

Survey of the Bible Ezekiel's Temple Part 1

As we come to this lengthy passage regarding the temple that Ezekiel describes we need to ask some questions about this temple.

- 1 Were the blueprints described meant to mandate the building of a literal structure?
- 2 Is it implied that such a structure will come to fruition with no conditions being attached, such as Israel's repentance?
- 3 Was this structure constructed after the exiles returned to Jerusalem?
- 4 If not, were they ever used to construct a literal building during the time of Herod, for example?
- 5 If these particular blueprints have never been used does this mean that they are meant for a future construction project?
- 6 If it is meant for a future construction project is it meant for the nation of Israel to build in that future time, (ie., the millennial kingdom)?
- 7 If this construction project is built, for what reason is it built? In other words, since the temple described by Ezekiel, is designed for worship through means of animal sacrifice, is it reasonable to conclude that the law, which has been abrogated by Christ fulfilling the law, going to be reestablished for 1,000 years in a kingdom on a sin-filled, cursed earth?
- 8 In light of Ezekiel's vision describing dry dead bones, resurrection and the eternal covenant yet to be fulfilled, should we approach the temple in a purely literal fashion?
- 9 Will God fulfill His covenant promises to the nation of Israel in the way we expect?

As we go through the last chapters of Ezekiel there are a lot of details regarding this structure. But whatever these details ultimately describe sometimes it is beneficial to describe something not simply as what it is but by what it is not.

And the only way we can describe it as what it is not is to allow the Scriptures to tell us what it is not.

And so, we'll begin there.

Whatever else the details of this Temple are describing we know what it is not describing by first understanding that Ezekiel is

giving us what God has already revealed in this vision given to him, and that includes the moving from the old covenant found in the law to a new and everlasting covenant.

Ezekiel 16:60 ⁶⁰ "Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you.

Ezekiel 37:26-28 ²⁶ "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. ²⁷ "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. ²⁸ "And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.""

We have already seen that this new and everlasting covenant is the covenant that was totally fulfilled in Christ which was foretold by the prophets of which the writer of Hebrews points out.

Hebrews 8:8-13 ⁸ For finding fault with them, He says, "BEHOLD, DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD, WHEN I WILL EFFECT A NEW COVENANT WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND WITH THE HOUSE OF JUDAH; ⁹ NOT LIKE THE COVENANT WHICH I MADE WITH THEIR FATHERS ON THE DAY WHEN I TOOK THEM BY THE HAND TO LEAD THEM OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT; FOR THEY DID NOT CONTINUE IN MY COVENANT, AND I DID NOT CARE FOR THEM, SAYS THE LORD. ¹⁰ "FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MINDS, AND I WILL WRITE THEM ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. ¹¹ "AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERYONE HIS FELLOW CITIZEN, AND EVERYONE HIS BROTHER, SAYING, 'KNOW THE LORD,' FOR ALL WILL KNOW ME, FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST OF THEM. ¹² "FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE." ¹³ When He said, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

And of course, Jesus Himself, after His resurrection as he was discussing with 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, confirms that

all of the prophets had spoken of the coming Messiah, which would include Ezekiel.

Luke 24:24-27 ²⁴ "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see." ²⁵ And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

And so, as we look at what Ezekiel has revealed in this vision from God we must necessarily conclude that the message must be of Christ and His Kingdom and the people He will bring to Himself in this everlasting Kingdom.

This we have already seen in the passages of the dry bones and those whom God brought up out of the graves.

All of those images were of God's resurrection power to raise spiritually dead people as He gave them eternal life as they were born from above, or born again.

And so, whatever these images are in the last 8 chapters of Ezekiel they cannot be divorced from all of the previous chapters that describe this eternal kingdom in the context of the new everlasting covenant.

And so, let's look at the opening passage and answer some of the questions I posed.

Ezekiel 40:1-4 ^{NAU} In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there. ² In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south *there was* a structure like a city. ³ So He brought me there; and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. ⁴ The man said to me, "Son of man, see with your eyes, hear with your ears, and give attention to all that I am going to show you; for you have been brought here in order to show *it* to you. Declare to the house of Israel all that you see."

So, there are a couple of things here to take note of. This vision comes to Ezekiel during the captivity of Israel. And the vision takes place at Jerusalem which is described as the city that was taken. In this vision God brings Ezekiel to a very high mountain. And it is on this mountain where Ezekiel sees a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze.

Now there have been those who believe that this man whose appearance is like bronze is describing an angel who is about to measure the city, similar to what we see in the book of Revelation, the companion book to Ezekiel.

Revelation 21:9-10 ⁹ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

Revelation 21:15 ¹⁵ The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.

As we go through this section of Ezekiel we will be coming back to Revelation to see how similar these two visions are of this city that is being measured out.

But the point is that the man whose appearance is like bronze may not have to be an angel but could be Christ Himself who is also described in a similar way.

Revelation 1:12-18 ¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; ¹³ and in the middle of the lampstands *I saw* one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. ¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

Who is this identified in Revelation?

When Moses was commanded to build the tabernacle of the Lord in the wilderness whose blueprint did he use?

Exodus 25:9 ⁹ "According to all that I am going to show you, *as* the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct *it*."

When David was instructed to encourage his son Solomon to build the temple for the Lord, whose blueprint did he use?

1 Chronicles 28:10-12 ¹⁰ "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act." ¹¹ Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch *of the temple*, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms and the room for the mercy seat; ¹² and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the LORD, and for all the surrounding rooms, for the storehouses of the house of God and for the storehouses of the dedicated things;

1 Chronicles 28:19 ¹⁹ "All *this*," said David, "the LORD made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern."

And so, when we come to Ezekiel the pattern of the city that is being displayed throughout the rest of the vision is a pattern that comes directly from God. Therefore, the son of man being described in the beginning of chapter 40 may very well be the son of man that John describes in Revelation as being the one who calls Himself, the first and the last, Jesus Christ.

And so, when we look at this temple that Ezekiel describes for us it must be understood that it is God who is giving us a heavenly perspective of a spiritual truth regarding the Kingdom of God and the King who will rule over His people.

So, let's begin with some of the questions I posed in the beginning.

Are the blueprints described by Ezekiel meant to mandate the building of a literal structure?

Nowhere in these passages does Ezekiel command the Jews to build from the blueprints that he describes in great detail.

But it is implied that this temple exists and that the Jews have an obligation to perform their worshipful duties in this temple.

Ezekiel 43:19-27 ¹⁹ 'You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering. ²⁰ 'You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. ²¹ 'You shall also take the bull for the sin offering, and it *shall be* burned in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary. ²² 'On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed *it* with the bull. ²³ 'When you have finished cleansing *it*, you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. ²⁴ 'You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. ²⁵ 'For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared. ²⁶ 'For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. ²⁷ 'When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,' declares the Lord GOD."

None of these things could be accomplished without the temple being in existence.

So, how can Ezekiel expect the Jews to perform their duties to the Lord if they are not instructed to build this temple?

In the same way, you and I in Christ are commanded to perform our duties of worship to God in an existing temple.

Romans 12:1 ^{NAU} Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

This is covenantal language set in the framework of temple worship.

In what temple do you and I in Christ perform our spiritual service of worship?

John 2:18-21 ¹⁸ The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this

temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

We live in the temple as the temple dwells in us.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

By the way, in this letter to the Corinthians Paul is addressing a primarily Gentile church and yet he uses the language of the temple that was given to the house of Israel through Moses and David and Solomon.

He gives a similar description of this temple when writing to another primarily Gentile church when writing to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:19-22 ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

But there is another sense in which the temple of God will dwell among God's people in the future and the apostle John describes this in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 3:11-13 ¹¹ 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name. ¹³ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

All of these references are to the temple of God and how we are to come before God in worship. And yet, where in all of these

acts of worship are we commanded to build the temple in which we are to worship?

In a very similar way, the temple that Ezekiel is describing is a temple that already exists in which the Jews were to carry out their worship before God.

But was the design of this temple in Ezekiel ever found in Israel either shortly after the exile or anytime thereafter, including the time in which Jesus lived where Herod's temple stood in Jerusalem?

The temple described in Ezekiel has never existed which has led many to believe that it is a future temple to be constructed in Jerusalem and presumably during a thousand year reign of the risen Christ on a fallen world.

Part of the problem with this scenario is that the temple described in Ezekiel clearly is a temple where animal sacrifice is still being enacted with Levitical priests performing their priestly duties.

Ezekiel 43:19-21 ¹⁹ 'You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,' declares the Lord GOD, 'a young bull for a sin offering. ²⁰ 'You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. ²¹ 'You shall also take the bull for the sin offering, and it *shall be* burned in the appointed place of the house, outside the sanctuary.

If this temple of Ezekiel is the millennial temple then how do we explain animal sacrifice while the risen Jesus is living on the earth with the rest of humanity?

Some say that this temple is constructed to fulfill the promises to Israel to bring them back to their land and to allow Christ to dwell among them.

But all of those promises were conditional. Upon what condition was Israel to be able to dwell with God in peace in the land?

Obedience to the commands of the promises and to follow no other gods but the one true God.

If the present day Israel is back in the land fulfilling the promises of God then how do we explain their total disregard for their Savior?

John 5:36-47 ³⁶ "But the testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony of John*; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish-- the very works that I do-- testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me. ³⁷ "And the Father who sent Me, He has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form. ³⁸ "You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. ³⁹ "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. ⁴¹ "I do not receive glory from men; ⁴² but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. ⁴³ "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and only* God? ⁴⁵ "Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. ⁴⁷ "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Jesus is saying that you cannot say you embrace the God of your fathers, whom they knew as Father, and not embrace Me as your Savior.

Present day Israel is the same Israel of Jesus's day who will not accept the Son sent from the Father. This is not the recipe for finding favor in the eyes of God and fulfilling the mandate to repent so as to be blessed by the Father as He brings you into His kingdom through the one He sent to redeem a people for Himself.

The other problem is that Jesus specifically stated to Pilate that this present world is not where His Kingdom resides, nor will ever reside.

John 18:36 ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

There is no way to escape these words and still have a thousand year reign with Christ on His throne in Jerusalem in this present world of which Jesus says, " My Kingdom is not of this realm."

And of course, back to the issue of animal sacrifice in this temple of Ezekiel. Assuming for the sake of argument that

there is a thousand year reign of Christ on a cursed earth, how do we return to animal sacrifices?

Well, the answer is clearly to show the Jews in that day how Jesus is the fulfillment of those animal sacrifices.

But, if you have the fulfillment living in your presence, why do you need a sign or shadow, like bulls and sheep that cannot take away your sin, to point toward the fulfillment?

Don't we already have a New Covenant memorial of the fulfillment?

1 Corinthians 11:24-26 ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

This covenant sign is to be "the sign" to be proclaimed until when? Until the millennial reign of Christ? No, we proclaim the Lord's death through this supper until He comes.

And when does He come?

On the last day when He resurrects His people.

John 6:39 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

This does raise the issue we find in the book of Revelation which addresses the saints reigning with Christ for a thousand years. We'll briefly address this next time as we continue to identify the temple of Ezekiel.