

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 43

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Ezekiel 43 is the climactic chapter of the temple vision that began in chapter 40. After three chapters describing the architectural dimensions of the new temple complex, chapter 43 narrates the return of the glory of the LORD to the temple — the very glory that Ezekiel had watched depart in chapters 8–11, one of the most devastating scenes in the entire book. The chapter opens with the vision of divine glory approaching from the east (vv. 1–5), re-entering the temple through the east gate, and filling the house — precisely reversing the departure sequence. The LORD then speaks to Ezekiel from inside the temple (vv. 6–9), declaring this the place of His throne, commanding that Israel put away her spiritual adultery (her corpse-kings and her high-place prostitutions), and promising to dwell among them forever. The remainder of the chapter (vv. 10–27) concerns the altar of burnt offering: its dimensions are given (vv. 13–17), followed by a detailed seven-day consecration and dedication sequence (vv. 18–27), culminating in the LORD’s acceptance of Israel’s offerings and His declaration: *“I will accept you.”*

This Text — Intent

God is seeking to accomplish three interlocking effects through this passage. First, He means to establish, beyond any remaining doubt, that He is returning to dwell among His people — the exile is not the final word, and the departure of His glory was not permanent abandonment. Second, He means to show that this restored presence is morally conditioned: the return of the glory demands the removal of defiling practices, and the altar of consecration must be properly established before worship can resume. Third — and most fundamentally — He means to produce in Ezekiel and in Israel a posture of prostrate worship before the returning God. The passage is designed to shatter despair and replace it with holy awe: the God who left has come back, and the life of the community is now ordered around the altar of His presence.

Subject Sentence: The glory of the LORD returns to the temple, reclaiming His throne and restoring Israel’s worship.

Primary Claim: God is declaring that His departure was not His last word — He is coming back, He is taking His throne, and everything in the life of His people must now be ordered around His presence; the community that was scattered in shame is being rebuilt around the altar of the returning King.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Return of the Glory — Literal Fulfillment or Symbolic-Eschatological?

The most significant and sustained interpretive debate surrounding Ezekiel 40–48 as a whole — and chapter 43 in particular — concerns the nature of this temple vision. Does it describe a literal, physical temple to be built in a future millennial age, or does it describe something that is fulfilled spiritually and eschatologically in the new covenant community and ultimately in the new creation?

Dispensational reading: The dispensational tradition (Scofield, Walvoord, Pentecost) reads Ezekiel’s temple literally and futuristically. The glory’s return in chapter 43 is the literal return of Christ’s divine glory to a rebuilt Jerusalem temple during the millennial kingdom. The altar sacrifices of verses 18–27 are understood as memorial sacrifices — looking back to the cross as the Levitical sacrifices looked forward to it. This reading has the virtue of taking the specificity of Ezekiel’s measurements seriously and of honoring the prophetic pattern of literal fulfillment. Its difficulty is significant, however: the return of animal sacrifice in the millennial age sits in severe tension with the argument of Hebrews (especially 7–10) that the Levitical system has been superseded, not temporarily suspended. The “memorial sacrifice” explanation is a harmonization that Ezekiel’s text itself does not suggest — Ezekiel presents these offerings as genuinely atoning, not merely commemorative. Evaluate: **Qualify** — the literal attentiveness is a genuine contribution, but the harmonization required creates more problems than it solves.

Amillennial/Reformed reading: The Reformed and broadly amillennial tradition (Calvin, Keil, Block, Duguid) reads the temple vision as a vision of the restored covenant community, given in architectural-symbolic form. The return of the glory is the promise of God’s renewed presence with His people, fulfilled progressively: in the return from exile, more fully in the incarnation (John 1:14 — the Word tabernacled among us), and completely in the new creation (Revelation 21–22, where the new Jerusalem needs no temple because God Himself is its temple). The altar and sacrifices are understood through the lens of typology: they point forward to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, not backward from a future millennial period. The seven-day consecration (vv. 18–27) mirrors the Mosaic inauguration pattern (Leviticus 8–9) and establishes the theological point that acceptable worship requires priestly mediation and blood atonement. Evaluate: **Preferred** — this reading accounts for the canonical trajectory without requiring harmonization and allows Ezekiel’s vision to be heard as genuinely good news to exiled Israel rather than news relevant only to a future dispensation.

A caution on over-spiritualizing: Some interpreters flatten the vision entirely into general promises of God’s presence and lose the specific, concrete, structural claims Ezekiel is making. The glory returning through the east gate, the altar dimensions, the consecration sequence — these carry specific theological freight about the ordering of worship around sacrifice, mediation, and holiness. Applications that reduce the chapter to “God is with us”

without engaging the altar and consecration material miss what God is actually doing through the vision.

The Altar and Consecration — Who Is the Priest?

Verses 18–27 assign the Zadokite priests a central role in the consecration of the altar. Some interpreters focus heavily on the Zadokite priesthood's prominence in Ezekiel 40–48 as a statement about legitimate versus corrupted priesthood (contrasted with the Levites who went astray, cf. 44:10–14). The Reformed reading traces this to its christological fulfillment: Christ is the great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14–5:10; 7:26–28) who both offers and is the sacrifice, making the Zadokite mediation typologically complete. The specificity of the consecration sequence — sin offerings, burnt offerings, seven days — mirrors Leviticus 8–9 and signals that the altar cannot be approached casually; it is established through blood, through time, and through priestly mediation. This is the textual basis for the pastoral application that renewed access to God is never self-generated — it is always mediated and always costly.

“I Will Accept You” (v. 27) — Conditional or Unconditional?

Verse 27's declaration — *“and I will accept you, declares the Lord GOD”* — raises a question about the relationship between Israel's obedience (putting away idols, v. 9) and God's acceptance. Arminian/Wesleyan readers emphasize the conditional structure: Israel must turn from defilement before the glory returns. Reformed readers do not deny the moral condition but insist that in the canonical context, the very act of God's returning and reestablishing the altar is itself a gracious act — Israel cannot generate the conditions for God's return; God returns and then commands the conditions. The sequence matters: the glory arrives (vv. 1–5), God speaks (vv. 6–12), the altar is given (vv. 13–17), and then consecration proceeds (vv. 18–27). God does not wait for Israel to clean up before returning — He returns and then issues the summons to holiness. This is the pattern of grace-then-law, indicative-then-imperative, that governs the whole of biblical covenant theology. Evaluate: **Qualify the Arminian emphasis** — the moral dimension is real; refute any reading that makes God's return conditioned on Israel's prior reformation.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 40:34–38** — The glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle at its dedication; Ezekiel 43 is the new-covenant parallel — the glory that filled the first dwelling now returns to the eschatological dwelling, establishing God's presence as the defining reality of His people's life.
- **1 Kings 8:10–13** — Solomon's temple filled with the glory cloud at its dedication; Ezekiel's vision of glory-return echoes this pattern and surpasses it — not a first dedication but a return after exile, carrying the additional freight of grace over judgment.

- **John 1:14** — “*The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we have seen His glory.*” The return of the glory in Ezekiel 43 finds its decisive fulfillment in the incarnation — Jesus is the temple in whom the full glory of God dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9), and His arrival in Jerusalem is the true east-gate arrival of the King.
- **Hebrews 9:11–14** — Christ as the great High Priest who enters the greater and more perfect tabernacle by His own blood establishes the altar consecration of Ezekiel 43:18–27 in its ultimate register; the seven-day animal offerings are the type; Christ’s once-for-all self-offering is the antitype.
- **Revelation 21:1–4, 22–27** — The new Jerusalem, where God dwells with His people permanently and there is no separate temple because God Himself is the temple — this is the final fulfillment of what Ezekiel 43 promises: not merely a return of glory to a building, but the eternal, unmediated, uninterrupted presence of God with His redeemed people.

Aim: To demonstrate that the return of God’s glory to the temple is not merely an Old Testament architectural vision but God’s most direct assurance — addressed to people living in the wreckage of exile — that He has not abandoned His people and that their life is now to be ordered entirely around the altar of His returning presence.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
43:1–2	Ezekiel is led to the east gate; the glory of the God of Israel comes from the east; its sound is like many waters; the earth shines with His glory	Precisely reverses the departure route of 10:18–19; 11:22–23; “many waters” echoes 1:24 — the same God who appeared in Babylon now returns
43:3	The vision is like the vision by the Chebar canal — Ezekiel recognizes it; he falls on his face	Ezekiel’s prostration is the only appropriate response; connects this vision to his original call (ch. 1) and to the departure visions (chs. 8–11)
43:4–5	The glory of the LORD enters the temple by the east gate; the Spirit lifts Ezekiel and brings him into the inner court; the temple is filled with the glory	The east gate is the gate of the LORD’s entrance — this is why it must remain shut (44:2); the house is now inhabited

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
43:6–7a	Ezekiel hears someone speaking from the temple; the LORD declares: <i>“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 children of Israel forever”</i>	The temple is not primarily a house for worship — it is the throne room of the King; “forever” is the covenant word
43:7b–9	The LORD charges that Israel has defiled His holy name by their whoring after other gods (“their whoring and the corpses of their kings at their high places”); He commands them to put away these practices; then He will dwell among them forever	The condition of His dwelling is the removal of defiling practices; “corpses of their kings” may refer to royal burials adjacent to the temple precincts; the connection between Israel’s idolatry and the exile is explicit
43:10–12	The LORD commands Ezekiel to describe the temple to the house of Israel — its design and laws — so that Israel may be ashamed of their iniquities; he is to write it down that they may observe its design and execute it; the law of the temple is holiness	The vision is given not merely as a promise but as a mirror — to produce shame and repentance; holiness is the governing principle of the whole temple-mountain
43:13–17	The dimensions of the altar of burnt offering are given: its base, lower and upper ledges, its hearth, its steps on the south side	The altar stands at the center of the court — worship is oriented around sacrifice; the hearth (Hebrew: <i>har’el</i> — “mountain of God” or “lion of God”) may be a theologically significant name
43:18	The LORD commands Ezekiel concerning the statutes of the altar: when it is made, it is to be used for	The altar is not decorative — it is immediately operational; blood is the first element

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
43:19–21	offering burnt offerings and throwing blood against it Zadokite priests are to be given a young bull as a sin offering; they put blood on the four horns, the four corners of the ledge, and the rim; the bull is burned outside the sanctuary — a sin offering	The Zadokites are the legitimate priestly line; the sin offering is first — consecration begins with atonement
43:22–24	On the second day: a male goat without blemish as a sin offering; cleanse the altar as with the bull; then a young bull and a ram without blemish as a burnt offering; the priests throw salt on them before offering	Salt = covenant permanence (cf. Leviticus 2:13); each offering is “without blemish” — perfection is required
43:25–26	Seven days of consecration: a male goat, a young bull, and a ram without blemish daily; for seven days the altar is to be consecrated; “they shall consecrate it”	Seven days mirrors the Mosaic tabernacle consecration (Leviticus 8–9); the repetition builds in thoroughness — this altar will be properly established
43:27	After the seven days: from the eighth day onward, the priests offer the people’s burnt offerings and peace offerings; God declares: “ <i>I will accept you, declares the Lord GOD</i> ”	The eighth day is the day of new beginning; “I will accept you” — the climactic declaration; God’s acceptance is the goal of the entire consecration process

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	43:1–5	The Return of the Glory — the King Re-enters His House
2	43:6–12	The LORD Speaks from His Throne — Conditions of

Division	Verses	Label
3	43:13–17	Permanent Dwelling The Altar Described — Worship Structured Around Sacrifice
4	43:18–27	The Altar Consecrated — Seven Days of Blood, Approaching the Eighth

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The glory of the LORD returns to the temple, reclaiming His throne and restoring Israel’s worship.

Primary Claim: God is declaring that His departure was not His last word — He is coming back, He is taking His throne, and everything in the life of His people must now be ordered around the altar of the returning King; the community that was scattered in shame is being rebuilt around the altar of His presence.

Applications (Five)

1. [Mind/Belief] — God’s withdrawal is not God’s abandonment; silence is not the end of the story.

The exiles had watched the glory depart and had every visible reason to conclude that God was finished with them. Ezekiel 43 is God’s direct answer to that conclusion: it is wrong. Every person in a season of spiritual barrenness, relational ruin, or felt divine absence needs to hear this: the departure of sensible divine presence is not the departure of God’s covenant commitment. The God who left Jerusalem did not stop being the God of Jerusalem. He was preparing a return more glorious than the original dwelling. The most important thing you believe when you cannot feel God’s presence is that His absence is not abandonment — it is prelude.

2. [Mind/Belief] — The glory returns through the east gate, and it returns in the person of Jesus.

The canonical trajectory of this vision leads directly to John 1:14 and ultimately to Revelation 21. The glory that Ezekiel sees approaching from the east is the same glory that became flesh, walked into Jerusalem, and filled — not a building — but human nature. The temple that Ezekiel envisions is ultimately a person: Christ, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily (Colossians 2:9). This means that the question “where is God’s presence?” is answered not by pointing to a building or a spiritual location but by pointing

to a person. To be in Christ is to be in the temple. The glory has returned, and His name is Jesus.

3. [Affections/Worship] — The right response to the returning glory is prostration, not analysis.

Ezekiel falls on his face (v. 3). He does not take notes, ask clarifying questions, or propose improvements to the floor plan. He goes down. In an era when worship is endlessly evaluated — its musical quality, its experiential engagement, its relevance — Ezekiel 43 calls God’s people back to the fundamental posture of the creature before the Creator: fall down. The glory is not a resource for your spiritual life; it is an overwhelming reality before which you can only collapse in awe. Let the vision of returning divine glory produce what it was designed to produce: holy astonishment, reverent silence, and prostrate adoration.

4. [Affections/Worship] — The temple vision is given to produce shame before it produces celebration.

Verse 10 is striking: the LORD tells Ezekiel to show Israel the temple plan so that they may *be ashamed* of their iniquities. The vision of restored glory is not primarily a comfort — it is first a confrontation. When you see what worship rightly ordered looks like, it should make you feel the full weight of your disorder. A church that rushes to “God is coming back, everything will be fine” without passing through the shame-and-repentance corridor of verses 7–10 has missed the pastoral logic of this chapter. Let the beauty of the vision first expose the ugliness of what you have preferred over God.

5. [Will/Behavior] — Order the concrete structures of your worship and community life around the altar, not around your preferences.

The second half of the chapter is achingly specific: altar dimensions, consecration sequences, which priests, how many days, what offerings in what order, with salt. This specificity is not bureaucratic fussiness — it is theological insistence that the presence of God must be approached on His terms, through proper mediation, through blood, through sustained consecration, not through whatever seems convenient. For the church: the means of grace — Word, sacrament, prayer, gathered worship — are the LORD’s altar. They are not optional supplements to a privately managed spiritual life. Order your life around them. Show up. Sustain the practice. Do not improvise an approach to the holy God.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 43 establishes that the God of Israel is a God whose holiness demands departure when defiled but whose covenant faithfulness compels return. The departure of glory in chapters 8–11 was not the termination of election but the consequence of persistent covenant-breaking — and the return of glory in chapter 43 demonstrates that God’s covenantal purposes are not ultimately frustrated by human sin.

Furthermore, the chapter establishes that God’s dwelling with His people is never casual: it is structured, mediated through sacrifice, and conditioned on the removal of competing loyalties. The throne-claim of verse 7 — “this is the place of My throne and the soles of My feet” — asserts that the living God is a King who rules from a specific, holy address, and that the community which surrounds that address must be shaped by the holiness of its resident King.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 43 embodies the covenantal pattern that is axiomatic in Reformed theology: God acts first (the glory returns uninvited), and then commands His people to align with His action (put away your idols; consecrate the altar). This is the indicative-before-imperative structure that governs every covenant text from Sinai onward — and it is the heartbeat of Reformed soteriology: God’s grace precedes and produces the conditions He requires. The altar consecration sequence, with its requirement of blood before worship can proceed, is the typological anticipation of what Hebrews makes explicit: there is no approach to God apart from priestly mediation and atoning sacrifice. For Reformed preaching, this passage grounds both the doctrine of perseverance (God’s glory returns; His people are not finally forsaken) and the doctrine of worship (access to God is not self-generated but Christ-mediated — the altar must be consecrated, and that consecration cost blood).

Main Takeaway

God has not finished with His people. The glory left — and the glory came back. And when it came back, it came back as King, claiming His throne, ordering His house, and declaring to a people who had every reason to believe themselves abandoned: *“I will dwell among you forever. I will accept you.”* That is the gospel-shape of this chapter. Your exile is not His last word. But understand this: the return of the glory means that everything — your worship, your loyalties, your approach to the holy God — must now be ordered around the altar. The King has come home. Live accordingly.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the temple vision as an architectural curiosity rather than a theological proclamation.** Ezekiel 40–48 is not the Bible’s version of a building code. Every measurement, every gate, every altar dimension is making a theological claim about holiness, access, mediation, and divine presence. A sermon that gets bogged down in dimensions or dismisses them as unpreachable misses the interpretive key:

the precision of the vision is the point — God’s presence is not vague; it has an address, an order, and a cost.

- **Resolving the interpretive question too quickly in either direction.** Both hyper-literalism (this will all be physically rebuilt) and hyper-spiritualization (this is just a general promise of God’s presence) flatten the text. The most faithful approach acknowledges the vision’s concrete specificity while tracing its canonical fulfillment through the incarnation and the new creation. Name the interpretive options honestly, then preach the canonical trajectory.
- **Preaching the return of glory without preaching the altar.** The most emotionally compelling part of the chapter is the vision of returning glory (vv. 1–5) — and there is a strong homiletical temptation to stop there and deliver a comfort sermon. But the chapter does not stop there. The second half is about the altar: blood, consecration, mediation, sacrifice. A sermon that gives the glory without the altar gives grace without atonement, and that is not the gospel. The glory returns to a house where the altar is properly established and the blood is properly applied.
- **Missing the shame-before-celebration sequence of verses 10–12.** The LORD explicitly says that the purpose of showing Israel the temple plan is so that they will be ashamed of their iniquities. Pastors who skip from “God is returning” to “God accepts you” without the intervening confrontation of verses 7–12 rob the passage of its diagnostic function. The vision is meant to expose as well as to comfort — and it exposes first.
- **Applying verse 27 (“I will accept you”) without its covenantal context.** This phrase is one of the most profound declarations of divine acceptance in the Old Testament, but it has been earned through the full consecration sequence of verses 18–27. To pluck it out as a freestanding “God accepts you just as you are” statement misses the point: God accepts His people at the altar, through blood, through priestly mediation, through seven days of consecration. In its christological fulfillment, God accepts His people in Christ — the once-for-all offering who consecrates the altar and the worshipers. Acceptance is real and full, but it is not undifferentiated; it comes through the cross.
- **Neglecting Ezekiel’s prostration as a homiletical model.** Verse 3 records that Ezekiel fell on his face — the same response he had at his original call (1:28). The preacher who expositors this chapter without calling the congregation to a posture of awe and repentant wonder has missed the chapter’s own internal cue for how to receive the vision. The sermon should not merely inform about the returning glory — it should attempt to produce the same prostration in the hearer that the vision produced in the prophet.