

# OpenTheo

## June 20th: Ezekiel 43 & Acts 18:1-23

June 19, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

Ezekiel's temple's altar and its dedication. Paul in Corinth.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Ezekiel chapter 43. I will tell you a story. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert.

I was a young man in the middle of the desert. I was a young man in the middle of the desert. The altar hath shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve broad.

The ledge also shall be square, fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad, with a rim around it half a cubit broad, and its base one cubit all around. The steps of the altar shall face east. And he said to me, Son of man, thus says the Lord God, these are the ordinances for the altar.

On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it, and for throwing blood against it, ye shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadar. And ye shall take some of its blood, and put it on the four horns of the altar, and on the four corners of the ledge, and upon the rim all around. Thus ye shall purify the altar, and make atonement for it.

Ye shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and it shall be burned in the appointed place belonging to the temple, outside the sacred area. And on the second day ye shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and the altar shall be purified, as it was purified with the bull. When ye have finished purifying it, ye shall offer a bull from the herd without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish.

Ye shall present them before the Lord, and the priests shall sprinkle salt on them, and offer them up as a burnt offering to the Lord. For seven days ye shall provide daily a male goat for a sin offering. Also a bull from the herd and a ram from the flock without blemish shall be provided.

Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and cleanse it, and so consecrate it. And when they have completed these days, then from the eighth day onward the priests shall offer on the altar your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, and I will accept you, declares the Lord God. The Book of Ezekiel concludes with a lengthy and highly detailed vision of the temple and the land.

Although the vision refers to actual historical realities, it does so in a symbolic fashion. No such temple or organisation of the land and its people would ever be established in a concrete form. Rather, Ezekiel's vision uses dense symbolism to articulate changes in Israel's covenant situation following their restoration to the land.

Chapter 43 continues this visionary account, reversing events of the vision of chapters 8 to 11. In that earlier vision, the Lord had departed from his temple, on account of the abominations committed within it. Departing from the East Gate, the glory of the Lord went up from the city toward the Mount of Olives.

Now Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord returning to the temple from the east. The appearance of the Lord's glory here is much as it was in the first vision of Ezekiel by the Kibar Canal, with which the book opens, and the vision in chapters 8 to 11 with the destruction of the city. In some texts, verse 3 literally speaks of the vision that Ezekiel saw when he, Ezekiel that is, came to destroy the city.

If this textual version is correct, Ezekiel's active participation in that earlier vision is accentuated. Once again, seeing the majestic glory of the Lord, Ezekiel falls upon his face. Next is chapter 40 verse 34 and 1 Kings chapter 8 verses 10 to 11, the filling of the tabernacle and the temple with the glory of the Lord, with a manifestation of the Lord's taking up residence within them.

Here Ezekiel is brought into the inner court of the visionary temple, and the Lord's glory fills the building. Having re-established his residence in the temple in the midst of his people, the Lord addresses Ezekiel from his new throne room, declaring his intention to dwell in the midst of the people forever. The Lord speaks of the dissonance brought to his name by the people in the past, and their unfaithfulness in going after other gods, the way that they had provoked his wrath by their flagrant idolatry, constructing pagan shrines adjoining and even within his own temple.

However, as they put such unfaithfulness behind them, the Lord would dwell in their midst once more and not depart from them. The vision of the returning of the Lord to inhabit the temple, and the vision of the temple itself, present Israel with a compelling vision of the way that things could be, of the purpose that the Lord has for them, and the future to which he is calling them. Ezekiel is charged to describe the details of his vision of the temple to the house of Israel.

It is entirely possible that this would entail the drawing of a detailed image of what he

witnessed in his vision, or perhaps even the creation of a scale model, in addition to writing down the detailed account of the vision itself, which we have recorded for us in this book. The intention of this is to cause the house of Israel to be ashamed of their iniquities. This would be achieved in part as the people appreciated the immense grace bestowed upon them, and how utterly undeserving they were of it.

However, the fine details of the vision really matter for achieving this intended effect. Ezekiel is given a comprehensive list of features of his vision that he must communicate to the people. It would be as they reflected upon the vision in all of its elements and details, that they would be able to recognise the full magnitude of what it meant.

It is an architectural representation of the Lord's exalted holiness in the midst of a sanctified and glorified people. This is what the Lord would have them to be. The visual character of the prophecy powerfully complements the oral elements of Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration.

It is one thing to hear about the Lord's intention to restore his people. It is quite another to have a symbolic portrayal of what that restoration will look like. Along with recounting and recording the vision for them, Ezekiel must charge them to live in terms of this image of the ideal.

The entire area around the temple complex is declared to be most holy. One of the features of Ezekiel's temple, city and land visions is an elevation and extension of holiness. Holy space is generally ordered largely concentrically, with realms of decreasing holiness going out from a central location.

In Ezekiel's temple, holiness extends much farther, and holy realms become more holy. The realm that is here described to be most holy is that earlier described in chapter 42 verses 15-20. Now when he had finished measuring the interior of the temple area, he led me out by the gate that faced east, and measured the temple area all around.

He measured the east side with the measuring reed, 500 cubits by the measuring reed all around. He measured the north side, 500 cubits by the measuring reed all around. He measured the south side, 500 cubits by the measuring reed.

Then he turned to the west side and measured, 500 cubits by the measuring reed. He measured it on the four sides. It had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common.

Already in this account of the measuring of the area, the hearer should have a sense of its holiness. Holy places are measured. Furthermore, the measurements of the realm are those of a square, like the Holy of Holies.

The measurements are 50 by 10 on each side, numerologically significant numbers, once again connected with the Jubilee themes that pervade Ezekiel's temple. In verses 13-17

we move to the description of the altar in the inner courtyard, in front of the temple proper. The altar is measured in cubits, as in chapter 40 verse 5 we are informed that it is being measured using the long cubit, 6 hand-breadths plus 1, corresponding to the week with its Sabbath.

The altar has a base, 1 cubit off the ground, a lower ledge, 2 cubits up from the base, and a larger upper ledge, 4 cubits up from the lower ledge. Each ledge is double the height of the preceding one. Each ledge is set back 1 cubit from the ledge or base beneath it.

We should note the absence of vertical measurements in much of the rest of the recorded details of the temple. The significance of a multi-level base for the altar suggests a symbolic mountain, as blood is applied to the horns, sides and base of the altar differently, according to the specific sacrifice being performed, and as the altar, coupled with the golden altar of incense, seems to represent the ordering of the nation. This multi-level altar and base might suggest an elaboration and glorification of the structure of the people themselves.

Seen from above, the altar is also squares within squares, and it is also at the very centre of a series of much, much larger squares within squares, the inner courtyard, the outer courtyard, and the larger bounded area of the temple, 500 cubits on all sides. The altar could perhaps be viewed not only as the centre of, but also as a miniature symbolic model of this larger set of squares. The whole altar upon its base is 20 cubits by 20 cubits, the same as the measurements of Solomon's altar given to us in 2 Chronicles 4.1, although there the cubits being used to measure are different.

The hearer is left to figure out this detail for themselves though, it is not recorded for us in this place. 20 cubits by 20 cubits is also the same as the measurements given for the most holy place of the temple, recorded in chapter 41 verse 4. The base and the upper ledge are surrounded by rims or lips. These rims would presumably make it easier to prevent blood from running into areas beyond the altar.

They would also be important for the performance of rites requiring the placing of blood around the sides of the altar, or around its base, which we see in verse 20. The altar itself on the upper ledge is a further 4 cubits high, likely making the altar 10 cubits up from its base. However commentators differ in how they visualise the details of the altar.

While Stephen Cook for instance sees the altar as being 10 cubits tall in total, Daniel Bloch sees it as only 6 cubits tall. The altar proper is 12 cubits long by 12 cubits broad, measurements that clearly recall Israel as a nation. The altar represents the people and the land, and the numbers associated with it, especially 4 and 12, underline this fact.

The altar was topped with four horns, one at each corner. If one were to draw a diagram of Ezekiel's temple as described, it would also seem that the altar is bang in the centre.

The altar is where the whole people and land are lifted up to the Lord in offering.

Some commentators compare the altar to a sort of ziggurat, and the whole structure of Ezekiel's temple has that sort of character to it. One ascends by stairs to each higher level. Priests here ascend to the altar on steps, which face toward the east.

This detail might surprise us, as steps up to an altar were explicitly forbidden in Exodus 20, verse 26. And you shall not go up by step to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. Stephen Cook suggests that the explanation for this might be found in the fact that the priests serving in Ezekiel's temple were described as having linen undergarments in chapter 44, verse 18, making the original restriction unnecessary.

This does, however, invite the question of why those serving in the original temple didn't simply wear undergarments, rather than having restrictions upon the permitted design of the altar. The service of the altar was exclusive to Zadokites. Ezekiel is appointed a role to perform in a sort of visionary dedication ceremony for the altar, and the worship of the temple more generally.

On the first day, the blood of a bull for the sin or purification offering was used to purify the altar, and the bull would be burnt outside of the sacred area. On the second day, a male goat would be presented as a sin offering. Then a bull and a ram without blemish would be offered as burnt offerings.

This was then to be repeated for six more days, making seven in total. From the eighth day, the altar could be used for general sacrifices. In some respects, Ezekiel's role here might invite comparison with that performed by Moses in the consecration of the tabernacle, as the prophetic director of the process.

The cleansing of the altar is a symbolic cleansing of the land and the people, preparing them for communion with the Lord, who has returned to his house. A question to consider. Very little of the furniture associated with the original tabernacle or the temple is described within Ezekiel's visionary temple.

However, the altar is described in considerable detail. Do you have any thoughts on why this might be the case? Acts chapter 18, verses 1 to 23 After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tent-makers by trade.

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own

heads, I am innocent, from now on I will go to the Gentiles.

And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household.

And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

But when Galio was pro-consul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law. But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Galio said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves.

I refuse to be a judge of these things. And he drove them from the tribunal. And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal.

But Galio paid no attention to any of this. After this Paul stayed many days longer, and then took leave of the brothers, and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Senchria he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there. But he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined.

But on taking leave of them he said, I will return to you if God wills. And he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next, through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. After leaving Athens, Paul moves to Corinth at the beginning of Acts chapter 18. Corinth was the capital of Achaia, a Roman colony and a strategic location for the mission.

It was a large multicultural city, with strong connections to Rome. One could travel to Rome from it in about five days. New Corinth was designed using a Roman pattern, predominantly used Latin in its public inscriptions, and a number of the people mentioned in the church there had Roman names and connections.

Estimates of its size vary quite significantly. Craig Keener suggests that, if the capacity

of the theatre of the city gives an indication of the city's size, being about a tenth of the population, we would have a median estimate of about 140,000 people. Estimates of the size of the city, however, vary by an order of magnitude or more.

The highest and quite excessive estimate that Keener mentions is 300,000 people with about 460,000 slaves. Compared to other ancient cities, it would have been very populous, and according to some scholars, might even have been one of the top three cities of the empire. Corinth was on the Isthmus, the narrow strip of land between the Peloponnese peninsula and the mainland of Greece.

Although attempts to build a canal between the two sides had failed or been abandoned due to excessive cost, there was a path specifically designed for the transport of ships and their cargoes from one side to another. Trade and crafts had made Corinth the wealthiest city in all of Greece. As a prominent location for trade and for travellers, it should not be surprising that Corinth would have had a reputation for immorality in certain quarters also.

In Corinth, Paul finds a Jew called Aquila, a native of Pontus and a former resident of Rome. With his wife Priscilla, Aquila works as a tentmaker. Corinth was a multicultural and cosmopolitan city, and Aquila and Priscilla would naturally have fit in in this respect.

Aquila was a Jew of the Diaspora, a native of Pontus on the south coast of the Black Sea, recently expelled from Rome and Italy, and now living in Corinth in Greece. Later on they would join Paul in going to Ephesus. When Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans, they host a church in their house there.

The importance of cosmopolitans and travellers like Aquila and Priscilla was immense for the early church. Such persons were instrumental in spreading the message of the Gospel to the most strategic hubs and broadly dispersing it throughout the empire. We get a glimpse of such cosmopolitanism in places like the final chapter of the Book of Romans, where Paul mentions over 20 Christians living in a city that he had yet to visit.

Cosmopolitan tradespeople like Aquila and Priscilla would have come in contact with a huge number of people, and as such would be ideal for spreading the Gospel message extensively. Such persons also formed many of the strongest connections that existed between churches in various locations at that time. Paul didn't aim to go to Rome on this particular missionary journey, but a more Roman city like Corinth would have been a perfect preparation for such a mission in the future, acculturating him to a context that was far more Roman than Syria or Judea, with which he was more familiar.

As nothing is mentioned of the conversion of Aquila and Priscilla, many commentators reasonably assume that they were already converted by this point. Paul may have started the church in Corinth, but this need not mean that he was the first Christian in the city. Although Luke's narrative in Acts closely focuses upon the Apostle Paul, we



should definitely not presume that he was the only person spreading the Gospel to new regions of the Empire during this period.

Indeed, some have suggested that the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius was a response to unrest in the Jewish community after the arrival of Christians and the Gospel in the city. The historian Suetonius claimed that the Jews were expelled from the city as a result of a disturbance caused by Crestus, which many scholars have argued might be a reference to Christ. The expulsion of the Jews from Rome likely occurred in AD 49.

Some have estimated that around 50,000 Jews lived in Rome at that time. The expulsion and later return might further help to explain why Paul knew so many people in Rome before he visited. Aquila and Priscilla were tent makers, a trade which Paul shared.

Paul would often work with his own hands to support his ministry. The fact that, of all the possible tasks that he could have done, Paul was a tent maker is worthy of notice. The first disciples were fishermen, an occupation given symbolic importance in the Gospels as the Lord declared that they would be made fishers of men.

Tent making might recall the great tent of the tabernacle. Paul, Aquila and Priscilla are all part of the task of constructing a new tabernacle, the tabernacle of the church. They are like Bezalel and Aholiab in the book of Exodus.

Aquila and Priscilla are a husband-wife pair, one of a number of male and female pairs in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The way that Priscilla is spoken of alongside Aquila might reasonably be seen to suggest that she played a very prominent part in their shared ministry. Paul's missionary approach here is the same as he adopts elsewhere.

He focuses upon the synagogue and tries to persuade Jews and Greeks within it. After Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia, perhaps with further support, Paul seems to have been freed up to engage in more ministry, without the same need to devote much of his time to earning his keep. Once again, Paul is largely rejected by the Jews of the city.

His response is to shake out his garments, like shaking the dust off his feet, and to declare himself free of the guilt of their blood. This might recall the task of the watchman, as described in Ezekiel 33, verses 1-6. Paul, as the Lord's appointed messenger, is responsible to deliver his message faithfully.

However, if he delivers that message and it is rejected, the blood of the hearers lies on their own heads. Paul then declares his determination to go to the Gentiles. This wasn't a complete rejection of the Jews on Paul's part.

From Paul's letters to the Corinthians, it seems reasonable to believe that a significant

number of the earliest converts and core members of the church in the city were Jews. Furthermore, when he moved on, he would once again begin with the Jewish synagogue. This didn't represent a fundamental re-evaluation of his mission strategy then, just the focus of his mission in the city of Corinth.

There are many converts at this time. Two especially noteworthy converts are mentioned here, Titius Justus and Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue. Some have suggested that Titius Justus might be Gaius, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1.14 and Romans 16.23. Crispus is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1.14, where we learn that Paul baptised him.

The Lord, presumably Jesus, appears to Paul at night in a vision, calling him to continue teaching boldly in the city. He will be preserved by the Lord and will have success in the city, as the Lord has many people there. It seems most likely that this is a reference not to people already converted to the gospel, but to people either marked out for salvation or people who are faithful Jews and God-fearers who have yet to hear the message of the gospel.

Usually, when cast out of the synagogue, Paul would leave the city shortly thereafter. However, on this occasion, he remains much longer. He has a lengthy stay of 18 months in the city, presumably enabling him to teach the young church extremely extensively.

Gallio, the Roman proconsul, was the son of Seneca the Older and the elder brother of the famous Stoic philosopher and statesman Seneca the Younger. He was in Corinth during the period of AD 51-52, which helps us to date Paul's visit. The Jews focus their attack upon Paul, claiming that he is teaching people to worship contrary to the law.

This continued opposition from the Jews might give the impression that, even some time after Paul has been thrown out of the synagogue, his message is making significant inroads among the Jews of the city. The claim of the Jews might be that Paul is proselytizing for a religion unrecognized by the Roman authorities. The Jews' claim might be that Paul is not teaching Judaism, a recognized religion, and for this reason is not a legitimate religious teacher in the city.

However, the Christian movement is still regarded as a Jewish sect by the Roman authorities. It is important to recognize that, at this point in history, the Christian church is still generally a Jewish one, operating primarily within the social and conceptual world of Judaism. Gallio dismisses the case, seemingly regarding the issue between the Jews and Paul as one between sects of Judaism, rather than between two different religions.

Had the Jews accused Paul of some clear crime or wrongdoing, Gallio would have accepted their complaint, but he sees no reason to accept them on this matter. The identity of the all who beat Sothisnes, the ruler of the synagogue, in verse 17 is unclear. Are they the rejected delegation of the Jews? Are they Gallio's men, Gentile observers? Or are they a mixture of Jews and Gentiles? It isn't entirely clear, but it's most likely that

the all were a crowd of Gentile observers who beat Sothisnes as the leading representative of the trouble-making Jews.

Gallio's inaction might remind us of Pilate. As a character called Sothisnes is mentioned in association with Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1.1, many have speculated that this Sothisnes was either already or later converted. Keener remarks upon how many details of Paul's visit to Corinth are either confirmed or possibly strengthened by other references in the New Testament, including but not limited to the fact that Aquila and Priscilla were a married missionary team.

They made their homes available for Christian work and were known to the Corinthians. They had connections with Rome and Ephesus. Paul supported himself while in Corinth.

Crispus was converted and baptised. Timothy and Silas were both involved in the Corinthian work. Paul began his work there before Silas and Timothy arrived.

He passed through Athens en route there. Sothisnes was possibly a convert associated with Corinth. The Corinthian church had a significant Jewish element and Paul later spent a period of time in Ephesus.

After staying for a lengthy further period, Paul returns to Syria and his sending church of Antioch, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. At Sancreia he cut his hair as part of a vow. Whether a Nazarite vow or a private vow, this was likely a Jewish practice and would have been completed by a sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem, which he may have visited before returning to Antioch.

Paul spends a brief period in the city of Ephesus, reasoning with the Jews in the synagogue and leaving Priscilla and Aquila in the city, declaring his intention to return if the Lord permitted at a later point. Ephesus was another sizeable city, likely even larger than Corinth, with a stronger claim to have been the third or fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. Paul returned to Antioch by way of Caesarea.

After spending some time in Antioch, he began his third missionary journey in verse 23, going throughout Phrygia and Galatia, mostly consolidating work that had already been established, rather than starting anything new. A question to consider, how did Paul explain his reasons for his practice of supporting himself with his own hands to the Corinthian Christians in his correspondence to them?