

CHAPTER 43

The prophet, having given us a view of the mystical temple, the gospel-church, as he received it from the Lord, that it might appear not to be erected in vain, comes to describe, in this and the next chapter, the worship that should be performed in it, but under the type of the Old-Testament services. In this chapter we have,

I. Possession taken of this temple, by the glory of God filling it (v. 1-6).

II. A promise given of the continuance of God's presence with his people upon condition of their return to, and continuance in, the instituted way of worship, and their abandoning idols and idolatry (v. 7-12).

III. A description of the altar of burnt-offerings (v. 13-17).

IV. Directions given for the consecration of that altar (v. 18-27). Ezekiel seems here to stand between God and Israel, as Moses the servant of the Lord did when the sanctuary was first set up.

EZEKIEL 43:1-6

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

After Ezekiel has patiently surveyed the temple of God, the greatest glory of this earth, he is admitted to a higher form, and honoured with a sight of the glories of the upper world; it is said to him, *Come up hither*. He has seen the temple, and sees it to be very spacious and splendid; but, till the glory of God comes into it, it is but like the dead bodies he had seen in vision (Ezekiel 37), that had *no breath* till the Spirit of life entered into them. Here therefore he sees the house filled with God's glory.

I. He has a vision of *the glory of God* (v. 2), *the glory of the God of Israel*, that God who is in covenant with Israel, and whom they serve and worship. The idols of the heathen have no glory but what they owe to the goldsmith or the painter; but this is the glory of the God of Israel. This

glory came from the way of the east, and therefore he was brought to the gate that leads towards the east, to expect the appearance and approach of it. Christ's star was seen in the east, and he is that *other angel that ascends out of the east*, ^{<600>}Revelation 7:2. For he is the morning star, he is the sun of righteousness. Two things he observed in this appearance of the glory of God: —

1. The power of his word which he heard: *His voice was like a noise of many waters*, which is heard very far, and makes impressions; the noise of purling streams is grateful, of a roaring sea dreadful, ^{<605>}Revelation 1:15; 14:2. Christ's gospel, in the glory of which he shines, was to be proclaimed aloud, the report of it to be heard far; to some it is a savour of life, to others of death, according as they are.

2. The brightness of his appearance which he saw: *The earth shone with his glory*; for God is light, and none can bear the lustre of his light, none has seen nor can see it. Note, That glory of God which shines in the church shines on the world. When God appeared for David *the brightness that was before him* dispersed the clouds, ^{<602>}Psalms 18:12. This appearance of the glory of God to Ezekiel he observed to be the same with the vision he saw when he first received his commission (^{<600>}Ezekiel 1:4), *according to that by the river Chebar* (v. 3); because God is the same, he was pleased to manifest himself in the same manner, for with him is *no variableness*. “It was the same” (says he) “as that which I saw *when I came to destroy the city*, that is, to foretel the city's destruction,” which he did with such authority and efficacy, and the event did so certainly answer the prediction, that he might be said to destroy it. As a judge, in God's name, he passed a sentence upon it, which was soon executed. God appeared in the same manner when he sent him to speak words of terror and when he sent him to speak words of comfort; for in both God is and will be glorified. *He kills and he makes alive; he wounds and he heals*, ^{<629>}Deuteronomy 32:39. To the same hand that destroyed we must look for deliverance. *He has smitten, and he will bind up. Una eademque manus vulnus opemque tulit* — *The same hand inflicted the wound and healed it.*

II. He has a vision of the entrance of this glory into the temple. When he saw this glory he *fell upon his face* (v. 3), as not able to bear the lustre of God's glory, or rather as one willing to give him the glory of it by a humble and reverent adoration. But the Spirit *took him up* (v. 5) when the *glory of the Lord had come into the house* (v. 4), that he might see how the

house was filled with it. He saw how the glory of the Lord in this same appearance departed from the temple, because it was profaned, to his great grief; now he shall see it return to the temple to his great satisfaction. See ^{<368>}Ezekiel 10:18, 19; 11:23. Note, Though God may forsake his people for a small moment, he will return with everlasting loving-kindness. God's glory *filled the house* as it had filled the tabernacle which Moses set up and the temple of Solomon, ^{<369>}Exodus 40:34; ^{<370>}1 Kings 8:10. Now we do not find that ever the Shechinah did in that manner take possession of the second temple, and therefore this was to have its accomplishment in that glory of the divine grace which shines so brightly in the gospel church, and fills it. Here is no mention of a cloud filling the house as formerly, for we now *with open face behold the glory of the Lord*, in the face of Christ, and not as of old through the cloud of types.

III. He receives instructions more immediately from the glory of the Lord, as Moses did when God had taken possession of the tabernacle (^{<371>}Leviticus 1:1): *I heard him speaking to me out of the house*, v. 6. God's glory shining in the church, we must thence expect to receive divine oracles. *The man stood by me*; we could not bear to hear the voice of God any more than to see the face of God if Jesus Christ did not stand by us as Mediator. Or, if this was a created angel, it is observable that when God began to speak to Ezekiel he stood by and gave way, having no more to say. Nay, he stood by the prophet, as a learner with him; for *to the principalities and powers*, to the angels themselves, who *desire to look into these things, is known by the church the manifold wisdom of God*, ^{<372>}Ephesians 3:10. The man stood by him to conduct him thither where he might receive further discoveries, ^{<373>}Ezekiel 44:1.

^{<374>}EZEKIEL 43:7-12

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

God does here, in effect, renew his covenant with his people Israel, upon his retaking possession of the house, and Ezekiel negotiates the matter, as Moses formerly. This would be of great use to the captives at their return both for direction and encouragement; but it looks further, to those that are blessed with the privileges of the gospel-temple, that they may understand how they are before him on their good behaviour.

I. God, by the prophet, puts them in mind of their former provocations, for which they had long lain under the tokens of his displeasure. This conviction is spoken to them to make way for the comforts designed them. Though God *gives and upbraids not*, it becomes us, when he forgives, to upbraid ourselves with our unworthy conduct towards him. Let them now remember therefore,

1. That they had formerly *defiled God's holy name*, had profaned and abused all those sacred things by which he had made himself known among them, v. 7. *They and their kings* had brought contempt on the religion they professed, and their relation to God, by their spiritual whoredom, their idolatry, and by worshipping images, which they called *their kings* (for so *Moloch* signifies) or lords (for so *Baal* signifies), but which were really the *carcasses of kings*, not only lifeless and useless, but loathsome and abominable as dead carcasses, *in their high places*, set up in honour of them. They had defiled God's name by their abominations. And what were they? It was *in setting their threshold by my thresholds, and their post by my posts*, that is, adding their own inventions to God's institutions, and urging all to a compliance with them, as if they had been of equal authority and efficacy, *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (²⁹⁹³Isaiah 29:13); or, rather, setting up altars to their idols even in the courts of the temple, than which a more impudent affront could not be put upon the divine Majesty. Thus they set up a separation *wall between him and them*, which stopped the current of his favours to them and spoiled the acceptableness of their services to him. See what an indignity sinners do to God, setting up their walls in opposition to his, and thrusting him out from what is his right; and see what injury they do to themselves, for the nearer any come to God with their sins the further they set him at a distance from them. Some give this sense of it: Though their houses joined close to God's house, their posts and thresholds to hi, so that they were in a manner his next neighbours, *there was but a wall between me and them* (so it is in the margin), so that it might have been expected they would acquaint themselves with him and be in care to please him, yet they were not so much as neighbourly. Note, It often proves too true, *The nearer the church the further from God*. They were, by profession, in covenant with God, and yet they had *defiled the place of his throne* and of *the soles of his feet*, his temple, where he did both reside and reign. Jerusalem is called the *city of the great king* (³⁹⁸⁰Psalms 48:2) and his *footstool*, (³⁹⁹⁵Psalms 99:5;

132:7. Note, When God's ordinances are profaned his holy name is polluted.

2. That for this God had had a controversy with them in their late troubles. They could not condemn him, for he had but brought upon them the desert of their sins: *Wherefore I have consumed them in my anger*. Note, Those that pollute God's holy name fall under his just displeasure.

II. He calls upon them to repent and reform, and, in order to that, to be ashamed of their iniquities (v. 9): "*Now let them put away their whoredom*; now that they have smarted so severely for it, and now that God is returning in mercy to them and setting up his sanctuary again in the midst of them, now let them cast away their idols and have no more to do with them, that they may not again forfeit the privileges which they have been taught to know the worth of by the want of them. Let them put away their idols, those loathsome *carcasses of their kings, far from me*, from being a provocation to me." This was seasonable counsel now that the prophet had the model or pattern of the temple to set before them; for,

1. If *they see that pattern*, they will surely be ashamed of their sins (v. 10): when they see what mercy God has in store for them, notwithstanding their utter unworthiness of it, they will be ashamed to think of their disingenuous conduct towards him. Note, The goodness of God to us should lead us to repentance, especially to a penitential shame. *Let them measure the pattern* themselves, and see how much it exceeds the former pattern, and guess by that what great things God has in store for them; and surely it will put them out of countenance to think what the desert of their sins was. And then,

2. If *they be ashamed* of their sins, they shall surely see more of the pattern, v. 11. If they *be ashamed of all that they have done*, upon a general view of the goodness of God, let them have a more distinct particular account of the temple. Note, Those that improve what they see and know of the goodness of God shall see and know more of it. And then, and not till then, we are qualified for God's favours, when we are truly humbled for our own follies. "*Show them the form of the house*; let them see what a stately structure it will be; and withal show them the ordinances and laws of it." Note, With the foresights of our comforts it is fit that we should get the knowledge of our duty; with the privileges of God's house we must acquaint ourselves with the rules of it. *Show them* these

ordinances, that they may *keep them* and *do them*. Note, *Therefore* we are made to know our duty, that we may do it, and be blessed in our deed.

III. He promises that they shall be such as they should be, and then he will be to them such as they would have him to be, v. 7.

1. The house of *Israel shall no more defile my holy name*. This is pure gospel. The precept of the law says, You must not defile my name: the grace of the gospel says, You shall not. Thus what is required in the covenant is promised in the covenant, ^{<390>}Jeremiah 32:40.

2. Then *I will dwell in the midst of them for ever*; and the same again v. 9. God secures to us his good-will be confirming in us his good work. If we do not defile his name, we may be sure that he will not depart from us.

IV. The general law of God's house is laid down (v. 12), That, whereas formerly only the chancel, or sanctuary, was *most holy*, now the whole *mountain of the house* shall be so; the *whole limit thereof*, including all the courts and all the chambers, shall be as the most holy place, signifying that in gospel-times,

1. The whole church shall have the privilege of the *holy of holies*, that of a near access to God. All believers have now, under the gospel, *boldness to enter into the holiest* (^{<391>}Hebrews 10:19), with this advantage, that whereas the high priest entered in the virtue of the blood of bulls and goats, we enter in the virtue of the blood of Jesus, and, wherever we are, we have through him *access to the Father*.

2. The whole church shall be under a mighty obligation to press towards the perfection of holiness, *as he who has called us is holy*. All must now be most holy. *Holiness becomes God's house* for ever, and in gospel-times more than ever. Behold this is the *law of the house*; let none expect the protection of it that will not submit to this law.

^{<393>}EZEKIEL 43:13-27

THE VISION OF THE TEMPLE

This relates to the altar in this mystical temple, and that is mystical too; for Christ is our altar. The Jews, after their return out of captivity, had an altar

long before they had a temple, ^{<458B>}Ezra 3:3. But this was an altar in the temple. Now here we have,

I. The measures of the altar, v. 13. It was six yards square at the top and seven yards square at the bottom; it was four yards and a half high; it had a lower bench or shelf, here called a *settle*, a yard from the ground, on which some of the priests stood to minister, and another two yards above that, on which others of them stood, and these were each of them half a yard broad, and had ledges on either side, that they might stand firmly upon them. The sacrifices were killed at the table spoken of before, ^{<369B>}Ezekiel 40:39. What was to be burnt on the altar was given up to those on the lower bench, and handed by them to those on the higher, and they laid it on the altar. Thus in the service of God we must be assistant to one another.

II. The ordinances of the altar. Directions are here given,

1. Concerning the dedication of the altar at first. *Seven days* were to be spent in the dedication of it, and every day sacrifices were to be offered upon it, and particularly a goat for a *sin-offering* (v. 25), besides a young bullock for a *sin-offering* on the first day (v. 19), which teaches us in all our religious services to have an eye to Christ the great sin-offering. Neither our persons nor our performances can be acceptable to God unless sin be taken away, and that cannot be taken away but by the blood of Christ, which both sanctifies the altar (for Christ entered by his own blood, ^{<392>}Hebrews 9:12) and the gift upon the altar. There were also to be a *bullock* and a ram offered for a *burnt-offering* (v. 24), which was intended purely for the glory of God, to teach us to have an eye to that in all our services; we present ourselves as living sacrifices, and our devotions as spiritual sacrifices, that we and they may be to him for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory. The dedication of the altar is here called the *cleansing* and *purging* of it, v. 20, 26. Christ, our altar, though he had no pollution to be cleansed from, yet sanctified himself (^{<479>}John 17:19); and when we consecrate the altars of our hearts to God, to have the fire of holy love always burning upon them, we must see that they be purified and cleansed from the love of the world and the lusts of the flesh. It is observable that there are several differences between the rites of dedication here and those which were appointed Exodus 29, to intimate that the ceremonial institutions were mutable things, and the changes in them were earnest of their period in Christ. Only here, according to the

general law, that all the sacrifices must be seasoned with salt (^{<8213>}Leviticus 2:13), particular orders are given (v. 24) that the priests shall *cast salt upon the sacrifices*. *Grace* is the *salt* with which all our religious performances must be seasoned, ^{<5006>}Colossians 4:6. An everlasting covenant is called a *covenant of salt*, because it is incorruptible. The *glory* reserved for us is incorruptible and undefiled; and the *grace* wrought in us is the hidden man of the heart in that *which is not corruptible*.

2. Concerning the constant use that should be made of it, when it was dedicated: *Henceforward* the priests shall *make their burnt-offerings and peace-offerings upon this altar* (v. 27), for *therefore* it was *sanctified*, that it might *sanctify the gift* that was offered upon it. Observe further,

(1.) Who were to serve at the altar: The *priests of the seed of Zadok*, v. 19. That family was substituted in the room of Abiathar by Solomon, and God confirms it. His name signifies *righteous*, for they are the righteous seed that are priests to God, through Christ *the Lord our righteousness*.

(2.) How they should prepare for this service (v. 26): *They shall consecrate themselves*, shall *fill their hand* with the offerings, in token of the giving up of themselves with their offerings to God and to his service. Note, Before we minister to the Lord in holy things we must consecrate ourselves by getting our hands and hearts filled with those things.

(3.) How they should speed in it (v. 27): *I will accept you*. And if God now accept our works, if our services be pleasing to him, it is enough, we need no more. Those that give themselves to God shall be accepted of God, their persons first and then their performances, through the Mediator.