

LECTURE 22

THE TEMPLE AND THE CITY OF GOD

First of all, I want to thank Dan for the wonderful lecture last week that brought us full force into the subject of prophecy. I agree with him that God is not done with Israel yet.

It's both my pleasure and my challenge to finish up our study in the book of Ezekiel. Stuart Briscoe's commentary on Ezekiel is titled *Dry Bones*. It was originally published with the title *All Things Weird and Wonderful*. That's certainly an apt title to describe what we've been studying these last nine weeks.

Isaiah had a vision of the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted and the train of His robe filled the temple. There was prophecy of the Messiah, a Suffering Servant, and a prophecy for the future when the lamb and lion would live in peace together.

Jeremiah was told, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to nations." Through the reign of five kings, he pointed out God's hatred of Israel's sins of idolatry and pride, prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, the 70 years of captivity in Babylon, and prophesied of a time in the future of restoration

to the land with a new heart for the people and God as their Shepherd.

Already deported to Babylon, **Ezekiel** got the “weird and wonderful” visions of God’s plan. He saw a sapphire throne and a man glowing like metal. He saw the “wheels within a wheel,” the four living creatures, and the man clothed in linen marking those who would die in the judgment on Jerusalem. He saw the glory of God depart from the temple. The signs continued when he was not able to mourn when his wife died as instruction for the captives not to mourn for the destruction of Jerusalem.

Then there was the lying first on one side then the other for a year, the boiling pot of meat and the signpost marked at the fork in the road for the coming conqueror Nebuchadnezzar to take Jerusalem next and deal with Assyria later.

Ezekiel had the prophecy against the king of Tyre (which many think is descriptive of Satan). All in all, there was no good news for those in Babylon who were hoping for a message saying, “You’ll soon be going home again.”

Ezekiel was made a watchman and we learned about his duties. He also conveyed something important for us to know about God – Ezekiel 33:11, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

And what's more, Ezekiel told us God has a future plan for Israel. God Himself will be their Shepherd; dry bones will one day reconnect to the source of life; there will be a covenant of peace, and a return to a secure land. Israel will survive a tremendous attack and invasion and, as a result, the whole world will know "I am the Lord!"

Paul wrote in Romans 11:25-29:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Whether you realize it or not, what you do with the Scriptures in Ezekiel we've been studying has a direct bearing on what you believe about prophecy and end-time events.

If you are a post-millennialist, Scripture is symbolic. Israel has no future, the church will Christianize the world and bring in

this time of peace with prophesied millennial conditions, and there will be a short time of tribulation before Christ comes again to create a new heaven and a new earth – the eternal state.

If you are an amillennialist, Scripture is spiritualized. Israel has no future earthly kingdom (it's all spiritual), Satan is bound now because of the cross, there is no millennium period of peace, and Christ will never again return to earth to rule and reign.

If you are a pre-millennialist, Scripture is held to a grammatical, historical and literal interpretation wherever possible. Not all Scripture has been fulfilled. Israel is set-aside during the church age; however, a time will come when God will again work with Israel as a nation. The church will be raptured (taken to heaven, I believe, participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb described in Revelation 19), while 144,000 Jews will be sealed as God's witnesses during Great Tribulation period of seven years and they, along with those who become believers during this period, will suffer persecution and often martyrdom under the Antichrist.

There will be a great battle and Christ will return to the Mount of Olives (we'll study that in Zechariah 14) with His saints and defeat the Antichrist.

There will be a judgment of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25). Christ will set up an earthly thousand-year reign – we call that the millennium. There will be a millennial temple and division of the land (as described in Ezekiel 40-48). At the end of the millennium Satan, who has been bound for the thousand years, is loosed for a short time according to Revelation 20:7-10. He will gather an army of those who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and King during the millennium and after a battle comes the final Great White Throne judgment and creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

There are a lot of Scriptures that connect with end-time prophecy, but we'll get to those in our last lesson. Suffice it to say, you either believe the eight chapters of Ezekiel we've studied this week are either – symbolic, spiritual or literal. I personally believe in the literal fulfillment of Scripture.

So what can we learn from these chapters of the last vision given to Ezekiel? There are three areas to address: 1) the temple itself, chapters 40-43; 2) the issue of sacrifices/worship, chapters 44-46; and 3) the division of land, chapters 47-48.

The Temple:

How many of you yawned at least once, or blinked your eyes to refresh the focus as you read exact dimensions of cubit after

cubit as the man with the measuring rod gave Ezekiel the temple tour? Not the easiest reading, was it? But there are some exciting things to note here.

If minute measurements are not literal and definite, it becomes difficult to understand why Ezekiel was not given an interpretation of the symbolism, as was usually the case in his other visions. Also, Ezekiel had a priestly background, so this was exciting stuff for him – much like we'd be excited with anticipation to read in the New Testament a passage that said, "These are the exact measurements of your place (your mansion) in heaven that Jesus is preparing for you." The careful verbal blueprint reminds us of the instructions given Moses for constructing the tabernacle during the Exodus – and those were intended to be literally carried out.

Much of what I want to share with you about the description of the temple comes from the commentary by Stuart Briscoe on Ezekiel that I mentioned earlier.

First there was a wall surrounding the entire temple area with a huge gateway on the east. The wall was about ten feet high and ten feet thick. Three little chambers (guardrooms) were situated on each side of the wall leading to the outer court of the

temple, where 30 additional chambers for the Levites are described.

Two more gates to the north and south and another large gate led up eight steps into the inner court where sacrificial offerings were prepared. After inspecting the quarters of the priests who handled the sacrifices, Ezekiel was led past the altar in the middle of the inner court to the steps leading up to the temple.

Ezekiel noted there were ten steps, and that the temple was divided into three sections called the porch, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The measuring man pointed out that the farther he went into the temple, the narrower the doors became.

He checked the size of the massive pillars leading into the porch and particularly noticed the table that stood in the Holy Place right outside the double doors leading into the Holy of Holies. This table, the guide explained, was set especially before the Lord.

The inside of the temple and the double doors were decorated with carved figures of cherubim and palm trees. The cherubim bore the faces of a man and a young lion. Another commentator's opinion was that possibly this indicated both the humanity and royalty of Jesus.

The Holy of Holies, which Ezekiel did not enter, was in total darkness, but the porch and the Holy Place derived light from windows set high in the wall.

Led back to the outer court to the gate that faces east, Ezekiel saw something he had longed to see for nineteen years. The glory of the Lord, which was so vividly displayed in his first vision, and which, to his horror, he'd seen depart from the temple in Jerusalem, was once more appearing in the eastern sky. He fell on his face and worshipped. The familiar brightness was there; the sound of rushing waters filled his ears. Once more Ezekiel knew that the Lord, who changes not, was ready to enter the temple where He longed to dwell among His people.

The Spirit led Ezekiel into the inner court where he gazed at the transformed temple. No longer just a beautiful building, but a dwelling place for the Living God, a vessel for His presence among His people. In the past the people had defiled the temple, but no longer.

With all this measuring, you might not have caught the fact that the altar was built on a solid base of three square tiers – 16 cubits, 14 cubits and 12 cubits with steps leading up to the altar on the east side. That's interesting, because God had forbidden steps to be built on the altar previously. Exodus 20:25 "And do

not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.” It would take seven days and much blood sacrifice to consecrate the altar.

Zadok was a priest at the time of David, and 2 Chronicles 6:50 reminded us he was a direct descendant of Aaron, the brother of Moses. It’s interesting that here in the millennial temple descendants of Zadok will serve as priests. And we read about how the priests will remain ceremonially clean before the Lord.

One thing we know for sure, this was not the temple constructed when the Jews returned from their captivity. Historical record determines it was not built to this plan. It has yet to be built. So what’s the purpose of a temple in the millennium?

1) The structure is a visible display of God’s holiness – it is exact and it is orderly.

2) It’s a dwelling place for God’s presence among His people as the Shekinah glory returns to dwell there.

3) It’s the center for divine government. During the millennium, God will rule over His people with Jerusalem as the universal center of His rule.

The river flowing from the temple in Chapter 47 has some similarities with Revelation 22; however, they are distinct. Revelation 22 refers to the eternal state (new heaven, new earth that will come into existence after the millennium). Ezekiel's temple refers the millennium period. The river gets progressively deeper flowing eastward to the Dead Sea. The river brought healing wherever it flowed, trees with leaves for healing. (There will be a return to conditions of Eden – an ideal state in millennium – precursor to the new heaven/earth.)

There's an important thing to remember here. The millennium is the antechamber **of** /and the preparation **for** the eternal state. Its glories are less than those of eternity, but they are of the same nature. One of the purposes of the millennium is to demonstrate the presence of sin even in a state of perfect environment. Why is that? It is humanity that enters into the millennium and children will be born during this period. The old argument about heredity vs. environment making us act the way we do will have the environment side eliminated. Heredity bears out the words of Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." Hard as it may be to believe, even with the presence of Jesus in the millennium, Satan will be able to find

a following after his release from bondage at the end of the millennium.

As Dan so effectively demonstrated last week, we need to understand that the church is not Israel. Promises for Israel are not promises for the church. The church is being perfected as the Bride of Christ during this period of the Gentiles. Our preparation for the eternal state is claiming the shed blood of Jesus Christ, being His witnesses and proclaiming His Glory until the rapture of the church, or death, which will bring us into His presence – then we will behold Him face to face.

Israel, however, going into the millennium will be brought again to that which is their heritage, what is familiar to them, approaching a Holy God with blood sacrifice. That brings us to the second issue.

The Sacrifices:

This is a major argument that amillennialists have against the pre-millennial position. Many say these sacrifices will be like we use communion to look back on the sacrifice of Christ's blood on the cross.

When you read Hebrews 9 – read these verses as it relates to the blood: 9:15-21 relates to the covenant; 22 relates to forgiveness; and 23-28 relates to salvation. Hebrews 10:3

reminds us that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”

In the millennium, I believe these sacrifices are not a reinstitution of the Levitical system, although there are similarities. The blood of Jesus still is the sacrifice that affects salvation. I hope you remember that the Law when it was given, including the sacrificial system, was never a means of salvation. It was a means of approaching a holy God. That is why Jesus did not come to abolish the Law (Matthew 5:17) but to fulfill it. Remember in the millennium, those who enter have accepted Jesus – they have survived the judgment of the sheep and goats of Matthew 25, but children will be born who still have to make that choice. And, again, we know from the last chapters in Revelation that a time will come when Satan will be loosed for a season and will find a following because of the wicked, unrepentant heart of mankind even living in a perfect conditions.

But these sacrifices are of a purification nature. To prepare God’s people to approach the Living God who actually dwells among them. Sacrifices in the millennium are also mentioned in Isaiah 66:20-21; Jeremiah 33:18; Zechariah 14:16-21; and Malachi 3:3-4.

In chapter 45:11-17, we read that the Prince will offer sacrifice and worship, so it's not Mosaic. This is something new – God's prerogative.

So who is the Prince? John Courson offers his opinion that he is Jesus. "Why would Jesus have to do this? After all, He never sinned, and, therefore, has no need to offer sacrifice for sin. I suggest He does this for the same reason He was baptized – for identification. . . as He identified with us in baptism, so, I suggest He offers sacrifices with the people in order that He might be at one with them. He never asks us to do anything that He Himself has not done or gone through."

Others have the opinion it is not the Lord Jesus, because he is said to eat with the Lord and he has sons. It may be David, or it may someone be in the line of David. You know the saints in heaven will return with Christ and have an administrative role in the millennium (the parable of the talents and the promise to the apostles in Matthew 19:28). David's heart's desire was for the temple, but he never built it, Solomon did. So this may be the reward of David's desire – David in a glorified state. That's purely opinion and conjecture. Whoever it is, he will have a very special function in the millennial kingdom.

Now . . .

The Land:

A reminder of what Dan shared last week – Israel was given the Promised Land under the Abrahamic Covenant that was unconditional – its fulfillment was based on God’s promise alone. It was reaffirmed in the Palestinian covenant (Deut. 30:1-10). In the millennium, the land will be divided equally among the tribes, with Joseph receiving a double portion through his sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

Some may notice that tribe of Dan is present in the millennium, although absent from those sealed as witnesses in the Great Tribulation period (Rev. 7:4-8). Danites do not serve in the Great Tribulation, but by the grace of God, they are brought into the millennium.

The millennial city has 12 gates, 3 on each side being named after the tribes of Israel. Gates on the north side of city, closest to the temple, are named after Reuben (first born), Judah (the kingly/messianic tribe), and Levi (the priestly tribe). The circumference of the city is 18,000 cubits – nearly six miles. The name of the city will be Yahweh-Shammah, meaning, “the Lord is there.” Hopefully, you found the illustration of the land division in your lesson material helpful.

There is no temple in this church age – you are the temple of God. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit dwells within you. We are not required to make blood sacrifices; our sacrifice is defined in Romans 12:1-2:

" . . . in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will."

A rebuilt temple we can understand – God had first a tent tabernacle, then a permanent structure as His Shekinah glory dwelt among His people. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and rebuilt when the people returned to the land, but again destroyed in 70 a.d. by the Romans.

Blood sacrifices reinstituted are harder for us – but then why did God require them of early Israel? Purification, not salvation. And never let us forget that God is God. When He commands, we obey.

Division of the land – what God has promised, He delivers. I believe His Word will be totally and completely fulfilled.

As we come to know our Lord more intimately through the study of His Word, it's really not important for us to know all about the cubits and handbreadths of the temple structure. What is important is that we know that there is still unfulfilled prophetic Scripture. God's call is always to holiness, worship and complete trust in Him. It is the message to the church today, and to Israel in a time yet to come. God is the same yesterday, today and forever – He is a promise keeper.

So, such was the ministry of Ezekiel – priest, prophet and pastor. There is no biographical note in his book as to how his life ended. It's fitting that his book closes with the spotlight on the message, not on the man. We today are exhorted to lift up our eyes and look in the direction of that prophetic message's fulfillment. The words of Ezekiel's book are the true words of God, and we who are living today are seeing the beginnings of its glorious fulfillment.