

The Eschatology of the Old Testament: A Case Study in Ezekiel 40 – 48

by James Prather

for Dr. Mark Hamilton

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Introduction

The eschatology of the Old Testament grows and shifts in its understanding from its beginnings to its latest writings. There is not one central view of it, and as history progressed and certain expectations failed to be met, the Hebrew Bible took these events in stride and worked around and through them to seek a better understanding of God's ultimate plan for the world. One such eschatological view is found in the final vision of Ezekiel 40-48. Before discerning the vision's eschatology, it is relevant to understand the shape of the text itself and then to ask whether or not Ez 40-48 is fit to be compared to anything or if a paucity of literary unity makes such comparisons irrelevant. Second, a good understanding of the prophet's "eschatology" is helpful in discerning the expectation of the author. Finally, the ways in which Ez 40-48 interacts with, agrees with, and disagrees with selected Old Testament eschatological passages will also be discussed.

Ezekiel 40 – 48 as a Literary Unit

The text of Ezekiel 40 – 48 serves as a vision of a future age, focusing on the temple and the return of God's presence to it. First and foremost, it serves as a chiasmic end-piece for the departure of God's presence at the beginning of the book (8 – 11).¹ However, the glory of the lord returning in ch 43 is not the final end to parallel ch. 1, but instead it is only the beginning of restoration.² There is hope

¹ Steven Tuell, *NIBC: Ezekiel* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 276.

² John B. Taylor, "The Temple in Ezekiel" in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple In Biblical Theology* (ed. T Desmond

during the bitter exile that God will indeed return to Jerusalem; the exile will not last forever. Second, the unit centers upon the priestly vision of restoration via a restored temple.³ After introducing the new temple, the text draws out the implications of its presence and of God's presence in the new city. This priestly ideal offers up an interesting eschaton with its centrality clearly staked because the temple is not only the center of religious life but also of a new utopian society. Chapters 40 – 48 align well with other priestly texts, even mimicking the worship and temple laws of Leviticus, and as is shown below, the story of Eden.

The unit as a whole has a definite structure and creates its own chiasm. It begins and ends with a city (40:1-4, 48:30-35), has parallel measurements taken of the city and of the new land allotments (40:5-42:20, 47:13-48:29), and surrounds the core of the new law of the temple with manifestations of the glory of God.⁴ It is strange that the glory of God is not central to the vision of restoration, but rather the new law code similar to that of the Mosaic Torah.⁵ In this way, the redactors probably shaped the text to indicate that the glory of God is only accessed through the priestly cult and their administration of the temple.

The structure of the text is interesting but is it the result of a final redaction or original to the prophet? Some argue that not only is Ez 40 – 48 a separate literary unit from 1 – 39, but also that the 40 – 48 itself is made up of the work of multiple redactors from a late period.⁶ Others argue vigorously for the literary unity of 40 – 48 as an original work with very little redaction due to its similarities to various legal manuscripts from the ancient Near East, such as the treaty between Ramses II and Hattusilis.⁷ However, these treaty documents show a history of redaction which could undermine the

Alexander and Simon Gathercole; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004), 69.

3 Leslie C. Allen, *WBC: Ezekiel 20 – 48* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 213.

4 Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 278.

5 Daniel Block, *NICOT: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25 – 48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 498.

6 George R. Berry, "The Authorship of Ezekiel 40-48," *JBL* 34/1 (1915), 28. Berry argues that pieces of 40-48 are newer than P. This view, while old, has been included for perspective on the evolution of the debate regarding the literary unity of Ez 40-48 itself.

7 Moshe Greenberg, "The Design and Themes of Ezekiel's Program of Restoration," *Interpretation* 38 (1984), 186 – 187.

hypothesis, and combined with the literary oddities of 40 – 48, many scholars find no unity in them as a whole.⁸ Regardless of whether or not it was originally part of the chapters 1-39, and whether or not its final redaction causes disunity among its pieces, it is integrally related to the rest of the book and must be interpreted as such.⁹

This understanding of 40-48 is important to this study because without any sense of unity it will be hard to compare the eschatological understanding of Ezekiel's vision to other similar Old Testament passages.

Eschatology in Ezekiel 40 – 48

The first question of primary importance here is this: what is meant by “eschatology” in relation to these chapters? Is this vision meant to be a realized future for Israel after the exile? Or is it a more apocalyptic vision of a utopian society? The way this question is answered will greatly affect the final reading of the text and its implications since the two deal with almost with entirely different matters. The final answer is likely somewhere between the two extremes, a metaphor for the hopeful future, but each possibility must be briefly examined.

The first position, that it was written to be a blueprint for Israel's restoration after the exile, is not very likely. First and foremost, the impracticality of the vision seems to indicate that it was not meant to be literally carried out. It is also surprisingly lacking in some critical data necessary to carry out the temple cult there, such as information about temple furnishings and equipment.¹⁰ Instead of practical data there appears more information about gatehouses which are proportioned absurdly.

8 Walter Eichrodt. *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 531. Such oddities include word usage used no where else in Ezekiel and scarcely in the rest of the Old Testament. A few times there are words never used again.

9 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Interpretation: Ezekiel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 194. Blenkinsopp suggests (194) that perhaps 40-48 was originally placed directly after ch 37 which ends on a note of a restored sanctuary. This is offered to establish a better fitting pre-redaction unity.

10 Greenberg, “Design and Themes”, 189.

Finally, even if it was meant to be taken literally, it was clearly not used in the post-exilic period.¹¹ This will be discussed more thoroughly below. This is perhaps the strongest indicator of its non-literal nature because those closest to the supposed writing of the text did not interpret it literally.

The second position is that Ez 40-48 is a vision of a far off apocalypse. In support of this, some argue for a progressing trend in the latter prophets for an eschatology detached from history, starting with the writers of Second Isaiah and continuing with Ezekiel. In this light, the hope of the rebirth of Israel is not to be discouraged when events do not line up with expectations. By detaching eschatology from any foreseeable future, Ezekiel would therefore be visualizing a total defeat of evil and a utopian society brought about by the direct intervention of God.¹² This understanding is more likely than the first position, but is tenuous at best. First, the Old Testament has very few passages that could be considered truly apocalyptic¹³ which would make this interpretation nearly out of context, and so to proceed under this interpretation places the burden of proof upon the interpreter. Second, this interpretation is out of place given the prophetic favor towards a physical return to the land in this life (e.g. Jer 29:10) as well as Ezekiel's own preference for this (Ez 11:16-17). Finally, the visions themselves seem to take seriously that they will soon, in some form, be realized within the scope of history and the natural world.¹⁴

It seems, therefore, that the “eschatology” found in Ez 40-48 is not an ultra-literal one, nor is it an apocalyptic world-ending one. It is also surprisingly not “supernatural” in the sense that most eschatologies are thought of, at least, not any more supernatural than the pre-exilic stories already are (e.g. a tree that can make you live forever, a god who literally has his presence come down into a

11 Taylor, “The Temple in Ezekiel,” 68-69.

12 Henning Graf Reventlow, ed. *Eschatology in the Bible and in Jewish and Christian Tradition*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 209.

13 Bill T. Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (ed. Jerry L. Walls; Oxford: Oxford Press, 2008), 33. Arnold defines three “proto-apocalypse” passages in Is 24-27, Zec 9-14, and Jl 3-4 and one “fully developed apocalypse” in Dn 7-12.

14 Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2* (trans. J. Martin; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 547.

temple, etc). Rather, the eschatology in 40-48 is a priestly vision of restoration centering around the temple and what that means for the chosen people *in this life*. It appears that the vision, however utopian it may sound, originally looked no farther forward than the literal return from exile where the writer expected to live and die in faithfulness to God in the land of promise. In this return, the prophet did not expect his temple vision to be used as a blueprint, but used metaphorically.

Eschatology of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48

In the eschatology described in chapters 40-48, the temple is placed square at the center.¹⁵ The temple represents salvation and forgiveness to the broken people of both Judah and Israel. This salvation is seen from the very beginning of the vision in 40:1 where “the new year” and “that very day” hint strongly at the end of the penitent days from Rosh HaShannah to Yom Kippur. This would set the date of the vision to be on Yom Kippur when the priest would sprinkle the blood on the ark (God's footstool, 43:7). Although this carries with it plenty of salvific connotations, it was also the day on which the Year of Jubilee was proclaimed.¹⁶ Moreover, according to the dating of the vision, it happened in the twenty-fifth year of the exile, a significant marker towards symbolic release.¹⁷ Since the temple is integral to both Yom Kippur and the Year of Jubilee, this eschaton is one where the people are forgiven and set free permanently. This is accomplished because God comes to dwell forever and is therefore no longer driven away by sin.

The following chapters of 40 – 42 describe a two-dimensional layout of a new temple in painstaking detail. As has already been shown, this detail was not for the purpose of building what is described, but rather it is given in the text: to shame Israel (43:10). This fits perfectly with the final

15 Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *The Journal of Religion* 64/3 (July, 1984), 281. This comes as a shock because, according to Levenson, up until this point the temple had always been portrayed negatively.

16 Allen, *Ezekiel*, 229.

17 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 345-346. Zimmerli makes no mistake about it: 25 years being half of 50 is an important and not incidental, detail.

Yom Kippur that Ezekiel envisions for traditional observance of that day is one of sadness, mourning, and even shame. It appears as though Ezekiel pictured an imminent Day of Atonement which would bring out Israel's true freedom both from slavery and from sin. This freedom draws out multiple implications and manifests in the following chapters in three distinct themes: God living with man, the restoration of the natural world very reminiscent of Eden, and the reallocation of land.

Theme 1: God living with man

It is only by the new temple that man's relationships to each other and to God can be restored because in Ez 40-48 the temple is what allows God's presence to dwell with man. This new temple is not built by man, but by God himself and thus it represents perfection and completeness, as seen in the square dimensions of the new house.¹⁸ God's presence returns to the temple (43:7) and the failings of the monarchy are rectified when God promises to never leave again (v 9) and therefore be king forever. This is made clear in the language used by God that the monarchy was a source of defilement. The funeral monuments of the kings are first mentioned, followed by the royal palace with its idols abutting the temple itself (v 8). It could be that this language was instituted to downplay the imperial dreams of the post-exilic community in light of their Persian rulers,¹⁹ but it seems more likely that it is part of the eschaton where God takes over personally as king due to the language used in v 7, “the place of my throne.” While it is true that this language was used previously (Jer 14:21; 17:12)²⁰, and thus could mean nothing new, the context of Ez 40-48 seems to indicate otherwise. This indication is threefold. The first is the aforementioned direct affront against the sins of the monarchy (Ez 43:7-8). The second is that a human king, a scion of David, is never reinstated in these chapters (but only a “prince”).²¹ It is debated as to whether or not this is some sort of code for “king”, but is more likely to

¹⁸ Leslie C. Allen, “Some Prophetic Antecedents of Apocalyptic Eschatology And Their Hermeneutical Value,” *Ex Auditu* 6 (1990), 18

¹⁹ Tuell, *Law of the Temple*, 38-42.

²⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 555.

²¹ Hwang, *Nsy in Ezekiel 40 – 48*, 183. This is in direct contrast within Ezekiel itself where in 34:23 it was directly mentioned that God would place David over his people. Of course, there is even direct tension within ch 34 because it

designate a leader of the community.²² The third indication is that directly after God returns to the temple and designates it his throne, a new law is given, which correlates strongly to justice, the job of every king (Jer 22:16). These indications move strongly in the direction that God has directly taken over the kingship with his throne in the new temple.

Theme 2: A new Eden

The new temple not only saves the people (metaphorically and physically) and brings justice, but it also brings about healing. This healing is understood in two distinct ways: spiritually and physically. Spiritual healing is implicit in the text, for what else could such water do if it miraculously springs from the very temple where God himself dwells? The text seems to take this for granted and instead focuses on the physical healing that the water brings. The river flows from the temple toward the east, gradually becoming deeper, until it empties into the Dead Sea. A veritable forest is suddenly growing all along the river's banks (v 7) as if to heal the desert wastelands south and east of Jerusalem. When it empties into the dead sea it is able to make the salt water lake into fresh water²³ where fish are in abundance. The trees along the shore bearing fruit continually solely because the water is flowing from the temple (v 12) and their leaves bear medicinal properties. The river is pictured healing both the land and the people which is what is needed since both have been defiled (e.g. Jer 3:2). This new "river of life" and some of the distinct Hebrew phrases used only in this passage and in Genesis explicitly draws the reader's mind to the garden of Eden.²⁴

The additional information regarding the swarms of living creatures (v 9) only cements this picture.²⁵ The understanding that the temple eschaton will bring a restored nature and natural abundance was not unique to Israel can be seen historically through the other ancient Near Eastern

claims that David will be set over them as shepherd while simultaneously claiming God would do it himself (34:11-16).

22 Sunwoo Hwang, "Nšy' in Ezekiel 40-48," SJOT 23 no 2 (2009), 191.

23 The Dead Sea has approximately 26% salt, while the Ocean is approx. 5%. This is indeed meant to be an enormous feat.

24 Bennett Simon, "Ezekiel's Geometric Vision," Harvard Theological Review 102 no 4 (2009), 429.

25 Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 584-585

parallels such as the Gudea cylinders which associate fertility in nature and material prosperity with temple-building.²⁶ In one such cylinder, Gudea's god creates a gradually increasing abundance while the construction of his temple progresses and nears completion.²⁷ The structure of Ezekiel 40-48 even lends itself to perhaps being informed by a temple hymn.²⁸ Another strong parallel is found in ancient writings about Marduk who goes to a distant land for 24 years and upon his return, there is restoration. The details of the restoration are strikingly similar to those found in Ez 40-48, such as that Marduk will: reassemble the scattered, make the temple splendid, make the land fruitful again, the rivers will teem with fish, and everything will come to order.²⁹ These two examples show that the pattern of restoration in Ezekiel is informed by a large corpus of ancient Near Eastern literature.

This river of life in Ezekiel's eschaton is where God brings about restoration starting at the temple in a way not seen since the garden of Eden where man was ejected due to sin. In Ezekiel's vision, God has forgiven mankind and thus there is a partial return to the garden in which the land of promise becomes paradise. It is only a partial return, of course, because no mention is explicitly made of the Tree of Life. This omission is one strong reason to think that Ezekiel's vision was meant to be a metaphor for a soon-realized future in this life where the people would be able to safely and prosperously live *and die* in faithfulness to God.

Theme 3: Reallocation of land

The final theme in Ezekiel's temple-centered eschatology is the reallocation of land to all twelve tribes of Israel. Several things rightly make this an eschatology of land allotment. The first is that the allotments are absurdly large and should be understood in a similar manner to the temple measurements; they are not to be taken literally but theologically.³⁰ These allotments are nothing like

26 Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 195

27 Diane M. Sharon, "A Biblical Parallel to a Sumerian Temple Hymn?" *JANES* 24 (1996), 103.

28 *Ibid*, 101, 104-105.

29 Helmer Ringgren, "Akkadian Apocalypses." in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*. (ed. David Hellholm; Uppsala, Germany: Tübingen, 1989), 381-382.

30 Block, *Ezekiel*, 723.

the actual land holdings that the tribes actually held, but rather is an ideal of what they *should* possess.³¹ Second, the allotment is unprecedentedly favorable to foreigners, even going so far as to say that they should be treated like native-born Israelites and given an inheritance (v 22). Previous texts had been very kind to the alien (e.g. Lev 19:33), but never in this manner. The gift of inheritance is not given to all foreigners, but only those who will permanently stay in Israel and father children there (e.g. contribute to the reestablishment of the community and its continued growth). This is not only a physical allotment but also a spiritual one too, fulfilling the ideal in Isa 56:3-8.³² After the foreigner, the tribes are given their shares in a much fairer distribution than in pre-exilic times, typified by the fact that the Priests (v 9-10) and Levites (v 13) finally get a share of the land. Social order is exemplified by the equal allotments to every tribe; no one is left out. Once more, it is clear that the future envisioned by Ezekiel was about living out faithful lives in the land itself.

It is clear that this is a *temple* eschatology because the allotments are centered around the new temple. There are seven tribes to the north and five to the south, with the temple and the priestly lands put in the middle. The new living arrangements center around the temple, similar to the arrangement of the wilderness camp around the tabernacle.³³ Living in the land with God in his house, and man given an inheritance for his own house, it seems like the ancient Israelites would have considered this to be what modern people have termed, “heaven on earth.”

Comparative Temple Eschatology to Other Old Testament Passages

Now that a definite eschatology has been defined, it is useful to compare it with other similar passages in the Old Testament. While it is true that the Old Testament does not contain as much on the topic of eschatology as the New Testament or even the later Jewish writings known as the Apocrypha,

31 Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 335.

32 Block, *Ezekiel*, 717-718.

33 Allen, *Ezekiel*, 280.

there are still several major texts with which to compare Ez 40-48.³⁴ However, even with these limited choices, each one cannot be analyzed due to space constraints and so a few important ones have been chosen. It is important to note here that the texts that have been chosen are eschatological in nature and not necessarily apocalyptic. Second, the texts that have been chosen are eschatological in the vein of Ez 40-48 (as defined in this paper) in order to make comparisons more appropriate.

Jeremiah 31

Chapter 31 opens with a covenant formula typical to both Jeremiah and Ezekiel³⁵ and speaks of a future time when the world will be reordered in some way and thus serves as an interesting comparison in eschatology. However, due to its length, only vv 27ff. will be considered. The formula of v 27 is familiar but also includes the curious mention of animals which compares to Ezekiel's vision of animals near the river of life. The following proverb in v 29-30 is a wiping of the slate with God – no longer will people suffer for the sins of their forefathers (e.g. the wicked king Manasseh). It does, however, say that each man will die for his own sins. This at first seems incongruous with Ezekiel's vision of forgiveness at Yom Kippur, but is negated in vv 33-34 where it explicitly states that everyone will “know” God, that he will forgive their sins, and he will remember them no more, and striking evidence for an egalitarian community. All of these things are made possible directly by the fact that God has forgiven³⁶ Chapter 31 ends with a section about rebuilding Jerusalem in which it is significantly larger than it was at the time. There are two interesting correlations to note here. The first is that v 39 describes this rebuilding with the language of a “measuring line,” which is very similar to Ezekiel's “measuring rod” (Ez 40:3) and “measuring line” (Ez 47:3). The second is that in this rebuilt city, even the formerly unclean places, “where dead bodies are thrown” (Jer 31:40) will become holy. Ezekiel seems to describe something somewhat similar when mentioning the royal burial ground

³⁴ Bill T. Arnold, “Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism.” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*. (ed. Jerry L. Walls; Oxford: Oxford Press, 2008), 24-26.

³⁵ Walter Brueggemann. *A commentary on Jeremiah : Exile and Homecoming*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 281.

³⁶ Brueggemann, *Ezekiel*, 294.

contaminating the temple (43:7-9).³⁷ This could be a place of contention between the two prophets, but it could also be a place of reversal: formerly the burial ground contaminated, but in “that day” (the eschaton), it will become holy.

While it is more than likely that Jeremiah was written (at least in some form) before Ezekiel, it is helpful to look at Jer 31 in light of Ez 40-48. As it turns out, the two line up rather well, probably due to Ezekiel being aware of the Jeremiah tradition. Understanding Jer 31 as eschatology in light of Ez 40-48 changes the typical Christian interpretation of immediately superimposing Jesus into it.³⁸ Suddenly it takes on a new frame of reference in that it is not immediately about messiah but is more focused on a realized eschaton to happen in the near future.

Zechariah 14

Beginning with the subject of the “day of the LORD,” Zech 14 addresses some of the same issues as Ezekiel but in a post-exilic time.³⁹ The pre-exilic prophets saw “the day of the LORD” as imminent and indeed it could probably be correlated to the destruction of Israel and Judah, but it was also seen as an on-going eschatological drama that had yet to fully play out. Thus Zech 14 opens with language that would have been instantly eschatological to his original audience.⁴⁰ In this eschaton, the prophet proclaims destruction for Jerusalem much like the pre-exilic prophets did, except it is vague as to why they are being punished and no clear enemy is indicated. The coming of God (Zech 14:5) is marked by violence of both men (v 2, battle, plunder, rape) and nature (v 4, earthquake). This sort of destruction is not paralleled in Ez 40-48 and marks a significant difference between the two.

In v 6 says that “living water” will flow from Jerusalem. This is perhaps the largest correlation

37 Jacob Lauinger, “The Temple of Ištar at Old Babylonian Alalakh,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 8/2 (December, 2008), 195. According to Lauinger, it was common for the royal palace be directly next to the temple and even, in the case of some Babylonian temples, encompass it.

38 Brueggemann, *Ezekiel*, 298.

39 It should be acknowledged that Zech 14 is part of a larger pericope of chapters 9 – 14, but not all of these can be considered in the present paper and so ch 14 was chosen.

40 Carol L. Myers and Eric M. Myers. *The Anchor Bible: Zechariah 9-14* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 409-410.

between the present chapter and Ez 40-48, specifically Ez 47. Although v 6 says that it will flow from Jerusalem and not the temple, one may assume that the temple is clearly meant given the context of the chapter.⁴¹ The real major points of difference are that only half of it goes toward the Dead Sea while the other half goes to the Mediterranean, and that there is no mention of life-giving powers. A new eschatological innovation is made in that all nations are considered. In Ezekiel's vision, they are mostly left out and certainly no questions are answered as to what happens to them.⁴² In Zech 14, the nations are still alive, apparently in their own lands, and very concerned with worshiping God at the temple for the yearly Feast of Tabernacles or they risk having no rain. It is here that a second innovation is made: the prosperity of the nations is now also tied to Jerusalem and the restored temple (Zech 14:17).

When comparing Ez 40-48 to Zech 14, one begins to see how the exilic vision of Ezekiel affected the post-exilic prophetic view of the coming eschaton. Probably due to the reality of the return from exile the post-exilic prophets did not view the “day of the LORD” as having finished yet and this changed their perspective on the role the nations would play in the future.

Isaiah 56

The eschatology of Isa 56 is concerned with many of the same things as Ez 40-48, but they are handled very differently. This is again probably the case because Third Isaiah was probably written in the post-exilic time period and as a result was probably aware of the Ezekiel tradition.⁴³ Isa 56:4-6 mentions both eunuchs and foreigners but for the purpose of this comparison we only care about the latter.⁴⁴ V 3 seems to indicate a similar situation as in Ez 47:23 because the foreigner feels excluded from the community. In both Ezekiel and Isaiah, the foreigner is given a place in the community, but

⁴¹ Meyers and Myers, *Zechariah*, 435-436.

⁴² In Ezekiel, the aliens in the land are given an inheritance, but Zech 14 is speaking of nations in their own lands who gather yearly in Jerusalem to worship God.

⁴³ John N Oswalt, NICOT: *Isaiah 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 451.

⁴⁴ John D. W. Watts, WBC: *Isaiah 34-66* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 820. Watts extrapolates that the two groups could be symbolic for all those excluded from the worship of God by the Torah.

how that is accomplished is radically different. As discussed above, in Ez 47 accomplishes this task by allocating an inheritance to the alien. This radical idea is not even insinuated in Isa 56, possibly because if it was written in the post-exile period then it would give foreigners the idea that they could become full members of the community. They are, however, allowed to enter into the temple and worship God (v 7). This is very different in Ezekiel where the foreigners are given an inheritance but are totally excluded from the temple (Ez 44:9).⁴⁵ Historically speaking, it was common practice to exclude foreigners and in Gudea's temple vision, foreigners were also excluded.⁴⁶ In this sense, the writer of Isa 56 was incredibly innovative in its approach to foreigners.

By reading Isa 56 through the eschatological lens of Ez 40-48, it is perhaps possible to understand the reaction of the post-exilic community to the treatment of foreigners with regard to the temple as specified in exilic texts such as Ezekiel. If the foreigner would be brought near to God in the eschaton, the soon to be fulfilled future, why did the post-exilic community that produced Isa 56 differ from Ez 47? How did the return from exile change their expectations?

Fulfillment and Disappointment

At this point a brief discussion of the fulfillment of Ez 40-48 is warranted. If, as is argued in this paper, Ez 40-48 pictured a soon to be realized eschaton where God would intervene, set the world right, and people would peacefully live out their faithfulness to God, what are the implications that it did not happen? Was this vision fulfilled at all? Of course, many pieces were left completely unfulfilled, such as God re-inhabiting the temple, the optimal redistribution of land to the completely regathered twelve tribes, and more. But even if these major events did not happen, the community itself could have tried to shape its future after the model in Ezekiel. However, the evidence is that the

⁴⁵ Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 149. It is likely that if the foreigners were made full members of the community then they would no longer be aliens living among the Jewish community, and therefore render this difference moot.

⁴⁶ Sharon, "Temple Hymn," 102.

post-exilic community, even when it was within its power, did not choose to use Ezekiel 40-48 as its model.⁴⁷ One such example is when the Samaritans came to the recently returned exiles and offered their help in rebuilding the temple and were categorically refused (Ezra 4:1-6). This is contrary to Ezekiel's vision because those people had been living in the land and thus would have received an inheritance and become (at least somewhat) part of the community. While it is true that Ezekiel refuses to allow foreigners near to the restored temple and thus the Samaritans would have not been candidates for building, they would have at least been able to financially support the project.

Another aspect of the vision that is directly contradicted by later writings is the priestly code and cult. Specifically, in Ezekiel's vision holiness can be transferred by touching another object to the clothing worn by the priests (Ez 44:19; 46:20). It is no surprise, then, that a post-exilic prophet challenges this idea (Hag 2:10-14) and completely denies its possibility in the present life under the present law. Several features of Hag 2 passage bear striking resemblance to Ezekiel's eschaton: transference of ritual purity (vv 11-14), prosperity starting after starting the work on the temple (vv 15-19), and finally a royal leader who is not called king (vv 20-23). It is likely Haggai felt he was living in the "end times," but that these expectations from places such as Ezekiel did not materialize as expected.

Conclusion

When Ezekiel 40-48 is read as a single literary unit, the full breadth of its theological plan comes to life in a beautiful way. It is an eschatological vision of the future where the greatest possible eventuality is returning to the land and living there with God in peace and prosperity. In this eschaton, all of Israel is once more united as has not been seen since the days of Solomon and everyone is given a fair portion, including aliens willing to contribute to the community. Once all the exiles are gathered, God returns to the temple and promises never to leave again, forgives their sins, and heals the world.

⁴⁷ Allen, *Ezekiel*, 214.

At the end we are left with a vision of a return to Eden with the river of life, trees with continual fruit and healing leaves, animals en masse, and a declaration that “the LORD is there” (48:35). Some degree of this restoration (though it is not clear how much) was expected to happen to the people in this life, which to Ezekiel, is the most beautiful thing imaginable.

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