

SHARED BEGINNINGS

For those keeping up, we are [immersing ourselves](#) in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, and, the New Testament book of John. At first glance, the connection between the two books might not be immediately visible. Separated by hundreds of years and differing rulers of the present age, one book foretells coming destruction followed by hope after the devastation is rote; the other book is about Jesus, the hope of the world brought about by his seemingly devastating end. How could these two relate?

[We have said](#) that John models his gospel after Ezekiel's collected visions so that you and I might recognize Jesus as a prophet. Actually "the prophet" who Israel had long been waiting ([Deut. 18:15-18](#)). A prophet, if you remember, is a representative of God whose primary concern was the relationship and mutual partnership between God and his people. Their purpose was to urge people to trust in God alone and hold singularly to that allegiance, often in theatrical fashion. The prophet aspired to awaken a recognition of the cosmic story in which they and the people's everyday lives were being played out; giving *weight* to their ordinary relationships and roles, as well as their political (nationalistic) ones.

John desires us to recognize Jesus' life, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection as a confronting plea for our affection, allegiance, and attention; and so he employs the structure and metaphors of one of the more dramatic prophets, Ezekiel. In fact, one scholar¹ notes no less than eighteen literary, thematic, and motif parallels between the first 52 verses of Ezekiel ([1:1-3:15](#)) and the first 51 of John's gospel ([1:1-51](#))². For both writers, the opening lines set the tone and course of the chapters and verses that follow.

Ezekiel encounters "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD." The dramatic vision of angelic creatures carrying the throne of God Most High from the north moved by the Spirit on gyroscopic wheels through the expanse of the heavens causes Ezekiel to fall to face. As God speaks, the Spirit enters him, and Ezekiel is shown the purpose of God's manifestation and given his engulfing call; to proclaim God's words of warning and judgment to his children, though the people would refuse to listen. The vision concludes with the thunderous praise the angelic beings declaring "Blessed be the glory of the LORD from its place!" Understandably, Ezekiel was overwhelmed, and in a stupefied state for seven days (3:15), all because "the hand of the LORD being strong upon" him. The remainder of the first half of the book (chapters 4-32) are the details of God's warnings, his judgments, and Ezekiel's seemingly fruitless endeavor to enlighten the rebellious house.

John too encounters glory, "glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Like Ezekiel, John's prologue begins in the heavenly expanses, where "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Like the fiery presence upon the mobile throne, John's Word shines brilliantly as the "light of men," so bright that all darkness is dispelled by his presence. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and the Baptizer, like his predecessor Ezekiel, was surprised to encounter God's presence along a river and not in the temple. Yet, he too knew what he saw when he saw him, "he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" Though Jesus also would find that "his own people did not receive him," or his invitations and warnings. The Spirit rested on John's prophet also, who then called others to participate with him in his purpose to bring grace and truth; to establish in visible form the kingdom of God, as "the King of Israel!" What follows in the encounters and conversations with Jesus throughout John's gospel will be nothing less than heaven and earth being brought back together, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

¹ Brian Peterson, *John's Use of Ezekiel: understanding the unique perspective of the fourth gospel*. 35.

² See the final section of this document for additional details on these parallels if you are interested.

John's depiction of Jesus and subsequent descriptor of his purposes in the opening lines of his gospel follow a similar structure to Ezekiel's encounter calling to his audience's mind that God's manifest presence, "the glory of the LORD" was once again on the move. And, this movement would have world-altering implications, especially for God's children. Ezekiel's story began with the confronting of a "rebellious house." They did not recognize that their way of life, way of relating to God and one another, their vision for a good life was indeed incongruent with rule and reign of God. Some didn't recognize their rebellion because of their ignorance and the corruption of their leadership. Others willingly ignored their rebellious hearts. The removal of God's glory from his temple in [Ezekiel 10](#) foretells the destruction that would physically take place in [chapter 33](#). No longer could God's children presume on God's patience in their consistent "do it my way" (or the way of the culture(s) around them). The weight of the situation for the ignorant and the arrogant alike was exposed. The death of their physical kingdom and ideological vision, would not mean the end of God's purposes to re-create and restore what the rebellion and rebellious had destroyed. In the final vision of Ezekiel's ministry, "the glory of the God of Israel" once again returns.

"And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. 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 [chapter 1]. And I fell on my face. 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 behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple...I heard one speaking to me out of the temple...'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.'" (43:1-7)

The promise of the temple's reestablishment and return of glory would become the driving hope of the remnant of Israel that remained after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. So compelling was the vision that Nehemiah would courageously endeavor to raise the resources for the temple's reconstruction from the very powers who destroyed it. Over the centuries, the scattered began to resettle their former promised land. Their migration back was not merely a quest for ancestral roots, but a vast majority believed that God would once again establish the soles of his feet upon the earth through the nation-state of Israel. So, this time, they would be ready and faithful. The judgments of Ezekiel had done their work. They—for the most part—recognized their rebellious hearts and would, therefore, do everything necessary to become a people worthy and ready for the glory of the LORD once more.

Hundreds of years of anticipation, preparation, refining, fighting the opposition and putting in every measure possible to remain aligned with God amid conflicting cultures, this is the context in which "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," in which the "glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" finally returned. Where Ezekiel ends, Jesus begins. And yet, a few years after the Son of Man's ascension to the right hand of the Father, the temple is once again destroyed by an occupying force. Was Jesus not establishing the dwelling of God amongst his people forever? Was this not the time for the children of God to rise to their purposed potential for the blessing of the world? What had they missed?

These were the questions being asked by the faith family to whom John wrote. Like Ezekiel's audience, their time and place in history needed interpretation. They needed to recognize what God was doing, particularly in Jesus. And so, John answers their question succinctly, Jesus did indeed return the glory of the LORD, full of grace and truth. What started at mount Saini in Exodus ([33-34](#)) was indeed finding fulfillment; God's glory established fully and forever not in a place but a person, in Jesus of Nazareth and those who would follow him.

Read that last phrase again, "God's glory established fully and forever not in a place but a person, in Jesus of Nazareth and those who would follow him." *Glory*. Did you pass over that word as just another "bible" word? One that sounds familiar and so you have a vague idea of its meaning, but you rarely use in it everyday language.

Glory is indeed one of the more common words in our scriptures, used well over 500 times. Re-Read Ezekiel 43 above and notice how many times it is referenced. While commonly read, it is not a word commonly pondered. In Ezekiel's Hebrew handwriting, the word *glory* is translated as weightiness or heaviness; suggesting importance. The intent being that glory is tangible. It can be felt, sensed, experienced, & shared; even it defies adequate description. The piercing and awe-inspiring nature of glory led to its association with a brilliant beauty (splendor) — the overwhelming quality of pure and powerful light. The phrase, "the glory of the LORD," was not new to Ezekiel. He had read the phrase before and heard it spoken when the stories of Israel's history told. The glory of the LORD became associated with the physical or actual presence of God, his splendor on display, his beauty beheld, his magnificence experienced. Most often, God's glory was recognized in his works of salvation—re-creating and establishing his goodness—and judgment—distinguishing what was true and what was false.

Remember, [John 1](#) describes Jesus as the "true light, which enlightens everyone," a brilliant "light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." And then John goes one step further by saying that the glory of God in Jesus became flesh. In other words, **Jesus displays most clearly and powerfully the beauty of God's actual rule and reign.** And not just in his message, but in his humanity. In the life he lived and the way he lived it. In the death he died and why he allowed it, and in his resurrection and his invitation that follows. The entirety of Jesus' existence is God's glory, which is why John says that "from his *fullness* we have all received grace upon grace."

Before we move on, we need to spend some time pondering glory. It is apparent by John's writing that we could all too easily miss glory and thus miss the very reality which transforms us. As Brian Peterson notes, "The revelation of both Yahweh and Jesus in [Ezekiel and John] was an in-breaking of God into the realm of humanity that **appealed to the senses and changed those who came in contact with the divine...**"³

PRACTICE:

In [Exodus 33](#), Moses recognizes the utter necessity of God's actual presence and so asks God two questions: 1) "...if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways..." and 2) "Please show me your glory." God answers Moses' request saying, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.'"

For a few moments today, imagine that you are in a place where you recognize the utter necessity of God's presence in your life and the life of our faith family (and the world!).

Ask God what Moses asked. Ask him to show you his way and his glory.

Then, read the words of John 1:14, 16-17 below and let them overwhelm you as God's answer to your prayers.

Respond as you are impressed to do so. If you need to repent, let go of what you are holding onto and receive grace upon grace. If you are moved to worship, sing it out! If you are convicted to action, be bold. If you are struck by awe, soak it in.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we have seen his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, he who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

³ Peterson, 49.

INTERESTING PARALLELS

John's prologue and Ezekiel's first vision share many parallels, some of which are referenced above: the divinity of Yahweh and Jesus, the glory of Yahweh and Jesus, the light imagery used in both and the rejection of both Ezekiel and Jesus by the very people they are attempting to persuade. There are five other parallels pointed out by Brian Peterson, which are both interesting and helpful for understanding the connection between these two books.

1. **The Removal of Sin by God:** When John the Baptizer sees Jesus, he declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). Jesus' purpose mirrored the purpose of God's presence to Ezekiel, to remove or purge the sin from Israel (Ezekiel) and the world (John). Removal of sin was the purpose of God's long-suffered judgment upon Israel and the surrounding nations, and this was the ultimate purpose of Christ's death and resurrection.
2. **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** Ezekiel recognizes God's glory and then "the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet." The filling of the Spirit would mark the life and ministry of Ezekiel, as it did Jesus, who "baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). Old Testament scholar Hassell Bullock notes,

"In no other OT prophetic call do we have the associations with the 'spirit' as we do in Ezekiel's experience. Further, we have no other instance in the OT where the heavens are opened to permit divine revelation. If the experience of Jesus at his baptism is viewed as the inaugural experience of his prophetic work, then the precedent for the attendant circumstances can be found in the inaugural vision of the prophet Ezekiel. While we may write off these affinities as mere coincidence, the intent of the gospels to demonstrate the prophetic function of Jesus cannot be dismissed so easily."⁴

3. **Coming From the North:** Ezekiel's vision begins with the description of "a stormy wind came out of the *north*" (1:4). In John's opening, Nathanael reacts to Philip's declaration of Jesus' identity with the statement, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46) Nazareth is in northern Israel, and while the statement could be a disparaging comment about the rural area of Jesus' childhood, more likely, in the context of Philip's announcement (1:45), Nathanael is commenting on the precarious nature of divine revelations coming from that direction. After all, when the glory of the LORD rests again upon Israel in Ezekiel 43, it comes from the east. So, Nathanael wonders if Jesus is coming as a prophet of judgment or salvation. Jesus promptly puts Nathanael's anxieties at ease, declaring he has come to bring heaven and earth together again, not destroy the connection (1:51).
4. **Divine Kingship:** John is the only gospel writer to make the explicit connection of Jesus as "the King of Israel!" (1:49). He will make the connection again in John 12:13 when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday" and the crowds declare "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" John book-ends Jesus' ministry with this divine kingship declaration. Likewise, the imagery of Ezekiel's first vision of God is, according to Peterson, meant to demonstrate the divine kingship of Yahweh over Israel who had submitted (voluntarily and via force) to lesser kings. The divine kingship imagery appears once again in the concluding vision of Ezekiel, in the establishment of God's rule through his appointed heir (44-48). Furthermore, in both books, "even though...the people reject their heavenly King, the sovereign plan of God is not thwarted as both Yahweh and Jesus are depicted as the King of the nation regardless of the people's rejection (Ezek. 20:30; John 18:36-37)."⁵

⁴ Hassell Bullock, "Ezekiel: bridge between the testaments," *JETS* 25, no. 1. 23-31.

⁵ Peterson, 57.

5. **The Title, SON OF MAN:** In John 1:51, Jesus makes the first of many references to himself as the “Son of Man.” This title is used by God to identify Ezekiel some ninety-three times, the first time in Ezekiel 2 when God says to the prophet, “Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.” Ezekiel never refers to himself with this bestowed title, which is significant. The title is God-given, meant to distinguish Ezekiel as set apart by God for this particular purpose. In this manner, it is clear that the title is given to designate a divine task with earthly responsibilities. Jesus’ self-referenced title speaks of both his divinity and his human role. Like Ezekiel, he has come as a prophet, to call attention to the relationship and mutual partnership between God and his people. Bruce Vawter makes the connection vivid between the “Son of Man” that we will come to know in John’s gospel and Ezekiel’s title and his role, he says,

“The Son of Man in Ezekiel is an exemplar of obedience to the divine will in the midst of a house of rebellion (2:8). He is filled with the word of God (3:1-4). He has a predilection for symbolic acts, signs, and is himself a sign for Israel (24:24). He is identified with the people of God, figuring their destiny himself (4:4-15; 12:1-7, 17-20; 24:15-24). He is known as a speaker of parables (20:49). He is the judge of Israel (20:4ff.; 22:1ff.); moreover, he affects the judgment by his words and works, a judgment which can be said as coming and yet is here (21:12). He knows that there are those who cannot hear his word (3:27); he is spiritually stirred, distraught, he groans, his soul is troubled (3:14f.; 21:11). He stands in the presence of God whence he is sent to reveal the glory of Yahweh; the burden and refrain of his prophecy is ‘that they (you) may know that I am the LORD.’” He offers mercy and forgiveness to Israel and resurrection to its dead bones through the spirit of God (37:14). He denounces the profanation of the temple, but looks forward to a covenant of peace when the divine dwelling will be among his people forever (37:26). He points to the true shepherd of the sheep of Israel. Other correspondences of this kind could be multiplied without difficulty.”⁶

⁶ Quoted in Peterson, 61.