



When God Leaves The Building

By

Mark McGee

Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. Ezekiel 10:18

This is one of the saddest verses in the Bible. After centuries of God's glory living with the people of Israel in Tabernacle and Temple, the glory of God departed from the Temple.

Ezekiel's Visions

Ezekiel lived in Babylon along with many other Jews who the Babylonians had taken captive from Judah in the early part of the 6th century BC. Ezekiel would have started his priestly duties at the age of 30, but he no longer lived in Jerusalem. He lived in a foreign land along with thousands of other Jews who had been captured by the Babylonians.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. Ezekiel 1:1-3

Even though Ezekiel had no temple duties to perform since he lived in another country, God called him to the office of prophet by means of a vision.

And He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.’ Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me: ‘Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. For they are impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God.’ As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse—for they are a rebellious house—yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Ezekiel 2:1-5

God called Ezekiel to be a watchman to warn His people.

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me. Ezekiel 3:17

Those warnings included what was going to happen to the Temple in Jerusalem. Jeremiah had prophesied years earlier that God was going to allow invading armies to destroy the Temple.

Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these'... Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched. Jeremiah 7:4, 20

Jeremiah also reminded Judah (Southern Kingdom) of what God had done to the Israel (Northern Kingdom) decades earlier when he allowed the Assyrian army to remove the Jews to other countries and bring Gentiles into the Northern Kingdom. God was going to allow another empire to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple (house which is called by My name, in which you trust).

But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works,' says the Lord, 'and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren—the whole posterity of Ephraim. Jeremiah 7:12-15

God showed Ezekiel how King Nebuchadnezzar would lay a final siege against Jerusalem and destroy the city and Temple (beginning in Ezekiel 4). One of the visions Ezekiel saw was of terrible abominations inside the Temple (Ezekiel 8). The men committing those abominations were the elders and priests of Judah.

And He said to me, 'Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them. Ezekiel 8:17-18

God then showed Ezekiel that He would remove Himself from His Temple, which meant God removing His presence and protection from the city of David. However, God did give Ezekiel hope for Israel's future.

Therefore say, 'Thus says the Lord God: 'I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. ' And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. Ezekiel 11:17-20

After giving Ezekiel that promise, God's glory left the Temple and the city of Jerusalem — “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which *is* on the east side of the city (Ezekiel 11:23).” Ezekiel then revealed what he had seen in the visions “to those in captivity” (Ezekiel 11:25)

God's Glory

We find the first mention of God's glory in Exodus 16:6-7 ..

Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, 'At evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears your complaints against the Lord.'

Just as promised, the glory of God appeared in the morning:

Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. Exodus 16:10

We God's glory again in Exodus 24:16-17

Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel

God's glory inhabited the the Tabernacle He instructed Moses to build:

And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:33-35

God's glory remained in the Tabernacle for centuries until King Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem about 977 BC. Even though Israel was unfaithful to God, God was faithful to Israel.

When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house. When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the Lord, saying: 'For He is good, For His mercy endures forever. 2 Chronicles 7:1-3

God's glory remained in the Temple until shortly before the Babylonians destroyed it in 587 BC. That means God's glory was with Israel (Tabernacle and Temple) for almost 900 years, even though the people were disobedient the majority of that time. How faithful and long-suffering is our God!

2nd Temple Glory?

Did God's glory return to the 2nd Temple? Let's see if we can find it in Scripture.

Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed Jews to return from exile in Babylon to Judah in about 538 BC. Cyrus took a large amount of the gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem decades earlier and gave it to Sheshbazzar, "the prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:8). Some of the exiles returned to Judah with Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah and other leaders. That was not the same Nehemiah who wrote the Book of Nehemiah, as we will see shortly.

Those Jews who returned to Judah in 538 BC started the process of restoring worship of God and rebuilding the Temple. They were able to lay the Temple's foundation. However, their Samaritan neighbors to the north (the former Northern Kingdom of Israel) opposed the rebuilding of the Temple. They sent a letter to a new king of Persia and received a letter from the king that the Jews should stop the

rebuilding (Ezra 4). Two Hebrew prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, urged Zerubbabel and Jeshua to rebuild the Temple. Opposition arose again, but a new king of Persia granted the Jews permission to complete the project. The second Temple was rebuilt in about 516 BC.

Our question is when the glory of God returned to the new Temple. The people of Judah celebrated the dedication of the Temple with joy. They offered sacrifices at the dedication of the Temple, assigned the priests to their divisions and the Levites to their divisions, “over the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses” (Ezra 6:17-18). However, what we don’t see is a return of God’s glory to the Second Temple as we did in Solomon’s Temple. Maybe that will come later in the story.

Ezra was a priest and scribe living in Babylon in the 5th century BC. He received permission from the king of Persia to lead a second return of exiles from Babylon to Judah. That was about 458 BC. Those returning exiles included more priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants

(Nethinim) along with “some of the children of Israel” (Ezra 7:7). Ezra’s purpose for returning was “to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel (Ezra 7:10).

Nehemiah, author of the Book of Nehemiah, also lived during the 5th century BC.

Though we read about a great revival that happened under the leadership of Ezra and another Nehemiah. He lived in Babylon and served as cupbearer for Persian king Artaxerxes. He had a strong desire to return to Judah to help his fellow Jews rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked the king’s permission to return to Judah and the king granted his request. That was about 445 BC. Nehemiah joined with Ezra to help guide the process of rebuilding the city and people spiritually and physically.

Nehemiah took charge of rebuilding the wall around the city of Jerusalem. He faced a lot of opposition, but was able to complete that huge task in fifty-two days. Ezra stood before the people and read and explained the Law of God. The people responded to the words of the Law by weeping. Nehemiah, who was the governor of Judah, Ezra, and the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day *is* holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn nor weep” (Nehemiah 8:9).

Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.’ So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, ‘Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. Nehemiah 8:10-12

Ezra and Nehemiah continued to lead the people in reading and learning the Law of God. They kept the feast days and worshiped according to the prescribed manner (Nehemiah 8:17-18). The people also confessed their sins and placed their seal on an agreement (covenant) to obey God. That included separating themselves from their foreign wives which was forbidden by God's Law. They also agreed that one-tenth of the people would live in Jerusalem and nine-tenths of the people would live outside Jerusalem. You can read the details in Nehemiah chapters 9 – 11. You'll find Nehemiah's dedication of the Jerusalem wall and a list of Temple responsibilities in chapter 12.

What you won't find, however, is any mention of God's glory coming to the Second Temple. You won't find it mentioned in Ezra, Nehemiah or any of the post-exilic prophets (e.g. Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). As far as we can tell from the Old Testament, God's glory did not come to the Second Temple in the same way it had to the First Temple.

Temple Glory After Malachi?

The Old Testament writings end about 400 BC (Malachi). Could it be that God's glory came into the Second Temple sometime after that? If so, how would we know? Do we need to look to the intertestamental period writings? How about something in the New Testament?

The "intertestamental period writings" are also known as "deuterocanonical." You may know them by the name "apocryphal." They were written in the period between the writings of Malachi and Matthew. You can read about them in our Faith and Self Defense Series, [Can I Trust The Bible?](#) (Parts 4, 5 & 6).

If you've read the apocryphal writings, you know that they are either historical or fanciful. None of them claim to be written by a prophet, which means they do not qualify as inspired Scripture.

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Luke 24:44-45

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. Hebrews 1:1-2

Even if apocryphal books mentioned the glory of God returning to the Second Temple (which they don't), it wouldn't matter from the perspective of that coming from a prophet of God.

And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city. Ezekiel 11:23

In the previous part of our study we saw God's glory leave Solomon's Temple and move to a mountain on the east side of Jerusalem. The Second Temple was rebuilt many years later, but we do not see the glory of God moving from the mountain into the new Temple. We do find a revival of obedience to the Mosaic Law among God's people in Judah through the teaching ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah, but there is no mention of God's glory in any of the post-exile literature.

So, what happened to God's glory? Did it ever return to the Second Temple? Is it still residing on a mountain on the east side of Jerusalem? Did it return to Heaven? Let's see what we find as we continue our study.

Second Temple Glory

The Second Temple is sometimes referred to as Zerubbabel's Temple since Zerubbabel led the first group of Jews from Babylon back to Judah in the 6th century BC. Though there is mention in the Old Testament that Persian kings gave some of the gold and silver items stolen from the First Temple back to Zerubbabel and later to Nehemiah (Ezra 1 and 6; , there is no mention of the Persians returning the Ark of the Covenant. The Old Testament does not mention the whereabouts of the Ark after King Nebuchadnezzar's theft of Temple items. The only mention of the location of the Ark of the Covenant in the New Testament is in Revelation 11:9:

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

We find details of what items the Babylonian army took from the First Temple before destroying it in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36. The Ark of the Covenant is not mentioned by name, but 2 Chronicles 36:18 reads, “And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all *these* he took to Babylon.” That would have most likely included the Ark of the Covenant unless the Jews had removed it from the Temple in some other way. We don’t know because the Bible doesn’t say.

King Herod began an expansion of the Second Temple about 20 BC. Work on the expanded Temple continued until about 63 AD. The Temple Jesus visited at the age of 12 would have been Herod’s Temple still under some construction. The same was true of the Temple Jesus visited during His earthly ministry.

We find an interesting timeline of events in the life of Jesus through an exchange He had with Jews after He drove out money changer from the Temple.

So the Jews answered and said to Him, ‘What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?’ Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. John 2:18-22

This exchange tells us that Jesus drove out the money changers in about 26 or 27 AD. We might ask if Jesus driving out the money changers and visiting the Temple during His earthly ministry might be a type of God’s glory returning to the Temple. The glory of God is His presence among His people and Jesus Christ, being God in the Flesh, did enter the Temple. However, I don’t think Jesus being in the Temple was God’s glory “returning” to the Temple as much as it God “offering” to bring His glory to the Temple through Israel’s acceptance of Jesus Christ as Messiah and King. As we

know, the leaders and most people in Israel rejected God's offer and the Romans destroyed Herod's Temple in 70 AD.

As we learn from the writings of the Apostle Paul, Christians are now the "temple of God."

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 1 Corinthians 6:19

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in

the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

This is a mystery that God kept hidden until He revealed it to Paul (Ephesians 3). As Paul wrote the Colossians, Christ in us is “the hope of glory.”

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:24-27

Future Temple Glory

Exile and post-exile prophets spoke about a day when God's glory would return to a "latter Temple" that would come following God's defeat of all His enemies. Ezekiel chapters 37 – 39 reference a time we know as the Tribulation and "end of the age." It is a time when God will restore Israel as a nation through Jesus Christ its King.

I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward.
Ezekiel 39:21-22

Ezekiel chapters 40 – 48 reference a future time when God will establish a new Temple and fill it with His glory. It's a fascinating read as you compare it with the last few chapters of Revelation. Remember how we saw the glory of God leave the First Temple and move to a mountain to the east of the

city of Jerusalem? Watch how God's glory will return to the future Temple.

Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw —like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. 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

God's glory returns to the new Temple from the "way of the east." It's interesting to note that the Mount of Olives is **east** of the old city of Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples were on the "Mount of Olives" when they asked Him "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming,

and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3) The resurrected Jesus ascended back to Heaven from the “mount called Olivet” and angels told His disciples that He would “so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Mt. Olivet may be the mountain where God’s glory moved to and “stood.” Could it be that God’s glory ascended with Jesus? Could it be that God’s glory will descend again when Jesus returns to earth? The glory of God moving from Mt. Olivet to the new Temple may coincide with Jesus returning to Mt. Olivet to make His way into Jerusalem and sit as King of kings and Lord of lords in the new Temple.

For thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘And in this place I will give peace,’ says the Lord of hosts. Haggai 2:6-9

Then speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, saying: 'Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, And He shall build the temple of the Lord; Yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule on His throne; So He shall be a priest on His throne, And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.' 'Now the elaborate crown shall be for a memorial in the temple of the Lord for Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. Zechariah 6:12-14

The time of God's shaking all nations is close. The time of Christ's return is at hand. May we be busy in the Lord's service!

Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Matthew 24:44

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