

The Departure and Return of the Shekinah Glory

We need to look at one more aspect of Pentecost before returning to study the Book of Ezra.

The Shekinah is not a term used in the Bible. It means "dwelling with" and was how the rabbis described the majestic presence or manifestation of God which descended to "dwell" among men. Also called the Divine Presence, it appeared as the pillar of fire and cloud.

We have seen how God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. That was the Shekinah. How he appeared on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law to Israel. How he appeared as a pillar of fire and cloud, first to confuse the Egyptians, then settling above the Ark of the Covenant's Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle.

- **Exodus 40:34-35** - "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

Later when King Solomon completed building the Temple, the glory of the Divine Presence filled the Holy Place so much that the priests could not minister.

- **2 Chronicles 7:1-2** - "Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house."

The "glory of the Lord" was the Shekinah.

The Temple is called the "house of the Shekinah" (Targ. Onq. to Deut. xii. 5; Ps. xlix. 15, cviii. 8)

But then followed the disastrous history of the division of the country into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Idolatry and rebellion against God prompted God to send first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians to chastise His people.

Just before the destruction of the Temple, the prophet Ezekiel describes how - because of the sin and idolatry of the people - the Shekinah glory departed from the Temple, first to the east gate then out to the Mount of Olives.

The Glory of God Departs in Stages from the Temple

- **Ezekiel 10:4** - "Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD'S glory."

- **Ezekiel 10:18** - "Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims."

- **Ezekiel 10:19** - "And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above."

- **Ezekiel 11:23** - "And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city."

From the Mount of Olives, the Shekinah Glory withdrew presumably to heaven. Jerusalem had lost the protection of the Divine Presence.

A different tradition says the Shekinah accompanies the people of Israel even into exile...

And it is written (**Isaiah 63:9**) "In all of their sorrows, He sorrowed."

- Mekhilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Tractate Pischa 14:19-23

The second Temple, which is being rebuilt by Zerubbabel as we read in Ezra, lacked many things. The Shekinah glory did not return to its place in the Holy of Holies. Nor was there the Ark of the Covenant.

The rabbis said when the Temple was rebuilt, the Shekinah did not rest upon it. For God had said, "If all the Israelites return (from Babylonia), the Shekinah shall rest upon it, but if not, they shall be served only by the Heavenly Voice [called the *Bat Kol*] - "a daughter of the (divine) voice," i.e., an echo of the divine voice.

- God says, 'In this world, because there were slanderers among you, I have withdrawn my Shekinah from your midst, but in the time to come, when I root out the evil inclination from you, I shall cause my Shekinah to return to you. And because I shall make my Shekinah to dwell among you, you will be worthy to fulfill the Law, and you will dwell in peace'

(Deut.R. y Ki Teze, vi, 14.]

Centuries later, when Antiochus defiled the Temple, and when it was re-dedicated on Hanukkah, there was the 8-day miracle of the oil. But the Shekinah Glory was still missing.

Ezekiel recorded a prophecy of the future return of the glory of God through the East Gate in 'Ezekiel's Temple'

- **Ezekiel 43:1-2,4-5** - "Afterward he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his

glory....And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house."

- **Ezekiel 44:1**. - "Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same. Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD: and I fell upon my face."

The Golden Gate is located in the north section of the east wall of the Temple Mount. In Jewish belief, the gate is called 'The Gate of Mercy' (*Sha'ar HaRakhamim*), and is considered to be the place from which the Messiah will enter in the end of days. According to Jewish tradition, the Shekinah (Divine Presence) used to appear through the eastern Gate, and will appear again when the Anointed One (Messiah) comes (**Ezekiel 44:1-3**) The gate is believed to be the place from which Christ entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, thus implying his own messianic status.

The Divine Presence returned in stages, like it left and as Ezekiel predicted.

First, we see it at the birth of Jesus:

- **Luke 2:8-9** - "And there were shepherds residing in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Just then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." - the "glory of the Lord" is the Shekinah.

The Holy Spirit had the form of a dove, and the Shekinah had wings. Thus he who acknowledged God took refuge under the wings of the Shekinah (Shab. 31a; Sanh. 96a); and Moses when dead lay in its pinions (or feathers) (Sifre, Deut. 355; Soṭah 13b; Targumic passages in Maybaum l.c. p. 65). - *The Jewish Encyclopedia*

Compare Jesus' baptism:

- **Matthew 3:16-17** - "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus entered the east gate of Jerusalem on a donkey as the Messiah was expected to do. His (divine) presence in the Temple, teaching and doing miracles and healings, was another step in the process of the return of God's Divine Presence to dwell with His people.

After His resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples and said "receive the Holy Spirit," foreshadowing Pentecost.

Christ ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (**Acts 1:9–12**) and promised to return to the same place (**Acts 1:11**; cf. **Zech. 14:4**). This was similar to Ezekiel's vision of the departure of the Shekinah.

The Descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples in the Temple at Pentecost was the fulfillment of what Ezekiel saw - with fire, and a sound of rushing wind, as the disciples waited at the foot of the pillar of Boaz.

Overlapping Temples

Pentecost was a hinge point in history, with the physical Temple and the spiritual Temple of Christ's body overlapping in one place. The old Temple was, as Melito of Sardis said, relinquishing its significance as the model to the true Temple and the New Jerusalem, part of a spiritual kingdom that was "within" the disciples themselves and "not of this world."

The Shekinah glory overshadowed them, the sound of a mighty rushing wind (a threshing wind) surrounded them and the appearance of flames of fire were over their heads.

Our God is a "consuming fire," the Torah tells us (**Deuteronomy 4:24**). The flames appearing over the disciples' heads signified God burning up the chaff of our old identities, leaving only the seed of Christ on the threshing floor.

That brings us back to Zerubbabel's rebuilding the Temple in the Book of Ezra.

Although the project was commissioned by God, that Temple would be only a shadow of its former self. But it was necessary that a Temple be in place for Jesus to call the Jewish people to repentance and to a new kingdom of the Spirit, and also to contrast the old Temple in the "Jerusalem that now is" with the Temple of His body.

Although the Temple lacked the Ark and the Shekinah, Jesus could still defend it for His Father and say, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (**Matthew 21:13**)

... quoting **Isaiah 56:7** - "...my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

The Temple, bereft of the protecting Spirit of the Divine Presence in the Shekinah, met its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Temple of Jesus' body and His kingdom continues still.

The Holy Spirit - the Divine Presence - abides within us now. But because His kingdom is not of this world but inward, there is no need for outward display of the Shekinah Glory. But the Spirit is giving enlightenment, bestowing its fruit and gifts to the body of

Christ. - continuing to burn up the chaff of our old identities, and binding us together in love and unity.