

# WHAT'S AFTER ATX

EXEGETICAL NOTES:

## THE MOST BEAUTIFUL PLACE

### A. Revelation 21:10, Ezekiel 43:5

John wrote, “and he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.” “in” or “by” the Spirit is based upon a commissioning formula, and it is found repeatedly in Ezekiel’s commissioning formulas (Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 11:1; 43:5). Essentially, this commission formula indicates that John has prophetic authority.<sup>1</sup>

Beale observes that in all of the above references from Ezekiel (save 43:5), Ezekiel is commissioned to declare judgment on Israel. But in 43:5, Ezekiel shares his vision of the new Temple and which God dwells in forever. Therefore, this commissioning formula “indicates without a doubt that the vision following Rev. 21:11f. is to be identified with the blissful vision of the future temple in Ezekiel 40-48, which is to be located ‘on a very high mountain.’”<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament understood that the temple was to sit on a high mountain. This vision, for both Ezekiel and John, depicts a future event in which God establishes his permanent abode. Yet, writes Beale, “the different pictorial details in John’s vision serve to interpret the Ezekiel vision.”<sup>3</sup> There is tension that develops in this text—Ezekiel sees a temple, but John says in Rev. 21:22 that he saw no temple—how do we make sense of this? Beale explains that John saw no *physical* temple—the Lord God himself is the new city’s temple. What John is doing is summarizing and interpreting Ezekiel’s vision in light of his own vision.<sup>4</sup> According to Habakkuk 2:9

---

1. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation, A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 1065.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, 1090.

and Jeremiah 3:16-17, the glory of the future temple would be greater than the former, and no one will miss nor remember the old temple. Beale wrote, “John probably understood these OT prophecies as fulfilled in the future by God and Christ replacing the former physical temple and ark with their glorious habitation, which will make the glory of the former temple fade in comparison.”<sup>5</sup>

In summary, not much is said about the mountain, *per se*, but the mountain is a shared detail between Ezekiel and John. Thus, the reference John makes to this mountain is John’s way of linking his vision to Ezekiel’s own vision, and also his way of interpreting OT prophecy in light of his own prophetic commission.

## **B. Psalm 96:11-13**

Why does the Psalmist say to let creation be glad and to rejoice? What’s the context here? According to Marvin Tate, this psalm’s focus is the glory of the Lord, and the proclamation of that glory—specifically to the nations and the world.<sup>6</sup> Tate wrote that God’s glory is not a static concept but is God’s active “presence, power, and action in the world.”

In essence, the Psalmist tells creation to sing a new song—to declare what he has done (his glory) to the nations. What is the content of this song? Tate suggests that “new song” is an allusion to Isaiah 43:18-19, and 48:6-7, which talk of a song about what God *will* do—it’s a song of anticipation of God’s future activity and how he will be victorious. In the words of this psalm, creation is to sing a new song *for the Lord comes to judge the world* (vv. 13). If Tate is right, this Psalm has importance for any study of eschatology, and how God will come release all the earth from bondage. In this psalm, all of creation anticipates this future redemption.

## **C. Ezekiel 1**

In his commentary on Ezekiel 1:1-3, Robert Jenson asks “What is heaven?” he responds insightfully: “In the theological tradition, heaven is the part of creation that the Creator has made as his own place within his creation. Apart from creation, God is not *in* any place but simply *is* his own place; therefore for him the creation is merely a single other place.”<sup>7</sup> In a footnote, Jenson rightfully says that the doctrine of omnipresence does not mean God is spread out through all creation—like a gas fills up a space. Rather, God’s omnipresence means that the entirety of creation, at every point, is present to him. Jenson continues:

But if he is not only to create others than himself, but to live with these creatures, he must have a place within the place made for them, from which to come and go with them. ‘Heaven’ is that part of creation. And what is *in* heaven besides God is the present reality with God of the future that his history with creatures intends, the

---

5. *Ibid.*, 1091.

6. Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1990), 512.

7. Robert Jenson, *Ezekiel*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 33.

divine present tense of ‘the kingdom of God’ and of what ‘must come before’ it. Ezekiel’s report fits well with this tradition.<sup>8</sup>

What did Ezekiel see? For the original reader, Ezekiel’s vision is a shocking one. God was generally thought to dwell in the Temple, so in order to encounter him one had to meet him there.<sup>9</sup> The idea that God was somewhat limited by the temple, and the Ark, is reflected in 1 Sam. 4-5, and Jer. 7:4. In Ezekiel’s vision, God’s perceived limitations are shattered—God appears to Ezekiel in exile; outside the land of Israel, and in the foreign enemy’s territory. The image of God’s throne on wheels further supports this notion—God is mobile, and the multi-directional position of the wheels (wheel-within a wheel), forces the prophet to take in a theological point: God is not limited by space.<sup>10</sup>

Because this is apocalyptic literature, it’s hard to press this text for literal details. What the text teaches is *literally true*, though perhaps not *truly literal*. The text would have made the audience realize that God was much bigger than they imagined (indeed, even how Ezekiel would’ve imagined him at the time), and that God’s presence was mobile and present no matter where they went. The details provided by Ezekiel would’ve made the reader think of the temple—with its four living creatures (the ark) and mention of the burning coals (perhaps Isaiah’s vision, Isa. 6?). Next to the theological points, the text also teaches that God’s presence is dazzling, majestic, and awesome to behold.

## ***D. Genesis 1:31, Colossians 1:16-20, Romans 8:18-23***

According to Romans 8:18-23, not only humanity, but creation itself, has been distorted by the fall. The whole of creation “groans,” says Paul. What is Paul saying? Sarah Lancaster offers this explanation: “as humans come to understand the world around us and discover its meaning, we may hope that humans also come to understand more fully our responsibility toward the world...human sin affects more than simply human beings: it distorts the entire creation.”<sup>11</sup> She further writes,

The idea of creation longing for restoration can easily be connected to ecological issues. We can see the gospel as good news not only for human beings but also for all creation because the hierarchical thinking that leads a person to treat another person as an object—of value only for one’s own gain—also leads persons to use and value creation only as it contributes to personal gain. A reversal of those values so that we see creation’s worth and goodness as God see it and act on its behalf is good news.<sup>12</sup>

---

8. Ibid.

9. Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Commentary (Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 16-17.

10. Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 83-84.

11. Sarah Lancaster, *Romans*, Belief: A Theological Commentary (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 144.

12. Ibid., 145.

Where does the idea that creation is good come from? Genesis 1:31. Miguel A. De La Torre observes correctly: “No dichotomy between the goodness of God and the wickedness of earth exists in the creation story. The earth and all it contains is good because it is derived from God.”<sup>13</sup> While some religions may demonize matter, Genesis teaches that matter is a part of God’s good creation. As a created good, the earth should be celebrated as well as cared for because God has made us stewards of his creation (Gen. 1:28).

But Romans also affirms that creation has been affected by the fall—its not what its supposed to be. How will God redeem creation? Through God’s only means of redemption—Jesus Christ. We return to Sarah Lancaster: “As later christological reflection began to make us of the rich meanings of the *logos* as a way of understanding Jesus, theologians could connect human destiny and the destiny of all creation through the rationality imbued in the whole universe by the *Logos*.”<sup>14</sup> As Colossians 1:16-20 says, “for by him all things were created...all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together...and through him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace by the blood of his cross.” Because of Jesus, creation eagerly awaits the day when everything will be returned to as it was when God said, “it is very good.”

### ***E. Luke 23:43, Genesis 2:8-9, Revelation 2:7; 22:2***

In Luke 23:43, Jesus says to the thief on the cross, “today you will be with me in paradise.” Heaven is described as paradise—a garden, several times in Scripture. The most notable appearance is Revelation 22:2, where John makes a reference to a river and to the tree of life. This reference is an allusion to Ezekiel 47:1-9, so it is very clear that John is connecting his vision to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8-9) which has a river and the tree of life.<sup>15</sup>

Also of importance here is Revelation 2:7, in which Jesus promises the tree of life to those who conquer. Revelation 22:2 is a recapitulation of the promises given to the church at Ephesus, as well as the other 6 churches, because Revelation 22 is a fulfillment of all of Jesus’ promises. But for Ephesus in particular, Jesus promises to let this church “eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

---

13. Miguel A. De La, *Genesis, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 37.

14. Lancaster, 144.

15. Beale, 1103.