

# **A Common Thread In the Apocalyptic Symbolism of Ezekiel and John's Revelation**

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In his book *Ring of Truth*, the Bible translator J. B. Phillips confesses, "Once one gets to grips with the actual stuff of the New Testament, its vitality is astonishing. I found myself provoked, challenged, stimulated, comforted, and generally convicted of my previous shallow knowledge of Holy Scripture" (24). Let me also confess to a shallow knowledge of the books mentioned in the title of this paper. Ezekiel and Revelation are not on my favorite, familiar paths through the Old and New Testaments. Most of us would probably classify them as being located on the lonelier, rockier roads; we may even feel that on such ways we are likely to meet robbers who will figuratively strip us, beat us and leave us half dead. Millennialistic interpreters have practically made these books their own.

So we do not often enough or seriously enough come to grips with the actual stuff of these two books. We are rather willing hastily to pick up a few gems lying openly along the way—the plain, easy passages: Ezekiel being compared to a watchman over the house of Israel in Chapters 3 and 33, or the comforting funeral texts from Revelation, like "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (7:17)—and then run back to preparing for the next meeting at church or correcting yesterday's quizzes.

That kind of reading, a little like hikers gingerly crossing; a rushing stream on a few firm stepping-stones, is hardly what the authors intended. The miraculously opened eyes of Ezekiel see "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD": such an awesome opening thunders to prophet and reader alike the message of an earlier prophet, "Prepare to meet your God" (Amos 5:12). How, then, can I read only Chapters 3 and 33?

Surely we all have also read at least up to the beatitude in the third verse of Revelation, "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." In the last chapter, Verse 19, John warns, "If anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." Siegbert Becker comments:

"It is evident that the Lord wants us to take this book seriously and use it as a significant part of God's Word. For the neglect with which orthodox Lutherans have often treated it, we need God's gracious forgiveness—just as those who have added all sorts of unjustified millennialistic interpretations to this book need God's pardon" (370).

If when we read on past the third verse we feel like asking the Ethiopian's question, "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?", Becker is willing to lead us by the hand in his swansong commentary, published by NPH in 1985. He quotes the Greek, but explains the text in a flowing, continuous style which is easy to follow. Prof. Brug of DMLC and WLS has written a Bible study course on the last book of the Bible called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ," a compact guide which a Bible class leader might give his students in his class while he himself is preparing on the basis of his own study and a commentary like Becker's. Between those two books in size is the study guide by Darrel Kautz, *Understanding the Book of Revelation* (1985), with a helpful concluding chapter on "Dispensationalism and Millennialism."

## APOCALYPTIC SYMBOLISM

Is there a common thread in the apocalyptic symbolism of Ezekiel and John's Revelation? First, symbolism in Revelation. I'd like to quote from a paperback commentary on Revelation by Martin Franzmann.

"On first encounter," he says, "the world of The Revelation to John does seem to be a wild and mysterious world. What are we to make of this strange land, where a slain lamb with unimaginable seven horns and seven eyes is conqueror and in the power of a conqueror takes a sealed scroll from the hand of God and unseals it? What are we to make of a land where the unsealing of a scroll does not merely make accessible information hitherto unknown and unknowable but releases horsemen mounted on whites red, blacks and pale horses who course across the world creating havoc as they go? What shall we make of a lamb who suddenly appears as a shepherd, who has a bride and a marriage supper, of a lamb who shares a throne with God, who is the lamp and the temple of a new Jerusalem?" (23)

Franzmann goes on to suggest that we seem to have lost the understanding and appreciation of the *symbol*.

"What is a symbol? A symbol is the shortest of shorthands. Whether it be expressed in language, in two-dimensional drawing and painting, or in three-dimensional form, a symbol expresses little but suggests much. It expresses little, that is, for the uninitiated, the outsider. It illustrates in an extreme form Luther's dictum that 'unless a man knows what is being talked about, he cannot make sense of what is being said. A symbol is language of an 'insider' for 'insiders.'" [Here Franzmann uses the example of the symbol of the cross, which is really just a vertical line transversed by a horizontal line.] "The force of a symbol can therefore sensed and appreciated only by an insider. (It is better to say "sensed" than "understood", since it is the peculiar virtue of a symbol that its force can be felt and its power appreciated even when it is but dimly understood.)

The symbols of The Revelation to John are not a form of hocus-pocus, intended to conceal; as John's own title to the book indicates, its intention is to reveal." (The Greek name in the very first verse of the book is the basis for the title *Apocalypse*, that is, revelation.) "The symbols have the effect of concealing only for those unwilling to come 'inside' and thus get eyes to see the invisible. And one gets 'inside' not by cultivating cleverness in guessing at possibilities or probabilities and not by undisciplined and uncontrolled use of the imagination (important as imagination is for the apprehension of symbols) but by going through doors provided by the book itself, by following the clues given by The Revelation to John itself" (24,25).

Franzmann goes on to speak of three doors which lead us inside the symbolism of the book: 1) the Gospel of Jesus Christ; 2) the Old Testament Scriptures; and 3) knowledge of the first century world of the Apostle John, in which the Roman empire bulked huge, and in which Jewish authors were elaborating on the Old Testament in the kind of literature which is called apocalyptic. Franzmann gives a brief definition of apocalyptic.

"Apocalyptic literature elaborated certain elements or aspects of Old Testament prophecy, found in such passages and books as Isaiah 24-27, Zechariah 9-14, Ezekiel, Joel, and Daniel. It sought

to interpret all history on the basis of purported visionary experiences of the author. It was especially interested in eschatology, that is, in the end of history and the ushering in of the world to come. It utilized pictures, allegories, and symbols (which soon became traditional); numbers, colors, and stars were in these images endowed with a profound significance. Books of this type were The Book of Enoch, The Book of Jubilees, Fourth Esdras, The Assumption of Moses. Formally, The Revelation to John belongs to this class; apocalyptic furnished the familiar vocabulary of its speech. The influence of apocalyptic on The Revelation to John can be and often has been exaggerated. The Revelation to John is set apart from the general run of apocalyptic literature by profound differences. Apocalyptic itself drew heavily on the Old Testament; John draws even more heavily. In fact, it is the Old Testament itself and not apocalyptic that constitutes the immediate background and the richest source for Revelation.... The visions of apocalyptic betray their origin; they are the fantasies of men....If apocalyptic may be termed literary meditation on prophetic themes, Revelation is genuine prophecy, a prophecy which uses apocalyptic motifs and forms insofar, and only insofar, as they are legitimate explications of Old Testament prophetic themes and are germane to its own thoroughly Christ-centered proclamation” (Franzmann, 27-29).

To give just a taste of non-Biblical apocalyptic literature let me quote from I Enoch, a book from the second century B.C. Enoch was a fascinating character to the apocalyptic writers because after saying that he walked with God, Moses does not report his death in Genesis: “he was no more, because God took him away” (Genesis 5:24). The author of the Book of Enoch is not known. He imitates Scripture, dividing his work into five parts, like the Pentateuch. Because the author writes under the name of Enoch, the book is classified with the Old Testament pseudepigrapha—books written under pseudonyms of Old Testament historical figures. Here is Enoch’s vision of the glory of the LORD.

And behold I saw the clouds: And they were calling me in a vision; and the fogs were calling me; and the course of the stars and the lightning’s were rushing me and causing me to desire (?) and in the vision, the winds were causing me to fly and rushing me high up into heaven. And I kept coming (into heaven) until I approached a wall which was built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire; and it began to frighten me. And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal, the ceiling like the path of the stars and lightnings between which (stood) fiery cherubim and their heaven of water, and flaming fire surrounded the wall(s), and its gates were burning with fire. And I entered into the house, which was hot like fire and cold like ice, and there was nothing inside it; so fear covered me and trembling seized me. And as I stood and trembled, I fell upon my face and saw a vision. And behold there was an opening before me (and) a second house which is greater than the former and everything was built with tongues of fire. And in every respect it excelled (the other)—in glory and great honor—to the extent that it is impossible for me to recount to you concerning its glory and greatness. As for its floor, it was of fire and above it was lightning and the path of the stars; and as for the ceiling, it was flaming fire. And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it—as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. None of the angels was able to come and see the face of the Excellent and Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him—the flaming fire

was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. No one could come near unto him from among those that surrounded the tens of millions (that stood) before him. He needed no council, but the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him. Until then I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling. And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word." And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face, etc. (E. Isaac, 1 Enoch 14:8ff., in Charlesworth, 20, 21.)

From this extract I think you can see that the book describes a fictional vision based principally on the Biblical account of Ezekiel. Although Revelation uses this kind of language and symbolism, the roots of its message lie in the Old Testament Scriptures themselves, especially in Daniel and Ezekiel, not in the apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period.

### **EZEKIEL 1 AND REVELATION 4**

This paper's title suggests that we compare passages from Revelation and Ezekiel. The New Testament uses wording of the Prophet Ezekiel in almost 100 verses, but 71 of these are in the Book of Revelation. Many of the parallels are matters of language only. For example, when John describes the fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation 18, he often uses phrases with which Ezekiel prophesied against Tyre in Chapters 26 through 28. Beyond those parallels, the most frequent points of contact between Ezekiel and John's Revelation are in the opening visions and in the last sections of the books. We'll compare these parts.

Remember the situation of each writer. John was in exile on the island of Patmos "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1:19). The church, or at least the apostle, was enduring persecution. Many years before, Herod's persecution had taken the life of John's brother James (Acts 12:2); the Roman persecution under Nero also lay in the past. There would be more persecutions and other trials just as severe to come. And here, alone on Patmos, John sees an awesome vision first of Jesus commanding his apostle to write to the seven churches and then in Chapter 4 of the very throne room of heaven, where the Lord appears as the Lamb who opens the book. Let me read the passage.

Then remember the situation of Ezekiel. The prophet, who was also a priest, had been carried off with King Jehoiachin from Jerusalem into captivity in Babylon in 597 B.C. The end of the Kingdom of Judah was near: five years of captivity had passed and in another six years from now, in 586 B.C., the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple were impending. While Ezekiel was among the exiles by the Kebar River in Babylon, the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God. His miraculously opened eyes saw "(a) an approaching fiery storm cloud (1:4), out of which emerged (b) four unearthly creatures (5-14), propelling (c) a four-wheeled chariot (15-21), bearing (d) a celestial platform (22-25), on which was enthroned (e) the glory of the LORD (26-27), framed by (f) the bright colors of a rainbow (28)" (Roehrs).

On the pages you received, Revelation 1 and 4 are printed in the left column of the first two pages and parallels from Ezekiel 1 and 2 appear in the right columns. The quotation from Revelation is quite complete and in sequence; the Ezekiel verses are taken out of Chapters 1 and 2 wherever they seem quite like John's vision. The sections of the two books are numbered for easier reference. Those numbers in the center margin are not verses; I have just assigned numbers for easy reference.

In Revelation, Section 2, the voice of Jesus speaking to John is like the sound of rushing waters; in Ezekiel, Section 2, the wings of the creatures moving the Almighty's chariot make a sound like the

roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty. (Think of that if you should happen to see and hear the waterfalls in the film *The Mission*)

In Revelation 4, Section 3, John saw a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. The one who sat there had the brilliant appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Ezekiel, in Section 3 of the text, saw what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. Brilliant light surrounded him; the radiance was like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day.

In Section 4 of Revelation, flashes of lightning and rumbling thunder came from the throne. In Section 1 of Ezekiel the whole vision is surrounded by a windstorm and an immense cloud with flashing lightning; the fiery creatures propelling the LORD's chariot in Section 4 also have lightning flashing out of the fire that moves among them.

In Section 5 of Revelation a sea of glass, clear as crystal is before the throne; in Ezekiel, Section 5, spread above the heads of the creatures, under the Almighty, is an expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome. This would seem to be the sky which spreads over the world beneath the LORD's feet.

Four living creatures surround the throne in John's vision, Section 6 of Revelation; they are covered with eyes, in front and in back. According to Section 7b of Revelation, there were eyes even under their six wings. In Ezekiel, Section 6, the chariot of the LORD has four wheels, able to move in any direction; the wheels are beside each of the four creatures, and the high rims of the wheels are full of eyes all around. Incidentally, when the cherubim reappear in a second vision in Ezekiel 10, "their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels" (10:12). The creatures know where they are going; the chariot of the LORD, so to speak, also knows where it is going; in fact, the swift motion of the chariot in any direction is one of its striking features. The creatures in Revelation have six wings, while those in Ezekiel have four.

In Revelation Section 7a the four creatures are described separately as being one like a lion, one like an ox, one with a human face, and one like a flying eagle. In Ezekiel each of the four creatures looks like this: it has not only a human face, but also the face of a lion on the right side and the face of an ox

on the left; each also has the face of an eagle. They are the same creatures mentioned by John, but all four creatures have all four faces. Perhaps the faces of these cherubim represent four aspects of creation: humans, wild animals, domestic animals and birds. However, when they reappear in Ezekiel 10, "each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle" (10:14).

In Section 4 of Revelation the one who sits on the throne is surrounded by twenty-four elders, just as in the first chapter the Son of man appears among seven lamp stands, with seven stars in his right hand. It is a reminder that in the New Testament the vision of the glory of the LORD is given to God's whole people, not only to a one prophet for them. Going on to the section numbered 8 in Revelation on Page 2, the one on the throne is holding a scroll, written on both sides. In Ezekiel, Section 10, the LORD reaches out to hand the prophet a similar scroll, which he is then directed to eat.

There are two ways to look for parallels between Ezekiel and the Revelation to John. We have been looking at details in which their visions of the glory of the LORD partially agree. But it is a concentration on details at the expense of the main point which often leads millennial interpreters astray. Becker suggests:

Just as we create difficulties for ourselves when we try to interpret every detail of a parable and in so doing often make the interpretation uncertain and the parable unclear, so we must guard against interpreting the Apocalypse in every detail. Symbolic and figurative language must never

be pressed beyond the point of comparison. That does not mean that the symbols are arbitrary and can be interpreted any way at all. There is a reason why the Savior is described as a lamb and the devil is pictured as a great red dragon...*We will have learned how to deal with this book when we have learned to read the Apocalypse the way we read the parables.* And when we have familiarized ourselves, not only with those sections of the Old Testament which are commonly classified as “apocalyptic” but with the rich symbolism which is so prevalent in the Old Testament and by no means missing in the New, we will find this prophetic book not nearly so formidable as it appears to be at first glance (15,16).

We especially need to keep in mind the Spirit’s purpose of the Scriptures, that we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and receive eternal life through faith in him. Closely connected with that is a proper understanding of the LORD’s ruling among his people, that it is not like the kingdoms of this world, that it is not established by the this world’s means, and that its glory is not the glory of the kingdoms of this world.

In both Revelation and Ezekiel we have an appearance of the glory of the Lord, though Ezekiel, recognizing his own unworthiness to see God, calls it (Section 8) “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.” The glory of the LORD appeared as a flaming lamp in Genesis 15, when the LORD established his covenant of grace with Abraham. It appeared to Moses in the burning bush. It stood between the Israelites and the Egyptians on the night before God’s people crossed the Red Sea. It appeared on Mt. Sinai when the LORD revealed his Law to Moses and then to the elders of Israel when they confirmed Israel’s Law covenant with the LORD. When Moses foolishly asked to see the unveiled glory of the LORD, his request was refused; instead, the LORD proclaimed his saving name.

After the tabernacle had been built according to God’s plan, “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.... In all of the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel; during all their travels” (Exodus 40:34-38). After the ark of the covenant had been carried into Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem, “when the priests withdrew the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple” (1 Kings 8:10,11), the holy house which Solomon called a place for the LORD to dwell forever (1 Kings 8:12).

In an essay on “The Glory of the LORD” August Pieper describes it this way.

It is, to the degree that it is unfolded, a more or less complete image of the true glory, of the absolute and infinite transcendence of God over all creatures according to his all-pervading presence, His all-dominating power, His infinite grace, and His all-consuming holiness—a symbol of His absolute sovereignty, of the one and only true and perfect Lord, to whom all creatures ought to render willing obedience and joyful service, and offer adoration, praise, and glory without end.

And where this manifestation appears, it constitutes a proclamation through an act—not only that the Lord God is there present in a special manner, but also that He is about to go into action in a supernatural way, that He will do something special, something that is otherwise not revealed but very momentous. And that which is thus announced invariably pertains to the plan of salvation from sin which he made in Christ, and to which is to be carried out through Him, pertains to the establishment, edification, preservation, and completion here in time of the eternal, future kingdom of God. God does not trifle with it, nor does He permit trifling with it.

No man, no angel can call it forth; God on the other hand freely employs it, when and where He will. It serves Him as an aid for His revelation through the Word; it preaches grace and wrath, it inaugurates judgment and deliverance, it constitutes an instance in which Law and Gospel are put into effect in this temporal world order. It is a faint reflection of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who is the visible image of the invisible God, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily...(106-107).

As part of the background of the appearance of the glory of the LORD to Ezekiel, let's remember that the chariot was a vehicle for soldiers and armies, the tank of the ancient world. At the Red Sea Moses and the Israelites sang praises after their victory over Pharaoh:

I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea...  
The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.  
Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. (Exodus 15:1-4)

Although the LORD does not appear riding a chariot at the Red Sea, he is the warrior who destroys Pharaoh's war chariots.

The chariot of the LORD or the chariots of his heavenly army appeared at the ascension of the prophet Elijah. As Elijah and Elisha were walking along and talking together, "suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, 'My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel'" (2 Kings 2:11,12).

When the Aramean king sent horses and chariots and a strong force to surround the city where Elisha was staying and the prophet's servant asked "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" Elisha answered, "Don't be afraid. Those that are with us are more than those who are with them," and in response to the prophet's prayer, "the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17). The LORD and his army were near to protect his prophet.

Now why should the LORD appear in such a momentous way to the prophet Ezekiel? Some of the Jews were already in exile in Babylon, the prophet among them, and in only a few years King Nebuchadnezzar would raze Jerusalem and burn the Temple. For many of the Jews the presence of the Temple in Jerusalem had become a sort of charm that meant no one could take the city. They were not trusting in the LORD, but in the Temple (cf. Jeremiah 7), almost as if they had locked him into the building. When that happened, God said, he was ready to destroy the temple, just as the Northern Kingdom had been destroyed. "My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched" (Jeremiah 7:20). In Ezekiel Chapter 10 the glory of the LORD appears again. A messenger is directed to take flaming coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city of Jerusalem. Then the glory of the LORD departs from the Temple (10:18). Later, on the same day that Ezekiel's wife dies, the word of the LORD comes to the prophet: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary—the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection" (24:21). The LORD reveals his glory to Ezekiel for a message of judgment against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

At the same time, the vision of the glory of the LORD was also a message of grace. That glory of the LORD which appeared in the Temple was not confined to the Temple. The LORD could reveal

himself to Ezekiel next to the Kebar River in the land of exile. In Babylon he would also reveal the good news that the destruction of Solomon's Temple did not mean the end of his plan for his people and for the salvation of the world through them. His war-chariot could move in any direction, as he pleased. So he told his people through Ezekiel of the coming return from captivity and of his coming return to live among his people:

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on the day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel....I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them” (34:11-24).

In the familiar manner he blends the return from the Babylonian exile and the whole New Testament era.

It is the LORD who is bringing on the destruction of Jerusalem by removing his gracious presence from the Temple; he himself desecrates the First Temple through Nebuchadnezzar's armies. But he has not abandoned his people who trust in him. The Jews must go into exile, but it is not their Babylonian captors who rule history. Nebuchadnezzar is the LORD's instrument of judgment, but the LORD, the Commander of the heavenly host, is also Nebuchadnezzar's Ruler and Judge. He teaches his people to say, “They that are with us are stronger than they that are with them,” or rather, “He that is with us is more glorious than all kings.” In his own time his glory will be revealed in his temple among his people again. That will become plain in the final vision of Ezekiel.

The situation is not all that different when John writes Revelation. Jesus has ascended to heaven, and his disciples have carried his gospel around the Mediterranean world. But now the last living apostle is an old man, and besides, persecutors have exiled him from the churches that he loves. The Father and Jesus appear in glory to comfort John in his last years and to strengthen the New Testament church for the days, years, centuries and millennia to come. Woes will be poured out over the earth: war, famine, plagues and death. Great powers will rise against the Lamb and against the people whom he shepherds. The martyrs slain because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained will cry out, “How long?” Seven angels with seven plagues (Revelation 15) will pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth (Revelation 16). Babylon the great will be “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (17:6). Gog and Magog, representing the hostile powers of the world, will war against the saints, a crescendo of hatred rising as the end nears (Revelation 20:7-10), just as Jesus predicted: “Those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning” (Mark 13:19, etc.). The appearance of the Lord in glory, and particularly the appearance of the victorious Son of Man, holding the keys of hell and death, is to comfort and strengthen John and the churches with him. The appearance of the Lord Jesus as the victorious Lamb in the center of the throne of the Almighty, breaking the seals of the book which release the woes of the last times, tells the church, “Jesus is Lord.” This apocalyptic vision to John repeats the promise Jesus gave at his ascension: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me....And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Pastors and teachers have a lot of practical concerns. Priests and prophets and apostles did, too. The agenda for a church council or a school faculty meeting lists one practical issue after another, and as



responsible servants of the congregation we must give such matters the best attention and the best ideas and the most efficient gifts of administration that God supplies.

But can we learn to see all those things in view of eternity, in the light of the glory of God? Can we lay them all down in the throneroom of heaven and realize that, no matter how the devil and the world around us and the flesh inside us may contend with Jesus and his Church, he lives and reigns, and “they that are with us are more than they that are with them,” or better: “He who is with us is greater than all?” It was part of the providence of God that in their last years when death was coming closer both Martin Franzmann and Siegbert Becker were studying the Book of Revelation. With them we will live and die more fearlessly when we know that the LORD of hosts is with us always.

Our church, springing into luxuriant growth ever since the ‘60’s, suddenly finds the bulk of its established membership in the Rust Belt. Congregational finances do not present a pretty picture. The synod budget is in the hole, and the Board of Trustees does not seem to know the way out. One special offering after another does not solve the problem. Graduates of our worker-training schools stand idle. The situation may well get worse before it gets better. Only thou and I seem to have good enough sense to see solutions—and sometimes I wonder about thee. Do we have our eyes open to what Ezekiel and John saw, and do we have our ears open to hear God speaking to us in judgment, so that we fall facedown before his throne? Do we then let his Spirit raise us up with the word of his grace to see our Father and his Lamb ruling the universe, holding the church in their loving heart and in their mighty hands? Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!

#### **EZEKIEL 40-48 AND REVELATION 21-22**

The other section with the most frequent parallels between Ezekiel and Revelation is at the end of the books, where John describes the New Jerusalem and Ezekiel the resettlement of the land of Canaan and the building of the new temple. I’ll read Verses 10 through 22 of Revelation 21 and the first portion of Chapter 22.

On Page 3 of the printed texts, in Section 2 both Ezekiel and John are carried away to a high mountain to see the city; Ezekiel says specifically that it is in the land of Israel. According to Section 3, the gates of the city are named after the twelve tribes of Israel; Ezekiel tells which three gates are on each side. In Section 4 the angel (Revelation) or the man whose appearance is like bronze (Ezekiel) holds a measuring rod, the angel to measure the city in Revelation, the man to measure the new Temple in Ezekiel. In Section 6 of Revelation the city is 12,000 stadia or about 1400 miles long, wide and high, with a wall about 200 feet thick. In Ezekiel, Section 6, the distance all around the city is 18,000 cubits, that is, 27,000 feet or a little less than 5.2 miles.

Finally, in Chapter 22 of Revelation, Page 5 of your printed material, John describes the “river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” In Ezekiel, the water comes out from under the east threshold of the new temple, deepening as it flows east till no one can cross it. In Revelation on each side of the river is “the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” In Ezekiel, “where the river flows everything will live.” Fish of many kinds fill the river; “fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river,” and “their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.” The point of both visions is life, abundant life, everlasting life.

We perhaps know the picture from Revelation fairly well, but a little summary like this gives us no idea of the new temple and the enormous temple enclosure described in the last chapters of Ezekiel. Keith Kuschel’s commentary in the People’s Bible series gives a fuller description and two diagrams. The sanctuary itself is 150 feet square; in its exact center is an altar, the hearth of which is about 20 feet square. The whole area around the temple also forms a perfect square, 750 feet on a side. There are new

regulations for the priests, the Levites and the sacrifices, replacing those in the Book of Leviticus. The whole land of Israel is divided equally among the twelve tribes. The sacred district around the Temple, including the home of the priests, is immense: a strip 20,000 cubits by 25,000 cubits, about 6 by 7 miles. In comparison, the temple area in the time of Christ was perhaps 500 yards square.

For the third time in his book Ezekiel now sees the glory of the LORD.

Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen when he came to destroy the city and like the visions I had seen by the Kebar River, and I fell facedown. The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east. Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. While the man was standing beside me, I heard someone speaking to me from inside the temple. He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever" (43:17).

That vision explains the name of the city, the name which closes the Book of Ezekiel: "THE LORD IS THERE."

In 536 B.C. under the authority of King Cyrus of Persia the Jews returned to Jerusalem. In 516 B.C., seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and the first temple, the Jews rededicated a restored second temple to the LORD. Many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen Solomon's temple, "wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping" (Ezra 3:12,13). Even if we overlook the mere physical insignificance of the second temple as compared with the first, something else was missing: the ark of the covenant, the heart of the tabernacle and the first temple, representing the presence of the LORD among his people, was not there. On the ark, the LORD told Moses, "above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (Exodus 25:21). But when the returning Jews rebuilt the temple, the ark was gone, perhaps burned when Nebuchadnezzar set fire to the first temple (2 Kings 25:8,9). And we do not read that the glory of the LORD appeared in the second temple, at its dedication or later. No bright cloud filled this sanctuary.

While the prophets taught the Jews to look forward to their return to the land of Israel, and while it was plainly the LORD's will that his people rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, we can hardly see in Zerubbabel's temple the fulfillment of God's promise through Ezekiel. In fact, Haggai wrote: "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?" (2:3). The prophet taught the people to expect something better to come: "In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth...and I will fill this house with glory....The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house and in this place I will grant peace" (Haggai 2:6-9). What was the LORD telling his people?

Let's start from the clue in Revelation 21:22, Section 7 on Page 4 of the text I gave you. "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God almighty and the Lamb are its temple." There is no parallel to this in Ezekiel, or rather, *the parallel is all those verses which describe Ezekiel's new temple and the glory of the Lord descending to fill it*. Do we understand? Ezekiel may be referring in a shadowy way to the rebuilt temple after the Exile, but the real fulfillment of his prophecy comes later. The so-to-speak shadow-fulfillment comes with the return from exile and the building of the Second Temple; the reality fulfillment comes in Christ; and the ultimate fulfillment will be in eternity.

John says it this way: “The Word became flesh and lived for a while”—the word means ‘tabernacled, tented’—“among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father grace and truth” (John 1:14). Just as the Old Testament tabernacle and then Solomon’s temple represented the presence of the LORD among his people, and he was actually pleased to let his glory—what the Jews called the *shechinah*—appear to them there, so Jesus reveals God the Father to us.

Jesus says it this way when he throws the animal dealers and money changers out of Herod’s temple: “‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. They believed the Scripture”—and doesn’t that perhaps specifically include Ezekiel 40-48?—“and the words that Jesus had spoken” (John 2:18-22). This became the charge that the false witnesses brought at his trial: he was condemned for his announcement that the Father’s presence among his people was now not in the temple building, but in the person of the only-begotten Son.

Jesus told the woman at the well near Mt. Gerizim, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem....A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is a spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24). Notice particularly: “the time has now come” for this new worship. We do not have to wait for eternity to worship God in his new temple. That time has come with the arrival of the Messianic King. (Pastor D. Sievert called attention to Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:6: “One greater than the temple is here.”)

With Israel’s rejection of God’s promised Messiah, the temple building was becoming only Jerusalem’s temple, not the LORD’s, an empty memorial of the LORD’s past presence among the Jews. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate” —that is, it has been abandoned to you, as Jesus was forsaken by his heavenly Father on the cross. “For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Matthew 23:37-39). His presence in grace has been offered to the Jews during his ministry; his presence in glory will be revealed on the last day, to unbelievers as well as believers.

As Jesus himself is the new temple among his people, so Scripture can freely compare him to key features of the temple. We enter heaven through his sacrificed body, which becomes our way to God, as the Old Testament high priest made his way into the most holy place through the curtain of the tabernacle. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...” (Hebrews 10:19-23).

The *mercy-seat*, the covering of the ark, was the heart of the temple, where the LORD appeared to Moses. “If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice”—the same Greek word used in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 25:16ff. for the mercy-seat, the covering of the ark— “for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:1,2)

Have we, then, shared the vision of Ezekiel and John, the revelation of the glory of God? Paul says we have: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). And the

Letter to the Hebrews: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (1:3).

The whole last part of Ezekiel, then, with its tremendously detailed picture of the twelve tribes of Israel living in God’s new city, surrounding a new Temple, describes in Old Testament terms Jesus Christ among his people, the holy Christian church. The cloud, representing the LORD’s presence, filled the Temple; “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). In the Temple the priests brought bloody sacrifices to the LORD; “but now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:22). God’s Old Testament people came to the temple to pray, and when they could not be in Jerusalem, they turned toward the temple; in Jesus, “and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

This is also what John sees in the first chapter and the fourth chapter of Revelation: the Lord Jesus in glory, surrounded by his people, represented by the seven churches of Asia Minor, or by the twenty-four elders. He teaches us to see ourselves, WELS congregations, WELS pastors and teachers, together with all believers of all times and places, in the throneroom of heaven. Foolishly, in our weak moments, like Moses we wish we could see his unveiled glory right now. Instead, he proclaims his saving name to us. If we have been baptized; if we hear the Gospel Word of forgiveness; if we gather around the Savior’s holy supper: then “since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1,2). We confess in the Sampler communion hymn, “Here, Lord, we see you face to face.”

Yes, Paul goes on in the same passage, “and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:2). This is what John sees in the last two chapters of Revelation, where everything is new: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (20:3,4).

*The Gospel of Christ, then, is the common thread in the apocalyptic symbolism of Ezekiel and John’s Revelation.* God’s temple among us, his people, is now his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, in the words of Isaiah, “the glory of the LORD has been revealed.” What still remains to be fulfilled is that “all mankind together will see it” (Isaiah 40:5). John says that by calling the Lord God Almighty not only the temple of the new Jerusalem—he is that now—but also its light. Already in the vision of Ezekiel and the earlier vision in Revelation, the most prominent feature is light: fire, lightning, rainbow, gemstones that brilliantly refract the light. And in eternity “the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, but the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp” (Revelation 21:22). Seeing the glory of God now through Jesus Christ in his Word and Sacraments, we know that a greater glory is coming. “How great is the love the father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:1,2).

We Americans are proud to be pragmatic. When the program committee assigned me this paper, I asked them, “Will that edify the brothers and sisters?” I really wondered. When my mother heard the title, she asked, “Is that practical?” We want our sermons to have good applications. We want the religion lessons we teach in the classroom to include suggestions that children can put into practice. The Bible classes that go over best usually treat practical questions on the basis of selected Bible verses. We want our classes and our congregations to know what they can do for the glory of God. God wants them to know that, too.

But above all he wants us and them to know what he has done for our salvation. He wants us to see the glory of the LORD. That is why Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). In Christ our God reveals all the glory of his grace. It seems to me that this implies a number of very practical pointers for our ministry as Lutheran pastors and teachers.

1. As we read the Bible, we will search for Christ there, in both Old and New Testaments. “They testify of me,” he said of the Old Testament Scriptures. This assignment reminded me of that again. If the connection with Christ is not apparent, we will search more deeply, trusting his word that we will find him there.

2. We will make the study of the Word the prime resource gathering aspect of our preaching and teaching ministries. I recognize all kinds of failings in my ministry and confession, but that is the most serious one. Starting to work on this paper last summer, I read a lot of books on apocalyptic literature, and did not get anywhere. Then I went to commentaries. Finally I started to read Ezekiel and Revelation. Too often we do not come to grips with the actual stuff. When I have run dry in my preaching and teaching, that was why.

3. When we prepare to preach and teach, our strongest efforts will be concentrated on presenting the Gospel of Christ. That, and nothing else, is the power of God for salvation. Nothing is more practical than that. The application of the sermon and the papers we hear in this conference will follow immediately in our own preaching and teaching for the next two weeks. “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

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## ADDENDUM

Revelation	Ezekiel
<p>Revelation 1:10-18      <b>1</b></p> <p><sup>10</sup> On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, <sup>11</sup> which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."</p> <p><sup>12</sup> I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.</p> <p><sup>15</sup> <b>2</b> His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was <u>like the sound of rushing waters</u>. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup> I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.</p> <p>Revelation 4:1-8      <b>3</b></p> <p><sup>1</sup> After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." <sup>2</sup> At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a <u>throne in heaven with someone sitting on it</u>. <sup>3</sup> <u>And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.</u></p> <p><sup>4</sup> <b>4</b> Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> From the throne came <u>flashes of lightning</u>, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.</p>	<p>Ezekiel 1:1-4      <b>1</b></p> <p><sup>1</sup> In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> On the fifth of the month — it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin — <sup>3</sup> the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light.</p> <p>Ezekiel 1:24</p> <p><b>2</b> <sup>24</sup> When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, <u>like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty</u>, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.</p> <p>Ezekiel 1:25-28      <b>3</b></p> <p><sup>25</sup> Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. <sup>26</sup> Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like <u>a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man</u>. <sup>27</sup> I saw that <u>from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him</u>. <sup>28</sup> <u>Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him</u>.</p> <p>Ezekiel 1:13-14      <b>4</b></p> <p><sup>13</sup> The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and <u>lightning flashed out of it</u>.</p> <p><sup>14</sup> The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.</p>

<sup>6</sup> **5** Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

**6** In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.

**7** <sup>7</sup> The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Ezekiel 1:22-23

**5**

<sup>22</sup> Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. <sup>23</sup> Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body.

Ezekiel 1:15-21

<sup>15</sup> As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. <sup>16</sup> This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. <sup>17</sup> As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went. <sup>18</sup> Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

<sup>19</sup> When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. <sup>20</sup> Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. <sup>21</sup> When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.

Ezekiel 1:4b-12

**7**

<sup>4</sup> The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, <sup>5</sup> and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, <sup>6</sup> but each of them had four faces and four wings.

<sup>7</sup> Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. <sup>8</sup> Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, <sup>9</sup> and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

<sup>10</sup> Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. <sup>11</sup> Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body.

<sup>12</sup> Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.

Ezekiel 1:28

**8**

This was the appearance of the likeness of the

Revelation 5:1-2           **8**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. <sup>2</sup> And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Revelation 21:1-22:5       **1**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

<sup>7</sup> He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

<sup>9</sup> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the

glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Ezekiel 2:1-2                   **9**

<sup>1</sup> He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” <sup>2</sup> As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

Ezekiel 2:9-10               **10**

<sup>9</sup> Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, <sup>10</sup> which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ezekiel 40:1                   **1**

<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the fall of the city — on that very day the hand of the LORD was upon me and he took me there.



bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

<sup>10</sup> **2** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup> It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Revelation 21:12-14 **3**

<sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.

<sup>14</sup> The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

<sup>15</sup> **4** The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.

**5** <sup>16</sup> The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.

Ezekiel 40:2

**2**

<sup>2</sup> In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city.

Ezekiel 48:30-34

**3**

<sup>30</sup> “These will be the exits of the city: Beginning on the north side, which is 4,500 cubits long, <sup>31</sup> the gates of the city will be named after the tribes of Israel. The three gates on the north side will be the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah and the gate of Levi.

<sup>32</sup> “On the east side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin and the gate of Dan.

<sup>33</sup> “On the south side, which measures 4,500 cubits, will be three gates: the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar and the gate of Zebulun.

<sup>34</sup> “On the west side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher and the gate of Naphtali.

Ezekiel 40:3-5

**4**

<sup>3</sup> He took me there, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze; he was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand. <sup>4</sup> The man said to me, “Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the house of Israel everything you see.”

<sup>5</sup> I saw a wall completely surrounding the temple area. The length of the measuring rod in the man’s hand was six long cubits, each of which was a cubit and a handbreadth. He measured the wall; it was one measuring rod thick and one rod high.

Ezekiel 48:15-16

**5**

<sup>15</sup> “The remaining area, 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long, will be for the common use of the city, for houses and for pastureland. The city will be in the center of it <sup>16</sup> and will have these measurements: the north side 4,500 cubits, the south side 4,500 cubits, the east side 4,500 cubits, and the west side 4,500 cubits.

Ezekiel 48:35

**6**

<sup>17</sup> **6** He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. <sup>18</sup> The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. <sup>19</sup> The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, <sup>20</sup> the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. <sup>21</sup> The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

<sup>22</sup> **7** I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 22:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

<sup>35</sup> "The distance all around will be 18,000 cubits.

**7**

"And the name of the city from that time on will be: **THE LORD IS THERE.**"

Ezekiel 47:1-12

<sup>1</sup> The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. <sup>2</sup> He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was flowing from the south side.

<sup>3</sup> As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. <sup>4</sup> He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. <sup>5</sup> He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in — a river that no one could cross. <sup>6</sup> He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river.

	<p><sup>7</sup> When I arrived there, I saw <u>a great number of trees on each side of the river.</u> <sup>8</sup> He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. <sup>9</sup> Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so <u>where the river flows everything will live.</u> <sup>10</sup> Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds — like the fish of the Great Sea. <sup>11</sup> But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. <sup>12</sup> <u>Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river.</u> Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. <u>Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.</u>”</p>
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### STATEMENTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In my opinion, young Christians should be advised against reading Ezekiel and Revelation. Some books raise too many questions.
2. I would never use the visions of Ezekiel 1 or Revelation 4 for a classroom devotion.
3. God said, “No one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). Yet Ezekiel and John saw God and lived to tell about it.
4. When I get to heaven, I expect that the Lord will have the same appearance he had in Ezekiel’s and John’s visions.
5. “We seem to have lost (or at least our conscious minds have lost, whatever we may have instinctively retained) the universally human understanding and appreciation of the symbol...A symbol is the shortest of shorthands...A symbol expresses little but suggests much...A symbol is language of an ‘insider’ for ‘insiders’” (F, 24).
6. In Revelation 21:26, the city of God is described as a cubical, about 1380 miles on a side. This allows for 1/30 cubic mile for of an estimated 20 billion residents, allowing just 25% for mansions, the rest for streets, parks, public buildings, etc. “Obviously there is adequate room in the holy city for all who will be there” (M, 451).
7. “Lutherans are often accustomed to saying that we must not read Revelation literally. This is a bad habit we have gotten into...We read Revelation just as literally as we read Genesis...The literal truth is that Revelation is a vision, and it is literally true that John saw the things he described here, and that the things he saw were symbols which pictured the future history of the church. This is the literal meaning of the plain words of the text” (B. 19, 20).
8. Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple in Jerusalem proclaims Christ in the midst of his NT church, through time into eternity.