

Ezekiel and Revelation

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A STUDY OF these two prophecies, written to two different peoples centuries apart, reveals many similarities, both in content and structure, some of which are shown in the table. Items 1–6a have been fulfilled, except for the imminent last judgements on the nations

spoken of in Revelation. Items 6b–12 are yet to be fulfilled, and have their particular expository challenge. We shall endeavour to deal with this section.

The two peoples to whom the visions were given are different in many ways. The nation of

1	1:1	Ezekiel exiled in Babylon	1	1:9	John exiled in Patmos
2	3:1	Commanded to eat book	2	10:9	Commanded to eat book
3	9:4	Man in linen marks the righteous in their foreheads	3	7:3	Angel seals the righteous in their foreheads
4	10:1,14	Vision of throne and four faces of the cherubim	4	4:2,7	Vision of throne and four faces of the cherubim
5a	Chs. 4-24	Condemnation of city and people	5a	Chs. 2 and 3	Condemnation of defectors in seven churches
5b		Assurance to faithful remnant	5b		Assurance to saints who overcome
6a	Chs. 25-35	Judgement on nations contemporary with Israel	6a	Chs. 6-18	Judgement on nations contemporary with saints
6b		Interspersed with these judgements are promises to Israel of regathering, and visions of the Kingdom	6b		Interspersed with these judgements are promises of future blessing for the saints and visions of the Kingdom
7	Ch. 37	Vision of dry bones brought to life	7	20:6	Resurrection of saints
8	Chs. 38 and 39	Magogian destruction	8	20:8,9	Magogian destruction
9a	43:1-5	Future temple filled with the glory of God	9a	21:10,11	Future city contains the glory of God
9b	Ch. 40-42	Measurement of the temple	9b	21:15-17	Measurement of the city
10	44:9	No stranger enters the sanctuary	10	21:27	No defiled shall enter
11	47:1	Waters from under the threshold of the house	11	22:1	River out of the throne
12	47:12	Trees on the riverside with fruit every month and leaves for healing	12	22:2	Tree of life on riverside bearing fruit every month and leaves for healing

Israel are the natural descendants of the fathers who received the promises. The nation was rejected by God and exiled, but not without hope. The people to whom John the Apostle wrote are not the descendants of Abraham, but by faith have been made heirs of the promises.

In the age to come, the nation of Israel will be a repentant people, blessed, and honoured above all other nations. Like other nations, however, they will be a mortal, subject people. In that age the approved saints will be immortal rulers over both Israel and other nations. These vital differences between the two peoples in the Kingdom are important in understanding the respective visions of Ezekiel and John. Although couched in similar terms, the two messages do not necessarily mean the same thing.

Item 7 in the table is a good example. The nation of Israel is seen in a dry-bone state, and raised to life again. This is understood as the regathering and renewal of spirit, following repentance. There is no suggestion of a change of nature. In John's vision the saints are also raised from the death state. In this case, it is a literal raising from the dead to receive immortality for those approved. Both operations are expressed in resurrection language, but carry different meanings. It is reasonable that this principle of interpretation be used to interpret the remainder of the visions.

Item 8 concerns the destruction of Magog in both visions, but a millennium of years separates the two events. The first affects the nation of Israel at the end of the kingdom of men. The other occurs at the end of the millennial rule of Christ and the saints and is explained by the symbolic loosing of the devil, after being bound for a thousand years. This means that the powerful supervision of Christ and the saints over sinful humanity is withdrawn.

There must be good reason for this action. It is reasonable to deduce that this is a test for the nations of the world, their final opportunity to respond favourably of their own volition. The result is outright rebellion in the form of a threat

to the camp of the saints. (One can but speculate as to the meaning of "the camp of the saints".) The outcome is inevitable: the annihilation of the nations. After a thousand years of righteous rule, humanity proves itself undeserving of perpetuating its existence. Sometime later there follows what is mystically called in 1 Corinthians 15:28 God being "all in all".

Items 9a-12 describe the establishment of and conditions in the future Kingdom of God. The seeming parity between the visions is outweighed by the differences in meaning. The details of Ezekiel's vision can be understood in literal terms. This cannot be said of John's vision. We must also keep in mind that Ezekiel's vision concerns a future mortal people, while John's is about future immortal rulers.

The temple of Ezekiel sees the return of the glory of God, which departed previously when Israel were exiled. The temple can be understood as a literal structure by its measurements. John sees the glory of God in a city which comes down from heaven. It is cubic in form, with measurements, if taken literally, which are an impossible concept. Its length, breadth and height are an equal 12,000 furlongs (1,500 miles). There being no literal explanation, it must be symbolic. The indescribable splendour of the descending heavenly city can only be the saints in glory.

Consistency in interpretation requires that we understand the vision of Ezekiel concerning a future mortal people in literal terms. Such indeed is the case with the temple, the waters, the trees and the healing of the nations. In John's Revelation the same things are symbols of the future saints. In a subordinate role to the supreme King, they are the waters and the tree of life to all nations: "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" (21:23,24).

"Early Christians refused to look at representations of Christ on the cross because they had seen men crucified. Our heart fails and our pen falters as we force ourselves to look at the events of the next six hours. It is a sight too terrible to gaze upon for long; yet to refuse to look at him steadily for a few moments before we wait for the first day of the week, is to deny ourselves the consolation of his love. We cannot linger in the shadow of the cross, but we must approach, lift our reluctant eyes steadfastly to his, and pass on our way with bleeding but strengthened hearts determined that for us, that sacrifice shall not be in vain" (Melva Purkis, *A Life of Jesus*, p. 344).