

The Glorious Temple

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[0 : 0 0] And let us pray. Lord God, again we pray that you will show us this vision.

Teach us your word that we may see glorious things. So make us look closely and listen attentively so that we may live glorious lives for you.

Amen. A bit over 40 years ago, Martin Luther King went to the mountaintop. In one of the greatest speeches probably of the 20th century, if not of human history, he declared not only to the blacks of the United States but to the whites as well that I have been to the mountaintop and I have seen the promised land.

And his vision of a promised land that day inspired a generation of Americans. Hard to imagine what Martin Luther King would think of recent weeks and months in the United States now.

He styled that famous speech a bit like being a new Moses in a sense. Remembering Moses going up the mountaintop of Mount Nebo where he died at the end of Deuteronomy but looking out before his death and seeing from top to bottom, from north to south and east to west the promised land that God was holding before the people of God.

[1 : 3 1] Martin Luther King's speech filled the hopeless with hope. But centuries before him, though after Moses, Ezekiel also was transported to a mountaintop.

Likewise, a vision of a promised land. And similarly, Ezekiel's vision functions for the purpose of giving hope to the hopeless that they may hopeful be.

There are many similarities, in fact, between Ezekiel and also Moses, in a sense on whose speech and time Ezekiel's vision is also derived.

Think of the books of Exodus and Ezekiel. Both of them end with elaborate descriptions of the place of the presence of God.

In Exodus, the tabernacle. In Ezekiel, the vision of the temple that we'll see tonight. Both books, Exodus and Ezekiel, have frequently throughout the purpose of God's work in the world is that they or you may know that I am God.

[2 : 4 0] You, the Israelites, they, the Egyptians, they, Pharaoh, in Exodus, they, the pagan nations round about in the book of Ezekiel, and you, Israel, that you may know.

Both of them have a focus on the laws of God and especially highlight the issue of idolatry. We see it in the laws and their preeminence in Exodus, God speaking his laws from a mountain, and in Ezekiel as well.

The key sin of Israel is the sin of idolatry. We see in the book of Exodus the plagues on Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, the nasty, violent, oppressive regime that is antagonistic to the people of God.

And we saw two Sunday weeks, two weeks ago on a Sunday night, as we looked in the middle part of Ezekiel, the oracles of Ezekiel against a range of foreign nations around about, and there, and God's judgment to be brought on them, and not least there, Egypt again.

And of course the book of Exodus is pushing forward to the bringing in to the promised land of the people of God, and the book of Ezekiel is looking forward to the return of the people of God to the promised land.

[3 : 56] Ezekiel began his book with a vision. The vision in the valley Kiba in exile. A vision of a holy God there in exile.

A vision that was later explained, as we saw earlier in January, chapters 8 to 11, another vision in this book, of how the glory of God deported itself out of the temple of Jerusalem because of the idolatry of Israel, and set out towards the east, explaining why the first vision, Ezekiel could see the holy glorious God present even in exile, and not in the temple of Jerusalem.

And now those two visions find their complement in the last nine chapters of the book, for from chapter 40, the beginning of which I read out earlier, to the very end of chapter 48, and the end of this book, we find a vision of the glory of God coming back to the land, back to his sacred space, back in the midst of his people, back in the midst of a glorious future for the people of Israel.

Now, this vision that concludes the book of Ezekiel focuses on the temple, it focuses on the land, and in between that, it focuses on the sacrifices in the temple.

Three things. I should also point out that this vision is much contested, at least by way of its application. There are those who think that there will be some literal rebuilding of stones and bricks and mortar in Jerusalem of this temple.

[5 : 30] And others not. And we'll explore that sort of issue as we go. Remember that at this time, the second half of the book of Ezekiel, the temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed.

Not so in the first half, when Ezekiel's words were primarily words of judgment. But then the voice came, the messenger came, in chapter 33, to say finally that Jerusalem had fallen, its temple destroyed.

And thereafter, amazingly, from the destruction of the temple, God's temple, come words of hope, not words of hopelessness. So it's in that light, in that context, that we find this final vision.

The temple of Jerusalem is no more. All that are left are foundations. But in the second half of the book, words of hope.

Words of hope that draw their threads together in this climactic, glorious vision of the glory of God. It is hope for those in exile, as we've consistently seen these last couple of weeks.

[6 : 37] Not hope for those left in Judah, where we might expect the hope to be, because that's the promised land. But rather, the hope of the future lies with those away from the land in Babylon, where Ezekiel is, that they may return.

Notice too, that it's a hope beyond the temple. Even though this is a temple vision, at least in its opening section, the hope of the future doesn't lie with the temple itself, but with God, whose glory fills the temple.

That's where Israel had got so wrong earlier. They thought that the temple itself was the guarantee of their future, not so. God is the guarantee of the future.

And to demonstrate that, he let the temple be destroyed so that their falsely placed hope would be redirected to him. As I say, this vision of nine chapters falls into three parts.

The temple, chapters 40 to 43. 43, the last bit, to 46, are to do with sacrifices in the temple. And 47 and 8, to deal with the land.

[7 : 48] Firstly, the temple. And I've read out the opening verses of chapter 40 of Ezekiel. This is a virtual reality type tour that Ezekiel is on and that we're on tonight.

We're on a fast forward version of it, so to speak. We're not going to be able to read every verse and look at every verse. But Ezekiel is taken to a mountaintop overlooking what appears to be Jerusalem, though it's not really named.

And he looks over a structure that looks like a city. It's a very high mountain that he's taken to. He's taken in visions of God. It's an expression we've seen earlier in the book.

And it's very vivid. It's as though he's there, but he's not. He's still in exile. But it's a very vivid vision that God gives him in order that he may relay it to those amongst whom he sits.

I remember watching a documentary of archaeology in Jerusalem a few years ago. I can't remember what it was called, but it was very well done. And as the archaeologist walked around and showed these stones and this brick and all that sort of stuff in Jerusalem, where I'd been a couple of times, then the graphics over it start rebuilding the old structures.

[9 : 03] And when I saw that, I thought, I wish when I go to Jerusalem that I could click a button and it'll all rebuild around me because sometimes you see all this and it's hard to imagine. Well, it's as though Ezekiel's on this tour back what appears to be Jerusalem, which is now just in ruins, but this virtual reality of a temple and buildings and walls and storehouses and altar and gates and doors and all that sort of paraphernalia.

It's very vivid for Ezekiel. We don't have pictures of it. God communicates to us in words and so the words are given to us for the same purpose. So what does he see?

He enters from the east, the very gateway from which the glory of God had departed in the earlier vision. East looking out towards presumably the Mount of Olives if this is Jerusalem.

He's taken then into the inner court the inner court is like a U shape that is in front of you. It's flat and then sides that go down and he's taken to the north side and then the south side exploring bits of the inner court and then in chapter 40 verse 48 he goes inside the sorry, that's the outer court and then in verse 28 he goes inside into the inner court.

That's in verse 28 of chapter 40. So he's looked around taken by this man this guide to see the north and then the south in the outer court taken in from the south gate into the inner court which again is sort of U shaped maybe not quite as pronounced.

[10 : 36] There he has a look around as well guided by this man and then in verse 48 he's taken to the vestibule the entrance way into the very holy part of the temple. If you can imagine it's not quite sort of concentric circles because it's cut off at the back but the outer court the inner court and then in the middle of it the temple and he's taken at the east end of the vestibule of the temple itself.

What he's seen has three levels. When he enters the outer court he goes up seven steps we're told in verse 22. When he goes into the inner court he goes up eight more steps and when he gets to the very vestibule of the temple itself it's a further ten steps up.

That's probably about two and a half to three stories in total a couple of stories it's not huge it's not like climbing up a massive mountain but you get the sense that as you approach the holy central place of the temple we are stepping up and up in elevation.

In the outer court there's lots of rooms and storehouses we won't worry about that. There are gates from the north the south and the east where he comes in. In the inner court the same there's a north a south and an east gate from the outer court into the inner court he enters it in from the southern gate going up these eight steps more store rooms around the inner court and then he comes to the temple itself the end of chapter 40.

The entry to the vestibule of the temple is 14 cubits wide a cubit is a foot and a half roughly a fingertip to elbow 18 inches.

[12:17] So 10 what do I say 14 cubits wide the entry into the nave or the central part into the holy part of the temple is 10 cubits wide we see at the beginning of chapter 41 the entry into the inner room the most holy place is 6 cubits wide the idea being that there's a more and more restricted entrance into the holiest part of this vision of the temple.

the outer court would be probably for any man maybe for any person we're not quite told that but it fits the general pattern of the earlier temple of Solomon the inner court probably for priests only and then the very central part the inside of the holy place for the high priest only but it's interesting that Ezekiel who we're told at the very beginning of this book was a priest from the tribe of Levi presumably is left at the vestibule and we're told only that the man who guides him goes in early in chapter 41 verses 3 and 4 and what's inside is relayed back to him from the man who goes in it shows us again the holiness of this central place even though at this point it's actually empty inside it's panelled from floor to ceiling there are no windows we're told in chapter 41 it's panelled with wood and there are depictions on it of two things we're told in chapter 41 verses 15 to 20 well I won't read all those verses now it's panelled with pictures of palm trees very pleasant it sounds a bit like a tourist advertisement but the palm trees are there no doubt as partly symbolism of the trees of the garden of Eden it fits the decoration of the earlier temple you see the tree of life that stood in the centre of the garden of Eden and that the

Jewish menorah seven branch candlestick so often represents as well but the other thing on this wood panelling that's represented here a cherubim now we think of Raphael's cute cherubs and cuddly little babies in those kitsch pictures that you can buy in different shops but as I said back in chapter one when we looked at that after Christmas a cherub was fairly ferocious cherubim that's the plural of cherub guarded the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were expelled they were there as the symbolism of Solomon's temple to guard entrance into the most holy place they are guards ferocious guards to keep people out and guard the holy presence of God and here they are again in the vision here late in chapter 41 in front of the most holy place was an altar to which we return a bit later in chapter 42 back out he comes he inspects various storehouses guided by this man and he ends up at the end of chapter 42 back where he started at the eastern gateway entrance to the whole temple precinct all of this time everything has been measured by the guide who carried a measuring stick with him so what's going on in the book of exodus many chapters are devoted to the detail of the tabernacle the forerunner of the temple a sort of portable version as exodus 25 to 31 deals with instructions to build it and exodus 35 to 40 deals with the actual building of it so seven chapters of instructions and six of completion a third of the book of exodus but there the measurements are for building the descriptions in those chapters come with instructions to build it this way but not so in Ezekiel here in Ezekiel the measurements are for description so that we can visualize its breadth and depth and so on the descriptions the measurements are not there for an instruction to build indeed there are lots of details that are not in fact included it's actually shorter on detail than the instructions to build the tabernacle in exodus but there's one thing missing one key thing missing at the end of the building of the tabernacle in exodus having actually built it according to the instructions given earlier in that book we're told in the very last paragraph indeed the last paragraph of exodus 40 verse 34 that the glory of the

Lord came and filled the tabernacle similarly a few hundred years later when Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem the glory of the Lord filled it on the day of his dedication prayer in 1 Kings chapter 8 Ezekiel had seen in an earlier vision the glory of the Lord departing from the temple of Jerusalem and later on heard that the temple had been destroyed in chapter 33 but now it comes back as we heard in the reading from chapter 43 from this vision of Ezekiel remember chapter 43 says this then he brought me to the gate the gate facing east the gate where he began this vision in chapter 40 1 the four living creatures the flames and coals in their midst the wheels underneath the blue dome over the top and the throne of God above it that's the glory of the Lord as he visualized it and described it in chapter 1 and here it is it's coming back he'd seen it in chapter 11 departing to the east to exile and now it's coming back in chapter 43 coming from the east the sound was like the sound of mighty waters and the earth shone with his glory the vision

I saw was like the vision that I'd seen when he came to destroy the city and like the vision that I'd seen by the river Kibbar chapters 8 to 11 the first bit chapter 1 the second bit and I fell upon my face as he did in chapter 1 again as the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east the spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court and the glory of the Lord filled the temple you see there's no point in a vision of the temple if there's no glory of the Lord in it because the temple is in a sense symbolic of the presence of God on earth in the this is the place of my throne so the temple the religious centre is the place not just of a religious practice it is the centre for the king they have thrones

[19 : 37] God rules over his people and over this world and he rules from the throne of this temple where I will reside among the people of Israel forever the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name neither they nor their kings by their whoring and by the corpses of their kings at their death when they place their threshold by my threshold and their doorpost beside my doorpost with only a wall between me and them they were defiling my holy name by their abominations that they had committed we saw all that in chapter 8 the idolatry that was going on in the temple itself but no more says glory of God is not God caving in to the depravity of humanity it is a holy God coming to live in the midst of a holy people and he says in verse 9 now let them put away their idolatry and the corpses of their kings far from me and

I will reside among them forever as for you mortal verse 10 says describe the temple to the house of Israel and that's what Ezekiel is doing by the very words of this book that he's described in effect to us and the purpose of that let them measure the pattern and let them be ashamed of their iniquities it's amazing isn't it I'm sure if we were to sit down tonight and read through these opening chapters of this vision and all the measurements of the temple we're unlikely to feel shame at our iniquities now that's in part because we're divorced from the temple practices before the exile in the Old Testament but hopefully by tonight's end we'll realise why we should feel likewise shamed the point of the vision is that an idolatrous sinful people will repent of their sins and purified by

God's spirit as we saw last Sunday night they will live in the midst and around God's presence forever you see the temple design points to the holiness of God it is not an easy access it's not free for anyone to come and go casually there are courts outer and inner there are walls to keep people out inappropriately or inappropriate people out appropriately kept out indeed at the centre of it is the holiness of God and all this elevation gates courts is to make us very careful it's a warning sign of how we approach almighty God well as I said at the beginning there are people today who are still awaiting the rebuilding of this temple of Ezekiel when the Jews did return from exile in 538 BC and thereafter finally they built a temple provoked to do so by the prophets

Haggai and Zechariah they began it in 520 BC completed in 515 it didn't fit the pattern of this certainly not exactly far from it and so there are those who think that this picture of the temple of Ezekiel will one day be rebuilt in Jerusalem indeed even in Jerusalem today there are movements like the third temple movement that are looking forward to the day when the Muslim dome of the rock will be wiped away and a temple rebuilt there are dispensationalist Christians as well who argue for the same thing that the day is coming of a rebuilding of a temple on that site in Jerusalem what they fail to see though is that this is a vision not legislation to build it's a vision of a temple without the command to build it exactly like this it's a vision given for hope not a vision given for construction like the tabernacle in

Exodus but moreover especially for the Christians who read this wrongly they fail to see where this vision finds its fulfilment the temple has come a living temple Jesus famously said destroy this building of temple and in three days I'll raise it and we're told in John 2 he was referring to his resurrection body the temple has come when the Lord Jesus rose and Christians who belong to Jesus are being built into that living temple it's a holy temple the Lord Jesus and those built into him are likewise holy the temple you see of the presence of a holy God is not limited to a geographical place but is located and centered on the foundation of Jesus Christ the person the son of God and we in him if we're believers in him are being in a sense built into him like living stones as

[24 : 50] Paul uses a similar sort of idea in Ephesians 2 Peter does the same in his first letter chapter 2 a writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we can have confidence to enter the most holy place that is because the living temple has come we belong to it we're actually in it in a sense and just as this temple vision is completed by the return of the glory of the glory of the only son Jesus is the fulfillment of this vision the middle section deals with sacrifice and much more briefly shall we look at that the rest of chapter 43 through to the end of 46 there's the description of the altar in the rest of chapter 43 an altar being large three meters high place of sacrifice where in this altar the priest would climb from the east thus facing west not east because eastward facings were for pagans who worshipped the sun there are various sacrifices for one week only that are described for us in chapter 43 it's the opening of the new temple so to speak it's the opening ceremony a week of purification to get this temple right in fact as

Ezekiel sees this vision he's actually instructed to take part in these sacrifices although when the next temple was rebuilt he would have been 108 if he would still been alive when it was completed it's hardly likely that that bit's well being and I will accept you says the Lord God burnt offerings were told earlier in the Old Testament in Leviticus are for atonement of sin the sacrifices of well being or peace offerings are there to celebrate the fellowship we have with God now that our sins are atoned for the Lord will accept you on the basis of sacrifice for sin that's the vision that Ezekiel sees it's but now in this purified new temple vision

God will accept his people not because they're perfect but because their sins are atoned for by sacrifice then the east door is shut never to be opened again it says never to be opened again probably because God's not going to depart again it's a sign of hope God is here and he's here for good and then chapters 44 to 46 give instructions about priests to categories of priests the general Levite priests and within it a subset of those descended from Zadok who have specific roles as priests there are details of different sacrifices and festivals and rituals that are to be conducted none of this is surprising all of it fits with Old Testament sacrificial practices in the original temple the emphasis throughout is on holiness the holiness of God the holiness of the place and the holiness of the people who are the priests and the offerers of sacrifices it reminds us that access to

God is limited not only is it limited through the gates and the courts and the elevation of this temple structure but it's limited by atoning sacrifices approach God only by blood shed for atonement for those who think that this temple is yet to be rebuilt who are Christians it seems to me bamboozling that they can argue that because here are sacrifices for atonement that are being commanded animal sacrifices but we know that the sacrifice for sin has come it is the most crystal clear statement in the Bible Jesus died for our sins no more animal sacrifice is needed so for any so called Christian to think that somehow this literally has to be rebuilt and done like this is a person in effect who's ignoring the very clear testimony of all of the New Testament and in fact is a degradation of

Jesus to do so this section on sacrifices points us clearly to New Testament fulfilment it's in the language that Ezekiel and the language of the Israelites for their understanding when Jesus came of course there were many who rejected him they didn't understand how he fulfilled all of these things that's why the New Testament explains it to us in such length things but it reminds us that approaching God is still through only one means through the blood of atonement sacrifice no other way for we are sinners and he is holy but the atoning sacrifice has been made for us not by us when Jesus died on the cross dying for the sins of the world so that God remains moral and holy and though we be sinners our sins are dealt with and taken away paid for fully by God's great mercy it's all there embryonically in this vision and it's there in reality in the

[30 : 41] New Testament with the coming of Jesus that's why the writer to the Hebrews can say we have confidence to enter the most holy place not confidence in ourselves but confidence by the blood of Jesus the atoning sacrifice shed for us you see the whole temple sacrifice priest system and all the paraphernalia finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ the living temple the great high priest the atoning sacrifice it's done for us by God who is so rich in mercy as the temple points to Jesus as the idea of glory points to Jesus so too does the idea of sacrifice point to Jesus and the altar point to his cross the last section of this nine chapter long vision chapters 47 and 8 deal with the land they deal with it in a sense in three parts firstly just a river in the land indeed at its source not even a river but just indeed a trickle it's a very peculiar vision begins in chapter 47 verse 1 he brought me back to the entrance of the temple there water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east for the temple faced east and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple south of the altar then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me round on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east and the water was coming out on the south side going on and he had to go out the north gate because the east gate's been closed remember so he had to go around the outside the long way and there this water that he'd seen on the inside from the very centre of the temple it's a thin trickle that's now coming out to the south of the east gate and going on eastward with a cord in his hand the man measured 1,000 cubits 1,500 feet thereabouts what's that nearly a third of a mile I guess and then led me through the water and it was ankle deep again he measured 1,000 and led me through the water and it was knee deep again he measured 1,000 and led me through the water and it was up to the waist and again he measured 1,000 and it was a river that

I could not cross for the water had risen two kilometres away roughly it was deep enough to swim in a river that could not be crossed and he said to me mortal have you seen this what's it all pointing to what's the point of all this water well the effect of it in verse 7 I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other symbols of fertility so often ascribed to the pagan gods of the land and then in verse 8 amazingly he said to me this water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arava the rift valley the very low valley that runs along the Jordan river from the sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea and down to the Red Sea in the south and when it enters the sea the sea of stagnant waters that is the Dead Sea as we call it today the Salt Sea sometimes described the water will become fresh that's certainly not been fulfilled literally today the Dead Sea is even deader now than it was then it's drying up now it's 35% salt you can hardly swim in it because any cut on you will sting and there's so much salt that it makes you buoyant you can float without any floating apparatus reading the newspaper that's what people get their photographs taken doing it's amazing to think that a freshwater river is going to change a salt lake into freshwater because if you put freshwater and salt water together you end up with more salt water even if it's diluted this is an extraordinary statement you see what's it on about finally at the end of this description of the river in verse 12 we read on the banks of both sides of the river there will grow all kinds of trees for food their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail but they will bear fresh fruit every month most orchards in this area as they used to be wouldn't have done that because the water for them flows from the sanctuary their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing he said it's not just any old river it's an unnamed river but the water source is the very sanctuary of

God from the throne of God in effect God is the source of this life-giving water life-giving water for fertility for fruit for healing salvation for bringing life to what in effect is dead it's clearly symbolic and poetic language what is it saying the garden of Eden had rivers in it named in Genesis chapter 2 the rivers of the water of life as well the end of the Bible has the river of the water of life flowing from God's throne as well psalm 46 speaks of Jerusalem having the river that brings life even though there's no real such river around Jerusalem poetic language is saying that God himself from his throne brings life and healing God is the life giver the healer the one who blesses who brings fertility and food all the covenant blessings and promises are summed up in the fruit in the effectiveness of this little river well there may I guess be those who are waiting for this very river to flow from a rebuilt temple one day I suggest they wait in vain they wait in vain in ignorance as well because it's come that river already you see there was a man who stood by a well in the center of

Israel talking to a woman she was trying to get water out of a well he offered her life-giving water and then in the very temple precincts of Jerusalem itself two thousand years ago the same man stood and he said to the crowds gathered on the last and great day of the feast of tabernacles that he was the one who would give life-giving water behind him there were fountains of artificial water water floating around sort of artificially and he was referring then to the gift of his own spirit the holy spirit who would produce life-giving water see it's come it's been fulfilled and yet again Jesus is the one who fulfills this he's the life giver the world the giver of the water of life the giver by his spirit the one who brings food for us for eternity the one who brings life to what is dead he's come the second part of this depiction of the land describes its external boundaries at the rest of chapter 47 the borders the land go from north down the east and south and then back around the west coast it's not quite the same description of the land we get in the old testament it's even bigger actually in some respects it's bigger than Solomon ever ruled over and he ruled over the most of any

Israelite or Jewish king it includes the Lebanon in the north but not the Transjordan which was an added bit in early days of Moses the point of it all though is that the whole of Israel will be reunited a message we saw on Wednesday night from Ezekiel chapter 37 remember that for 200 or 150 to 200 years Israel had been a divided nation and the north had gone in fact in fact for 400 years it will be reunited under one king one shepherd and then finally the last section of chapter 48 deals with the boundaries internally in the land the boundaries between the tribal areas they're strange boundaries many of them are straight lines a bit like we've got you know the Western Australian and Northern Territory South Australia borders you know straight lines they're very artificial we can do it in our country because it's pretty flat and remote in Israel it's not and yet it looks like the borders of these tribes are simply basically straight lines as though you've got a ruled page and each tribe one on top of the other from the north down to the south one tribe flat boundary next tribe flat boundary next tribe all the way down 12 tribes with a special place in the middle that's described in this chapter as well it's a highly stylized border of the land they're not the borders of ancient Israel the tribes are not even in the same sort of place most of them the tribes on the very north and very south are those that derive from the concubine wives of Jacob you may know that the tribes of Israel come from the 12 sons of Jacob in effect the ones that were born to concubines or his wives maids they're furthest away the north and the south and then you've got the ones in the middle there are seven on the north and five on the south the seven on the north the bottom of those is Judah and the top of the five is Ephraim it's strange because they were central in ancient Israel but the other way around now they're in reverse and in between them is a special sacred place a thin strip of land across the cross that's described in chapter 48 verse 8 to 22 it's the place in which will be a city in which will be the temple the vision of which we've just seen it's a reserved place a sacred place but

[40 : 29] Judah's on the top and Ephraim's underneath the reverse of what we've come to expect on the assumption that each land each tribal land is the same width and they said one portion one portion so it's suggesting that they're the same width if you go from the top boundary to the bottom you end up with Judah halfway up the country and the sacred space doesn't even cross where Jerusalem is today or was then now I say that because for those who think that somehow this is a literary building Jerusalem is not even the location it seems to me that people are doing a pick and choose method to say yes we'll rebuild a temple Jerusalem's not even it's further north 30 miles north maybe where Shiloh was in Old Testament times the reserve section is where this temple place will be it's saying that God is central in the midst of his people the city is a perfect square in area probably because it's got an idea of expanding the square place of the holy of holies in the temple the idea is in the scriptures that the glory of the Lord which is confined within the holy place will expand to fill the city which will expand to fill the world for that's God's goal that his glory fills the whole universe the name of the city is not Jerusalem either so we shouldn't get hung up about that the name of the city at the very end of chapter 48 the last words of the book the Lord is there that's its name the Lord is there we take too much for granted when we consider being in the presence of

God we assume I think too often casual easy access these words and the scriptures as a whole warn us to take God seriously that we can only approach God through an atoning sacrifice the great grace and joy is that God has made that sacrifice once for all when his son Jesus Christ died on the cross but though we don't make the sacrifice our approach to God is still and always shall be and always must be only through his blood that we're in God's presence trusting Jesus death has dealt with our sins and we're responding to that not only with faith but with faithful obedience as well for God remains a holy God Ezekiel's vision and indeed his whole book is driving us to see a pure and holy God a moral God who is jealous when his people turn away to idols and other gods a God of fierce wrath and punishment for those who reject him and repel him a God who's jealous for his own glory a God who's eager for all the nations to know that he is the Lord and yet this vision of a holy God does not exclude or preclude any sense of mercy or grace either it's astonishing thing about God he is perfect in holiness and yet not compromising that holiness by issuing mercy and grace that he invites and draws people into his holy presence who do not deserve it who cannot earn it by good works or religious piety of any sort the God who provides transformation placing his own spirit in our hearts as we saw a week or so ago an undeserved and gracious gift he promises access to himself through an atoning sacrifice that he made a sacrifice we do not have to offer and he promises an enduring presence in the midst of his people and those promises he delivers on his people and he gives us access to his presence in the midst of his presence in the presence of his Son and when we gather in his name he is in our midst he gives us access through the blood of his Son wherever and whenever he is a presence with us for eternity he's given us a new heart and his life-giving spirit and he's done this why for the sake of his glory so that we so the people of every tongue and tribe and every nation will give him glory will acknowledge that he is the Lord so the people of every race and tribe and tongue and nation will gather around in the final picture of heaven and sing forever the praises of God he's done this so that the whole earth not just the center place of Jerusalem not just the city but the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea and we read this fully realized and finally fulfilled in the last pages of scripture

John disciple of Jesus says this of the vision he has I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb and the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb the nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it its gates will never be shut by day and there'll be no night there people will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations but nothing unclean will enter it nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life then the angel showed me the river of the water of life bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city on either side of the river is the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit producing its fruit each month and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations nothing accursed will be found there anymore the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and his servants will worship him they will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads and there'll be no more night they need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord God will be their light and they will reign forever and ever

Amen come Lord Jesus let's spend a moment as we reflect on the glory of God