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A Message of Comfort and Hope to a Pilgrim People, Part 2

Eskimos have numerous words for snow. And most of you know that when snow is such a large part of your life, you discover that there are different types of snow.

So it is with biblical prophecy. Walking through the Old Testament prophets one finds different types of prophecy. For example:

1. Dual Fulfillment — These are prophecies which have two or more events in view at the

time of the giving of the prophecy. In this regard, I have illustrated the nature of this prophecy using the metaphor of a mountain range which from a distance appears to have two peaks next to each other, but when seen from a different perspective it is discovered that they are separated by many miles. An example of Dual Fulfillment is Isaiah 7 where the promise is given that "...a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14b). When Isaiah gave this prophecy, he didn't see two births, but one! However we know from Matthew 1:23 that this referenced NOT ONLY the birth of a child in Isaiah's day, BUT ultimately the birth of Christ!

2. Telescoping — This is where two events are prophesied (as in Dual Fulfillment), BUT the two are inseparably linked. As in a telescope where there are two lenses worthless by themselves, but when the image on the far lens is viewed through the close lens, we see things we otherwise would have missed. An example of Telescoping is "the Day of the Lord" passages found throughout Scripture- like these:
 - Zephaniah 1:18: speaking initially of the Judean exile of 586 BC, Zephaniah prophesied, "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the Lord's wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth."- again, while this referenced the exile of 586 BC, there is no question that God intended the exile to be a foretaste of the trial and difficulty that is coming upon the world when Christ returns in His glory. In this regard, the purpose of Telescoping is found in Luke 13:2b-3, referencing a temporal crisis which nevertheless pointed to the future judgment, Jesus said, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans, because they suffered this *fate*? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."
3. Prophetic Discourses — This is what we most commonly think of when it comes to prophecy. Here a future event is simply foretold. The prophecy has no bearing on the present, but is genuinely a foretelling of the future. In fact as we've seen, this is one of the marks of a genuine prophet (Deuteronomy 18:22). An example of a Prophetic Discourse is Daniel 4-5 where Daniel predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his mind and become as an animal. There wasn't Telescoping involved here or Dual Fulfillment. It simply was a foretelling of a future event. This is the Dispensational Approach to Ezekiel 40-48.
4. Eschatological Prophecies — This is where a future event is foretold whose significance is bound and limited to the Last Day, specifically the Second Coming of Christ. An example of an Eschatological Prophecy is Isaiah 66:10-24. If you care to read it later today, you will note that its reference is confined exclusively to the end of this world and the start of the next.
5. Apocalyptic — This is where, unlike the previous types of prophecy, a future and climatic event is foretold whose genesis and implication begin in the present. It is this present aspect that is the defining mark of this type of prophecy. An example of Apocalyptic Prophecy is the book of Revelation (in fact, the Greek title for this book is ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*)). This book clearly is speaking of the end of the world, yet we all know the revelation addresses the present. Right? Revelation 2-3 describes the

different types of churches that can be found today. That means the book of Revelation is a prophecy whose fulfillment began the moment it was given!

Ezekiel 40-48 is best understood apocalyptically. It ultimately is describing a future reality whose fulfillment began the moment it was given! Accordingly, the description of the Temple referenced here is a description of what God at that moment was doing amidst His people, and yet what ultimately He would do when His prophetic plan was brought to its fulness at the end of this world!

Accordingly, what we have before us would have been an incredible word of comfort and hope to the people of Ezekiel's day, which is why I've titled our study, A Message of Comfort and Hope to a Pilgrim People. Consider the first word of comfort/hope: The Lord is THE Sovereign King who reigns supreme over the Earth, Ezekiel 43:1-7a.

Ezekiel 43:1-2, "Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east. And His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory."

Ezekiel clearly and purposely patterned this section after the Exodus/Conquest narratives found in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (hence Ezekiel 40-48 details a second conquest... of the hearts of God's people)! Why? The answer is twofold:

1. To encourage his current generation to identify with their past brethren who likewise lived as the Beloved of God and yet as aliens and strangers on this earth. And so looking back upon the people of God in the Exodus, they would know that they like them were the beloved of God!
2. To remind them that although God's people at the time of the Exodus lost almost everything they held dear, nevertheless God remained the Sovereign Lord of the Universe and as such led His people in the wilderness exactly where He wanted them!

And that is the idea behind the phrase in our text this morning, "...and the earth shone with His glory." The word for "glory" is כְּבוֹד (*kabed*) which speaks of weightiness or substance. It is what is behind the third commandment which calls us NOT to take "the name of the Lord Thy God in vain/lightly" (Exodus 20:7). The word for "shone" is אִיר (*ur*) and is used in multiple places in reference to the "enlightening of the mind" of an individual (cf. Ecclesiastes 8:1; Proverbs 6:23). In fact, the word also is used synonymously with joy and gladness (Esther 8:16). Together, the idea is that beginning in Ezekiel's day, God would manifest the weightiness of His being to His people unto their spiritual growth in grace.

Now, reflecting back on the Exodus, though God's people in Egypt and then in the wilderness seemed like vagabonds, nevertheless the weightiness of God's Being was clearly evident both in what God did and how He led His people! Concerning the plagues, God said this:

Exodus 12:12, "For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments- I am the Lord."

What an incredible verse! Each plague that God brought against Egypt was directed against an Egyptian deity to demonstrate the absolute power and sovereignty of the Lord! Now practically speaking, years later when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, perhaps tempted in their thinking about what deity had *overruled* the will of God such that His people now seemed cursed of man, just a shallow reminder of the plagues would have brought them back to reality... "*God is indeed the Great I Am! We are where we are today NOT because God is weak, BUT because He has willed it to be so!*"- that is a "shining forth of the glory/weightiness of the Lord!"

God's people were brought to the base of Mount Sinai:

Exodus 20:18, 20, "which shone with His glory," "And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance... And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid [do not be terrified]; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.'"

The parting of the Red Sea, the wilderness wanderings, the trials and tribulations... ALL occurred that the eyes of God's people might be opened that they might see the greatness of the glory of the Being that was going before them! In fact, THE promise that God gave to His people at the very beginning of the wilderness wandering which was intended to be a comfort and encouragement to Israel in and through all things was this:

Exodus 14:14, "The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent."

Though Israel during the time of the Exodus and Conquest were bereft, displaced, and the object of attack and hatred from the many nations they would encounter on their way to the Promised Land, nevertheless God had an unthwartable plan which at that moment meant a wilderness existence for His people.

That theme clearly is what emerges in Ezekiel 40-48 on account of the parallels between Ezekiel and the Exodus. In fact, what is implicitly proclaimed via the many parallels between Ezekiel and the Exodus Narrative is explicitly brought out in the text before us, speaking of the glory of the Lord:

Ezekiel 43:3-7a, "And *it was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city [Ezekiel 9-11]. And the visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar [Ezekiel 1]; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east.

And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. Then I heard one speaking to me from the house, while a man was standing beside me. And He said to me, 'Son of man, *this is* the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever.'"

Through Ezekiel, God's people were privy to the glory of God leaving the Solomonic Temple in Ezekiel 9-11. How heart breaking that must have been to have heard! And yet how much more heart breaking to behold... for that is why the nation was now in exile! Yet what do we read here? The God who left the physical temple now has made His people to be His temple which means regardless of where they may be, He would be there in their midst- which is exactly what He promised He would do in Ezekiel 37.

Ezekiel 37:26-28, "And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."

What a glorious showing forth of the glory of God among His people! And so it came to pass with the promise of the temple in Ezekiel 43:4-5.

Ezekiel 43:4-5, "And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate facing toward the east. And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house."

Apocalyptically, again this is NOT merely a prophecy of that which would occur at a future date, RATHER this is a description of what God began doing amongst His people at that time AND which would come to its fulness at the last day when the events of Revelation 21 come to pass.

Revelation 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them."

So get this! The glory of God's presence, though it left the physical temple, never left His people in the exile! From Ezekiel 40, God's people had the glorious promise that God was ever and always in their midst. Picking up on this truth Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

There is no question that the gathering of the people of God is a Temple of the Lord God! And based on Ezekiel 40, that temple likewise is inhabited by the King of glory!

As the people of God, we constitute the Temple of God on this earth! Now this temple has seen some awful things.

- Think of the people of God in exile... the abuse, deprivation, persecution!
- Think of the people of God in Nazi Germany... the abuse, deprivation, persecution!
- Think of the people of God today living in Islamic lands... the abuse, deprivation, persecution!

Accordingly, the worldling and the flesh might have us believe that God either is evil or has forsaken His people. But from Ezekiel 43 and many other passages, we know better! In and through it all God goes with us, is within us, and in fact is working out the glory of His presence in our lives in and through all things! This is no doubt where Peter got the inspiration for His exhortation to the persecuted people of God in his day:

1 Peter 1:1-2a, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens [the language here is the language used of the exiled people of God in the Old Testament], scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."

Christian do you understand today that as a body and as individuals, a Sovereign and Loving Lord has you right where He wants you? There are no accidents... no surprises. We are part of a Kingdom that cannot be thwarted. So weep not... fret not... and worry not! Truly we are "marching to Zion"- which is gloriously pictured in the text before this morning!

And yet there is one more element in regard to this point we ought not to miss! Truly from the text before us we know that even in exile God goes with us. But the question is this: "WHO is the God who goes with us?"

Ezekiel 43:3, "And *it was* like the appearance of the vision which I saw, like the vision which I saw when He came to destroy the city. And the visions *were* like the vision which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face."

This reference brings us back first to Ezekiel 10 and then Ezekiel 1, AND SO the greatness of the glory of our awesome/almighty God! Ezekiel wants God's people to have the same encouragement and hope that he did when God called him to the ministry of a prophet. Do you remember? Just as in the case of Moses (Exodus 3), Isaiah (Isaiah 6), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Daniel 3), Paul (Acts 9), and Stephen (Acts 6) — all of whom received a revelation of the glory of God to encourage them in their ministry — so it is with us! This passage was given to exiled Christians as a reminder that in and through all things THAT is the Being who has called them and goes with and before them!

The impact of the knowledge that it is THIS Glorious Being who goes with us is life changing! Think of Elisha. You remember the account how the Arameans were seeking the life of Elisha and so chased his servant and him to the city of Dothan and surrounded it? From all outward

appearances, Elisha and his servant were doomed! Yet Elisha wasn't concerned! How was that so? Well, when the servant of Elisha approached the prophet and expressed his despair to Elisha, do you remember the prophet's prayer?

2 Kings 6:17b, "'O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

In other words, God opened his eyes to the reality of the Glory of God which accompanied them!

Family of God, the same Being who accompanied Elisha in his ministrations, Moses, Isaiah, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, Paul, and Stephen is the same Being who accompanies you this very moment!

- Are you ill? This is the Being who draws by the bedside and wipes your brow!
- Is your safety threatened? This is the Being who stands watch over you while you sleep!
- Are you weary and heavy laden? Christian, be Comforted and Encouraged, this is the Being who promises you rest!