

But this Is not Enough

The fact is, the day of restoration, that return from captivity, when it did arrive, with its consequent rebuilding of the temple, came nowhere near exhausting the extent of Ezekiel's prophecy. Not by a long chalk! For a start, the Davidic kingship was not restored with Judah's return from Babylon. And though the temple was rebuilt, that second temple was painfully inferior to Solomon's structure which had formerly occupied the temple mount. It cannot be gainsaid: the second temple was a second-rate temple in comparison to the first. So much so, those who remembered the surpassing greatness of the former temple (2 Chron. 2:9), although, it goes without saying, they were glad to see the new edifice, grieved over its smallness compared to the time before the captivity (Ezra 3:12). Thus, the second temple, being but a sad reflection of the glory of Solomon's imposing temple, came nowhere near fulfilling the prophecy of Ezekiel 40 - 48.

Nor did things improve in the years that followed. Down the centuries after the restoration, time and again Judah would be forced to endure cruel slavery under a succession of tyrannical empires (Medo-Persian, Greek, Roman), as predicted in Daniel 2. There is no escaping the fact: by no stretch of the imagination can the history of Judah's restoration from Babylon represent the complete fulfilment of Ezekiel's message of hope. And nothing in Israel's history since AD70 - when the second temple was sacked by the Romans (culminating in AD135) - comes remotely close to fulfilling the prophecy.

A Millennial Kingdom?

So is there to be a coming Jewish kingdom? Will Ezekiel's prophecy be fulfilled in a literal sense in a future day? Some interpreters think so. They see the ultimate fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy in a Jewish millennial kingdom, lasting for a thousand years (when, as they admit, it will end in disaster), which kingdom is to be established after the return of Christ, with Christ reigning as king in Jerusalem. They expect the

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temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the festivals, the kingship all to be reinstated at a standard of opulence and glory exceeding that of the days of Solomon.

There are, however, grievous objections, insurmountable objections, to this interpretation of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Surely no one expects the setting up again of David as king, his reign to last forever⁵ - which means he as Israel's king will never die (Ezek. 34:23-31; 37:24-25) - and the rebuilding of the temple with all its apparatus of priesthood and sacrifice, including altar, offerings, feasts and holy-days (Ezek. 37:26-28; 40:1 - 46:24). And, please note, with regard to these sacrifices and offerings, if literally restored, they must be for atonement for sin (Ezek. 43:13-27; 45:17-25), not merely for commemoration, as some try to say. Think of that! But what need will there be for animal sacrifices in some supposed millennial kingdom, now that Christ has offered his one finished complete sacrifice for sin forever (Heb. 9:11-28; 10:10,14)? More than that; such a ritual, were it to be reinstated, would be anathema! Further, if those sacrifices were to be commemorative of Christ's sacrifice, what would it be saying about the Lord's supper, which Christ set up precisely for that very purpose until his return (1 Cor. 11:23- 26)? And why did the apostles not tell us about this radical change of commemoration, this 'ultimate' reminder of Christ's one effectual sacrifice? Again, Ezekiel predicted that God would restore his people, giving them a new heart to obey his covenant and law. Are we to expect, therefore, the reinstatement of the old covenant with the Mosaic law in this millennial kingdom? The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, under the direct inspiration of the Spirit, expressly wrote at length to put a stop to Jewish believers going back to the old covenant - so why would God himself reinstate that fulfilled, obsolete system after Christ's return? It makes no sense whatsoever. It contradicts biblical sense! What need will there be for levitical priests, when Christ, a priest after the order of Melchizedek, abolished the Mosaic covenant and the levitical

⁵ Not for a mere thousand years, please note.

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priesthood (Heb. 5:5-10; 7:1-22)? Furthermore, are we to expect Israel to have a prince again, a prince who will have sons, who will have an allotment of land, the inheritance of which is to be maintained according to property laws which distinguish between royal sons and servants (Ezek. 44:3; 45:7-8; 46:2,16-18)? Is the land yet to be reallocated according to the tribes (Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13 - 48:29)? Who will the aliens be (Ezek. 47:21-23)? Will the tribal settlement be in rectangles (Ezek. 45:1-8; 48:1-29)? Will the observance of the new moon and the sabbath be re-established, literally (Ezek. 44:24; 45:17; 46:1-4,6,12)? Of course not!

Moreover, let us not forget that some see the ultimate fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy in this restoration of the nation and its kingdom under the old covenant and its law, the rebuilding of this more-than-magnificent temple, the reinstatement of the sacrificing levitical-priesthood with its old-covenant sacrifices and festivals; 'ultimate' I stress. There are, however, very, very serious objections to that word 'ultimate'. What can improve on the perfections of the person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Nothing, apart from the eternal state, can supersede the gospel, the new covenant, instituted by Christ's *tetelestai* (John 19:30)! Nothing! Certainly not an earthly Jewish-kingdom under the reinstated Mosaic covenant and law, which will come to a catastrophic collapse!

To think some millennial kingdom fits the bill, and represents the 'ultimate' expression of the hope set out in Ezekiel, is to live in a fantasy world. And worse! For such a system would, to say the least, very seriously traduce the finished work of Christ. Think of that! Christ fulfilled the old covenant, rendering it obsolete (Heb. 8:13). How can its reinstatement be considered the *ultimate* glory?

Furthermore, the post-Pentecost Scriptures offer no warrant for such an expectation. None whatsoever! So...?