

15. Glory in the temple

April 17, 2014

Many portions in the Bible are exciting to learn; but some are rather boring – probably either we don't understand them well or we cannot connect with them; the vast majority of the Bible texts are clear cut instructions, but then again there are some portions we have to dig harder to grasp the meanings.

What we are about to study tonight is one of those boring and difficult to understand portions because like many other Ezekiel's prophecies, it does not necessarily point out the timing right away. The Scripture forces us to dig deeper. It talks about a new temple in the city of Jerusalem in the future.

A. THE HISTORY OF THE TEMPLES OF ISRAEL

Before we start to study the texts we must understand the history of the temples for the Israel people in the past:

1) The Tabernacle

During the time of the Exodus with Moses and the children of Israel, we have the Tabernacle, the portable device that moved with them as they wandered through the wilderness, a temporary structure. The design of this tabernacle was completely instructed by the Lord through Moses.

2) Solomon's Temple

When the Israelites got into the land, David prepared everything for Solomon to build the Temple which was a physical permanent structure to replace the Tabernacle. We call it the "First Temple" or "Solomon's Temple." It was destroyed by Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar in the period we are dealing with here in Ezekiel.

There are some scholars who believe the temple that Ezekiel describes in chapter 40-48 is simply Solomon's Temple. The problem with that argument is that the measurements and descriptions of the temples are not the same.

3) Second Temple

When the Israel people from the exiles of Babylon subsequently were freed to go back to the land, they built what is called the "Second Temple" under Nehemiah. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with that period. It was actually a modest effort where they did the best they could with what they had. But it was the temple where they could worship the Lord.

By the way, there were only about 50,000 who returned from Babylon; the rest stayed, they thought they had a pretty good life in Babylon.

4) Herod's Temple

It was some years later that a descendant of Edomites by the name of Herod, who was put on the throne by Rome and attempted to gain popular support by refurbishing Nehemiah's temple. He did it very substantially. The construction was started in 19 BC and was not even finished when the Romans soldiers destroyed it in AD 70.

Herod's Temple was extremely elaborate, and it was the Temple in place when Jesus Christ was there in the flesh. Herod's Temple is spoken of as the "Second Temple" by scholars since Nehemiah's temple was simply refurbished.

5) Tribulation Temple

After the rapture, Israel will make a seven year covenant with the European Union for their protection with the help of the antichrist. Then, the antichrist will arrange a compromise between Israel and Arabs so that the Israel people will be able to build a temple on the Temple Mount.

I know that some will object that it is impossible because of the Dome of Rock that is located on the Temple Mount. But it is not impossible, because many biblical scholars as well as the Jewish archaeologists believe that the area where the Dome of Rock is located is not the actual spot where Herod's Temple used to be, rather the rightful place is where the Dome of Spirit is located.

The reason is that the outside retaining wall was not destroyed by any of the foreign forces in the past, especially the East Gate, a.k.a. the Gate Beautiful. According to the record, if you were standing in the Holy of Holies inside of Herod's Temple with the temple door open and the East Gate doors opened, you could see Mount Olive directly.

After the Tribulation Temple is built, in the middle of the Tribulation, the antichrist will place his own statue in the temple and demand that the Israel people worship him. That is as known as 'Abomination of Desolation' that Jesus talked about.

Daniel 9:26-27 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

Matthew 24:15 "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand),

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

6) Millennial Temple

So is Ezekiel talking about the restoration temple of Nehemiah or Herod's temple in chapters 40-48? This leads us to the most popular view of this passage, which is a Millennial Temple. This Temple will be built in the time of the Millennium after Jesus Christ returns to the earth in His Second Coming.

The term "millennial" comes from the Book of Revelation, which describes a thousand years on the earth, during which Satan will be bound. It is the interval between the first and second resurrection which the Scripture talks about.

By the way, Ezekiel isn't the only prophet who said there would be a holy temple during the Kingdom Age. You find a kingdom temple and kingdom worship mentioned

in Isaiah 2:1-5, 60:7, 13; Jeremiah 33:18; Joel 3:18; Micah 4:2; Haggai 2:7-9; and Zechariah 6:12-15, 14:16, 20-21.

B. THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS TEMPLE

Ezekiel 43:1-5 Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. 2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. 3 It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw -- like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. 4 And the glory of the Lord came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. 5 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple.

Nothing is said about a veil that used to separate the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, but since the Messiah will be present with His people, the veil is not necessary. He wants His glory to be revealed to everyone. There is also no mention of the ark of the covenant or the mercy seat on it the blood was sprinkled on the annual Day of Atonement.

There are other things that were not mentioned – a golden altar of incense and the seven-branched golden lampstand. The altar of incense symbolized the prayers of God's people ascending to the Lord, but since the Lord is present with them, there is no need for symbolic prayer. As for the lampstand, which symbolized the light of God's truth through the nation of Israel.

C. WHY SACRIFICES?

From v18 of chapter 43, Ezekiel was told how the priests will prepare sacrifices in the Millennium Temple. Of course, objections would start to fly for this from any Bible students: "Why do we need any more animal sacrifices when Jesus was the atoning sacrifice on the cross? He abolished all sacrifices." Yes, that is so true, but the sacrifices we will see during the Millennium period are not for our atonement, rather remembrance.

Please allow me to explain. There will not be any sacrifice to take away sins. As the Word of God stated no more sacrifices are necessary:

Hebrews 10:12-18 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. 15 But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, 16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

The OT sacrifices couldn't take away our sins, but only cover them. Those sacrifices were looking forward to the real sacrifice – Jesus. However, the sacrifices at the Millennium Temple are commemorative sacrifice to remember what the Lord Jesus had done for us. It is the same as we take communion each month. Jesus' body was not broken or His blood was shed each month as we take communion. We do it as a remembrance of His sacrifice for our sins and it does not have any atoning value.

This portion of the Scripture is hard to interpret so that even Martin Luther and some of the reformers of that era looked on this passage as symbolic or allegorical.

D. DANGERS IN INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Last year, Jeff Thorpe taught us about 'Hermeneutics' – the science and method of interpretation of the Scriptures – in depth. The best way to interpret the Bible is literally with the Bible in context.

But those who would like to think too much for their own good and like to show off their intelligence start to spiritualize and interpret the Bible in their allegorical ways. Then, the sky is the limit to go outside to the La La Land. You can add any meaning that you want to add and become the first leader of your own cult.

Here are a few important points for you to think about concerning spiritualized or allegorical interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48:

- 1) Ezekiel presents a highly detailed description, with numerous measurements, and historical scenes that do not fit with a spiritual interpretation.
- 2) If this passage is spiritualized, then on similar grounds most of the O T prophecies could be spiritualized away, including the obviously literal ones about Christ's first coming, which we know from their fulfillment was literal. The same, then, applies to His second coming.
- 3) The Bible clearly distinguishes between Israel and the church in the NT. Promises unique to Abraham and his literal descendants, such as the Promised Land in Genesis 12, are not fulfilled in the church, but remain yet to be fulfilled in the future as it is mentioned in Romans 11 and Revelation 20. The church NEVER, EVER REPLACES Israel.
- 4) The picture in Revelation 21 is not that of the Millennium, but of the eternal state that follows it. Ezekiel's prediction of the temple will be fulfilled in the Millennium. Later, in the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no temple or sacrifices. No one should spiritualize or attempt allegorical approach on the sacrifices in the Millennium Temple.

E. APPLICATION

- 1) The prophecies of the Lord always come true, have been, and will. Whether we embrace them or not is up to us. If we don't, we are the ones who miss out.
- 2) This Book ends with a very important thing we should remember :
Ezekiel 48:35 All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE."
The city will be called "Yahweh Shammah." That is what gives the city its glory. Anywhere God is, that is where I want to be, don't you?