlongs, or fifteen hundred miles, the city stretches along and across the plain, and rises into the sky, twelve, - the number of the people of God, multiplied by thousands, the heavenly number. The wall is also measured - it is difficult to say whether in height or in thickness, but most probably the latter - a hundred and forty and four cubits, or twelve multiplied by twelve. (\*[Comp. Eze 40:2-3](#))**

The measuring is completed, and next follows an account of the material of which the city was composed. This was gold, the most precious metal, in its purest state, *like unto pure glass*. Precious stones formed, rather than ornamented, its twelve foundations. Its gates were of pearl: *each one of the several gates was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass*. In all these respects it is evident that the city is thought of as ideally perfect, and not according to the realities or possibilities of things.

Nor is this all. The glory of the city is still further illustrated by figures bearing more immediately upon its spiritual rather than its material aspect. The outward helps needed by men in leading the life of God in their present state of imperfection are dispensed with. There is *no temple therein: for the Lord, God, the Almighty, is the temple thereof, and the Lamb*. *The city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God lightens it by day, and the lamp thereof by night*

is the Lamb. There is in it no sin, and every positive element of happiness is provided in abundance for the blest inhabitants. A river of water of life, bright as crystal, flows there; and on this side of the river and on that side is the tree of life, not bearing fruit only once a year, but every month, not yielding one only, but twelve manner of fruits, so that all tastes may be gratified, having nothing about it useless or liable to decay. The very leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and it is evidently implied that they are always green. Finally, there shall be no curse any more. The throne of God and of the Lamb is therein. His servants do Him service. They see His face. His name is in their foreheads. They are priests unto God in the service of the heavenly sanctuary. They reign forever and ever.

1. The vision is really an echo of Old Testament prophecy. We have already seen this in many particulars, and the correspondence might easily have been traced in many more. *"It is all," says Isaac Williams, as he begins his comment upon the particular points of the description - "It is all from Ezekiel: 'The hand of the Lord was upon me, and brought me in the visions of God, and set me upon a very high mountain, by which was as the frame of a city;'*<sup>1</sup> *'And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the gate toward the east;'*<sup>2</sup> *The Lord entered by the eastern gate; therefore shall it be shut, and opened for none but for the Prince.*<sup>3</sup> *Such was the coming of Christ's glory from the east into His Church, as so often alluded to before."*<sup>4</sup> *Other prophets, no doubt, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us, who testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow, are to be added to Ezekiel, but, whoever they were, it is undeniable that their highest and most glowing representations of that future for which they longed, and the advent of which they were commissioned to proclaim, are reproduced in St. John's description of the new Jerusalem. That they may have looked forward to the world beyond the grave is possible; but any distinction between the first and second coming of our Lord had not yet risen upon their minds. In the simple coming of the Hope of Israel into the world they beheld the accomplishment of every aspiration and longing of the heart of man. And they were right. The distinction which experience taught the New Testament writers to draw was not so much between a first and a second coming of the King as between a kingdom then hidden, but afterwards to be manifested in all its glory.* (<sup>1</sup> [Eze 40:1-2](#); <sup>2</sup> [Eze 43:2](#) <sup>3</sup> [Eze 44:1-3](#); <sup>4</sup> *The Apocalypse*, p. 438)

2. This ideal view of the Messianic age is also constantly brought before us in the New Testament. The character, the privileges, and the blessings of those who are partakers of the spirit of that time are always presented to us as irradiated with a heavenly and perfect glory. St. Paul addresses the various churches to which he wrote as, notwithstanding all their imperfections, "beloved of God," "sanctified in Christ Jesus," "saints and faithful brethren in Christ."<sup>1</sup> Christ is "in them," and they are "in Christ."<sup>2</sup> "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it; that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish,"<sup>3</sup> - the description evidently applying to the present world, where also the Church is seated, not in earthly, but in "the heavenly, places" with her Lord.<sup>4</sup> Our "citizenship" is declared to be "in heaven;"<sup>5</sup> and we are even now "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable hosts of angels, and to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, who are enrolled in heaven."<sup>6</sup> Our Lord Himself and St. John, following in His steps, are even more specific as to the present kingdom and the present glory. "In that day," says Jesus to His disciples, "ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you,"<sup>7</sup> and again, "And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as We are one;"<sup>8</sup> while it is unnecessary to quote the passages meeting us everywhere in the writings of the beloved disciple in which he speaks of eternal life, and that, too, in the full greatness both of its privileges and of its results, as a possession enjoyed by the believer in this present world. The whole witness of the New Testament, in short, is to an ideal, to a perfect, kingdom of God even now established among men, in which sin is conquered, temptation overcome, strength substituted for weakness, death so deprived of its sting that it is no more death, and the Christian, though for a little put to grief in manifold temptations, made "to rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and glorified."<sup>9</sup> From all this the representation of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse differs in no essential respect. It enters more into particulars. It illustrates the general thought by a greater variety of detail. But it contains nothing which is not found in principle in the other sacred writers, and which is not connected by them with the heavenly aspect of the Christian's pilgrimage to his eternal home. (<sup>1</sup> [Rom 1:7](#); [1Co 1:2](#); [Col 1:2](#); [Col 1:2](#); <sup>2</sup> [Col 1:27](#); [1Co 1:30](#); [Php 3:9](#); <sup>3</sup> [Eph 5:25-27](#); <sup>4</sup> [Eph 1:3](#); <sup>5</sup> [Php 3:20](#); <sup>6</sup> [Heb 12:22-23](#); <sup>7</sup> [Joh 14:20](#); <sup>8</sup> [Joh 17:22](#); <sup>9</sup> [1Pe 1:8](#))

(1) Let us look at [Rev 20:9](#), where we read of "the camp of the saints and the beloved city." That city is none other than the New Jerusalem, about to be described in the following chapter. It is Jerusalem after the elements of the harlot character have been wholly expelled, and the call of [Rev 18:4](#) has been heard and obeyed, "Come forth, My people, out of her." She is inhabited now by none but "saints," who, though they have still to war with the world, are themselves the "called, and chosen, and faithful." But this "beloved city" is spoken of as in the world, and as the object of attack by Satan and his hosts before the Judgment. \* (\*Comp. Foxley, *Hulsean Lectures*, Lect. 1)

3. Another consideration on the point under discussion may be noticed, which will have weight with those who admit the existence of that principle of structure in St. John's writings upon which it rests. Alike in the Gospel and in the Apocalypse the Apostle is marked by a tendency to return at the close of a section to what he had said at the beginning, and to shut up, as it were, between the two statements all he had to say. So here. In [Rev 1:3](#) he introduces his Apocalypse with the words, "For the time is at hand." In [Rev 22:10](#), immediately after closing it, he returns to the thought, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand; "that is, the whole intervening revelation is enclosed between these two statements. All of it precedes the "time" spoken of. The New Jerusalem comes before the end.

In the New Jerusalem, therefore, we have essentially a picture, not of the future, but of the present; of the ideal condition of Christ's true people, of His "little flock" on earth, in every age. The picture may not yet be realized in fullness; but every blessing lined in upon its canvas is in principle the believer's now, and will be more and more his in actual experience as he opens his eyes to see and his heart to receive. *We have been wrong in transferring the picture of the New Jerusalem to the future alone. It belongs also to the past and to the present. It is the heritage of the children of God at the very time when they are struggling with the world; and the thought of it ought to stimulate them to exertion and to console them under suffering.*