

Jehovah-Shammah

¹ Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. ² And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. ³ And the vision I saw was just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. ⁴ As the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east, ⁵ the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.— Ezekiel 43:1-5 ESV

YHWH-šāmmāh – “The LORD is There.” The closing chapters of the Book of Ezekiel contain God’s promise of a restored nation of Israel in a revived kingdom complete with a new-and-improved Temple. This eschatological glimpse into Israel’s future was intended to provide hope and remind Ezekiel’s original audience of God’s faithfulness.

Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry while living as an exile in Babylon. A former priest, Ezekiel was part of the 10,000 Jews sent to Babylon as captives during Nebuchadnezzar’s second deportation of Jerusalemites in 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:12-17). During his exile, Ezekiel received a vision that portrayed the glory of Yahweh in a strange and bewildering manner. The vision was a spectacular sight and contained visual imagery difficult for Ezekiel to comprehend. But he knew he had seen the LORD, Yahweh.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. — Ezekiel 1:28 ESV

The vision was accompanied by a message from Yahweh, providing Ezekiel with a commission to serve as His spokesman.

“Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’” — Ezekiel 2:3-4 ESV

As part of his vision, Ezekiel was provided with a scroll that “had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezekiel 2:10 ESV). Ezekiel was commanded to consume the scroll and regurgitate its content to “a rebellious house” (Ezekiel 3:9 ESV) with “a hard forehead and a stubborn heart” (Ezekiel 3:7 ESV).

Ezekiel was warned that his message would not be well-received and that his efforts among the exiled people of Israel would prove fruitless. But despite the less-than-encouraging nature of his assignment, Ezekiel was assured that the vision and message had come from Yahweh Himself. He heard a sound like an earthquake and a voice thundering from heaven.

“Blessed be the glory of the LORD (Yḥōvâ) from its place!” — Ezekiel 3:12 ESV

Yahweh had spoken. But it is important to note that, at this point in the story, Yahweh remains in His “place.” He has visited Ezekiel in a vision but has not come to dwell among His exiled people. But fast-forward to the end of the book and Yahweh provides Ezekiel with a much-different vision of a much-improved future when He will dwell among His restored people in a reconstituted kingdom.

It begins in chapter 40, where Ezekiel receives another vision. On this occasion, he is transported back to Judah and placed on a high peak where he can view the city of Jerusalem spread out before him. But what he sees is dramatically different than the disheveled pile of rubble the Babylonians had left behind. Ezekiel is taken on a guided tour of the city, beginning with the newly restored Temple. Everything is immaculate and perfect. No detail has been overlooked. What the Babylonians destroyed, God has restored. But there is one thing missing: Yahweh’s glory. The city has been restored and the Temple has been rebuilt, but it all means nothing without the presence of Yahweh. In his vision, Ezekiel is privileged to see the glory of Yahweh return, accompanied by a reassuring message of hope.

“Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever.” – Ezekiel 43:7 ESV

In the remaining chapters of his book, Ezekiel describes the nature of this new kingdom in which Yahweh will dwell with His people. Ezekiel is given a detailed layout of the tribal allotment within the Millennial Kingdom. Beginning in the north and working his way down, he describes God’s plan for the geographical arrangement of the 12 tribes. Each tribe will occupy a portion of the land of promise that extends from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Jordan River in the east. The tribes of Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad will have the “Brook of Egypt” as their western border. Unlike the division of the land under Joshua, the Millennial Kingdom will allot equal portions of real estate to each of the tribes. When Moses had set aside the land for the people of Israel, he had done so based on the population size of each tribe. But in the Millennial Kingdom, the land distribution will be based on a different criteria. Rather than size, it appears to be based on faithfulness.

In examining the north-to-south allotment of the land, it becomes clear that there is an intended progression to the order. Dan, one of the most unfaithful tribes, will find itself located in the far north of the land. The tribe of Gad will bookend the land from its location in the south. It’s interesting to note that the four sons born to Jacob’s concubines (Dan, Asher, Naphtali, and Gad) all occupy land on the extreme edges of the Kingdom. Yet Judah and Benjamin are located on either side of the holy district, the site of the Millennial Temple. These were the two tribes that made up the southern kingdom of Judah after God split Solomon’s kingdom in two. During the days of the divided kingdom, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin displayed the greatest degree of faithfulness to Yahweh and yielded the largest number of godly kings. Their reward for their faithfulness will be in the form of land allotments on either side of the holy district. The rest of the sons born to Jacob’s two wives, Leah and Rachel, will occupy land toward the center of the kingdom.

Proximity to the Millennial Temple seems to be the point in all of this because that is where God's presence will dwell. Ezekiel saw the vision of God's glory reentering the new temple and taking up residence in the Most Holy Place (Ezekiel 43:4). The Millennial Temple will sit within the holy city, and Ezekiel describes this future Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8) as being six miles in circumference. It will have 12 gates, three on each side, dedicated to the 12 tribes of Israel. His description of the city and its gates mirrors the one given by the apostle John in the book of Revelation. But John was describing the New Jerusalem.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. – Revelation 21:10-13 ESV

He was not describing the Jerusalem of the Millennial Kingdom, but yet another iteration of the holy city that will appear at the end of the millennial age when God makes all things new (Revelation 21:5). This New Jerusalem will have 12 gates named after the 12 tribes of Israel, but it will also feature 12 foundations, dedicated to the 12 apostles.

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. – Revelation 21:14 ESV

The greatest difference between these two versions of the city of Jerusalem appears to be the timing of their appearance. The Jerusalem that will exist during the Millennial Kingdom will feature a Temple and a reinstated sacrificial system. The city will be occupied by both Jews and Gentiles, but not all will be Christ followers. In the New Jerusalem, the occupants will be from every tribe, nation, and tongue, and share a common faith in Christ. It will be filled with the elect of God from all eras, including both Jews and Gentiles.

"The Millennial Kingdom is dedicated to the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Its very existence culminates God's covenant promises to the patriarchs and fulfills every commitment He made to them. But that kingdom will come to an end and be replaced by the New Jerusalem and the eternal state, and at that time, "it will be 'true' Israel—those who have trusted in Jesus Christ—that will enter the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is through the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem that the true tribal people—believers of Jewish descent as well as Gentiles who have been 'grafted in' with God's people (Romans 11:17–25)—will enter the joy of the Lord (see Matthew 25:21)." – (<https://www.gotquestions.org/twelve-gates-Revelation.html>).

But there is one important factor that both Jerusalems have in common: The presence of Yahweh. John describes his vision of the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven.

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." – Revelation 21:1-4 ESV

The dwelling place of God will be with man. He will dwell with them. God himself will be with them as their God. There is a promise of permanence in this passage. God will come to live among His people – on earth. Our final destination is not heaven, but earth. All the redeemed will live in perfect unity with God the Father and God the Son – for all eternity. And in this future Jerusalem, there will be no temple.

And 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 gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... – Revelation 21:22-24 ESV

But the Jerusalem of the Millennial Kingdom, with its glorious Temple, filled with Yahweh's glory, will also enjoy His presence. In fact, the very name of the main gate that will lead into this future city is Jehovah-Shammah: The Lord Is There" (Ezekiel 48:35 ESV).

The book of Ezekiel has finally come to an end. It has been 22 years since Ezekiel first saw his vision of God and received his commission as God's prophet to the people of Judah. His ministry began with an unbelievable glimpse of the glory of God. He was given a word to deliver from the very mouth of God, predicting the coming siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the deportation of the people of Judah to Babylon. In chapter ten, Ezekiel is shown the real tragedy of it all – the glory of God departing the temple. The very presence and power of God were removed from the midst of the people due to their sin and rebellion. But two decades later, God gave Ezekiel another vision of a rebuilt temple, a restored Jerusalem, and a revived relationship with the people of God.

The book of Ezekiel ends with the city of Jerusalem referred to by the name, "The Lord Is There." It is a statement of God's faithfulness and a reminder of His desire to live among His people. The abiding presence of God is a powerful image with which to sum up this book. While God had to punish His people for their sins, He never abandoned them completely. He remained faithful and committed to His plan for them. Even while they were in exile, He sent His prophets to communicate His message to them. And ultimately, God returned them to the land. But there is a day when God will complete His plan for the people of Israel and fully fulfill His promises to them. He will once again make His place among them so that the city of Jerusalem can truly be called "Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord Is There."