

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE (PART 1)

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Chapters forty through forty-eight of the Book of Ezekiel contain an extended vision of a new temple in Jerusalem, and details of Israel's worship of God in this future hopeful age. Keep in mind that these words were inspired by God through the prophet Ezekiel in the land of Babylon where only a remnant of the Israelites had survived to be taken as captives. The city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple were utterly destroyed during those days. There is overwhelming evidence that God never intended the temple of Ezekiel's vision to be built in a physical sense, but is rather a prophecy that pertains to the coming of the New Testament age.

The Second Temple

There *was* a physical temple that would be (and was) rebuilt in the earthly city of Jerusalem. God's prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, were instruments of the Lord to foretell its construction, as can be read in each of their books. Ezra 5:1-2 also says, "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them." The first half of the Book of Ezra gives the details of the construction of the Second Temple. Ezra 6:15 says, "And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." Herod the Great refurbished and greatly expanded this building, which is the temple that Jesus Christ taught in and performed many miracles.

Ezekiel's temple was not the Second Temple

In order for the temple in Ezekiel's vision to be built, God's conditions for Israel were that they be ashamed of their abominations (i.e. repent), and be holy and obedient to Him (Ezek 43:7-12). The children of Israel who returned from captivity and built the Second Temple *had* repented (Jer 24:5-7; Ezek 11:17-20; 36:24-27), and *did* obey the Lord (Ezra 2:1-2,61-63; 3:1-6,10-11; 5:1-2; 6:14-22; Hag 2:18-19). Therefore, it would be incorrect to say that they had not met God's conditions for rebuilding Ezekiel's temple, and that God consequently gave them an inferior temple. In fact, God comforted the builders of the Second Temple, assuring them that He was with them and that the glory of that temple (due to the Messiah who would enter and teach with in it) would exceed the glory of Solomon's Temple (Hag 2:4-9). The Lord warned against despising the new temple as if it were a "small thing" (Zech 4:8-10). Therefore, if God *had* intended for the temple of Ezekiel's vision to be literally built, it would have been built by Zerubbabel and Joshua. But the temple described in Ezekiel's vision is most certainly

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE (PART 1)

(continued)

not the Second Temple which was built by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity. That serves as strong evidence that Ezekiel's vision was of a spiritual temple, not a physical one.

No "third" physical temple to come

The popular doctrine known as "Premillennialism" is centered in the false belief that we are currently living in the age before (i.e. "pre") an earthly thousand year (i.e. "millennial") reign of Jesus Christ when he returns. Those who hold to the doctrine of Premillennialism believe that Ezekiel's temple will be physically built to coincide with Christ's return. Premillennialism erroneously holds that the Israel and kingdom of God in prophecy is an *earthly* nation and kingdom. But the kingdom of God is a *spiritual* kingdom, which is the church of Christ (see Isa 2:1-4; 9:6-7; Dan 2:44-45; 7:13-14; Matt 16:18-19; Mark 9:1; Luke 1:31-33; 17:20-21; John 18:36-37; Acts 2:1-4,29-47; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23; Col 1:13,18; Rev 1:9). It is also doctrinally absurd to contend that God would restore Old Testament worship, when God has already permanently nailed that system to the cross of Christ (Col 2:14; Heb 7:12; 8:13; 10:9), in favor of the *better* and *everlasting* covenant (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6-13,18; Heb 7:19-22; 8:6-13; 9:11-15; 10:20; 12:22-28). Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that when Jesus returns, *on that day* the world will end in a fiery destruction (Matt 24:35; 2 Cor 4:18; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Pet 3:3-14; Rev 6:14; 20:11). Therefore, there will never be a revival of the physical nation of Israel, the establishment of an earthly kingdom of Christ in Jerusalem (or anywhere), or any such thing. Therefore, Ezekiel's temple will never be constructed in the future. Premillennialism is utterly false.

A figurative temple

There are several clear and compelling reasons found within the text of Ezekiel chapters 40-48 for understanding this vision to be figurative in nature. In fact, the Biblical evidence is overwhelming that Ezekiel's temple was never intended to be physically built. It must be noted that the temple of Ezekiel's vision is inseparably tied to the land allotments found in the same vision (Ezek 42:15-20; 45:1-5; 48:8-12), which is also tied to the allotment and instructions for the "prince." The temple in the vision is also tied to the various commands and instructions given for conducting the worship within it (Ezek 40:38-49; 42:13-14; 43:13-27; 44:5-31; 45:13-46:24). The temple in the vision is also inseparably linked to the description of the river in Ezek 47:1-12. Therefore, if there is any reason that it is impossible for any of these other parts of Ezekiel's vision in chapters 40-48 to be understood literally, then consistency demands that we also understand the temple that is described in *the very same vision* to be equally figurative in nature. Several such reasons are to be explored in Part 2 of this series, Lord willing.