

### **Ezekiel's Temple**

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KJV – Ezekiel 40 - 48

### **“Ezekiel's Temple”**

In the year of 573 B.C. fourteen years after the fall of the city Jerusalem the Prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of the temple. Ezekiel the prophet was God's man, yet carried away into Babylon in his twenty-fifth year of exile God continued to use this man to record this prophetic message. Ezekiel was a priest who had never fulfilled his priestly duties in the temple at Jerusalem due to the fact he had been carried away into exile before he had been old enough to begin as seen from Ezekiel chapter one.

Ezekiel had recorded thirty-nine chapters up to this point and the following is an overview of the breakdown up to chapter forty. Ezekiel 1-24 refers to the southern kingdom, Judah's historical ruin. Chapter's 25-32 deals with the retribution and historical judgments against the other gentile nations:

1. Ammon (Ezekiel 25:1-7)
2. Moab (Ezekiel 25:8-11)
3. Edom (Ezekiel 25:12-14)
4. Philistia (Ezekiel 25:15-17)
5. Tyre (Ezekiel 26:1-28:19)
6. Sidon (Ezekiel 28:20-24)
7. Egypt (Ezekiel 29:1 - 32:32)

Ezekiel chapters 34 to 39 is Israel's literal future return to the same land as a reversal of the historical dispersion. Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe a future historical invasion of Israel and its aftermath during the time just before the Messiah's return. Much of this prophecy has caused great confusion over the years because of the various different views of end of times prophecies. Chapters 40 through 44 on the temple are linked with the vision in chapters 8 to 11. It was here in the form of the vision that Ezekiel gave us the vision of the defiled temple, the orders given for the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. We further saw the departure of the glory of God from the temple. In chapters 40 to 44 we see the restored temple, city and land and the LORD's return to the temple and presence among His people.

The book titled “The Prophecy of Ezekiel” by Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg gave both views of the literal and figurative views for the interpretation of the temple. Because this has been a question that has troubled the religious community for centuries; is this a literal temple or is this figurative language being used here to describe something else. The question one must seriously ask their self is this, are these prophecies to be taken literally? We must realize this one simple fact; all of these prophecies up to this point have been fulfilled literally.

So therefore we must reasonably conclude that the prophecies dealing with the apocalyptic or eschatological and the realism of the temple are to be taken literally as well.

This has not just been a question in our days, but this was in question as well even in the days of Christ's ministry. N. T. Wright in his book *The Climax of the Covenant and the Law in Pauline Theology*, wrote; *"There were those in Israel in Jesus' day who thought the exile was still happening, since Israel remained under foreign domination, and who still looked for it to come to an end"* (Wright, 1992, p. 141).

With thirty-nine chapters of this entire book treated as literal there is no valid reason for the treating of this large division any differently. Over the years there have been several approaches suggested for these last nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel. According to a broad classification they may be identified within two groups the literal view and the figurative view.

Dr. Charles Lee Feinberg is one of this nation's leading authorities on Jewish history, the Old Testament languages and customs and biblical prophecy. He was reared in an Orthodox Jewish home and studied for fourteen years of his life in Hebrew and Old Testament in preparation to becoming a Rabbi before coming to receive Christ.

His scholarly work gave both views, however he leaned more toward the literal view of interpretation and gives much supporting evidences to support this stand. Dr. Feinberg states the four main views within the theological camps in dealing with the interpretation of Ezekiel's Temple. One of these four interpretations holds to the view that this is a description of Solomon's temple.

This is very hard to substantiate and defend this view because of the fact that the details are quite different between the two temples. This thought even though so very difficult to support is often scoffed at, yet it is one of the main four views.

The second view or position concerning the temple is *"that Ezekiel gave a lofty ideal or pattern for the exiles in their building of the restoration temple. However, it is more than strange that there is no reference whatever to such a temple in any postexilic book"* (Feinberg, 1974, p. 233).

The third view has been widely accepted by many mainstream Jewish commentators who hold that the Messiah will build the temple and will even inaugurate the ritual of the millennial sacrifices. However even within this camp there is much dispute over the idea of the reestablished sacrifices. Some in viewing this interpretation states that the temple is literal as well as the sacrifices. While others hold to the interpretation that states the temple is literal but the sacrifices are figurative.

The fourth view is that these nine chapters are speaking in figurative language and that both the temple and the sacrifices are not to be interpreted literally. I would like to point out some of Dr. Feinberg's views in the immense details given to Ezekiel for the description of this temple that leads this author to hold to the literal interpretation and because of the other prophecies within this writing are literal I must conclude that yes both the temple and the sacrifices are literal.

Let's take a brief look at the literal places of worship recorded in the Scriptures in the past and those literal places of worship in the future.

I'm not into numerology but as you can clearly see if we take into account the tabernacle and all the temples we conclude that there has been and will finish with a total of seven.

**1. The Tabernacle:**

The Tabernacle (the tent) precise details given to Moses for the building of this place of worship which is also known as a temple. *"So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD"* (KJV; I Samuel 1:9). The tabernacle is also referred to as a temple in the Psalms of David, because this was the temple in which God dwelt it was the House of God. Still only a tent yet this tent was brought through the forty year wilderness journey and existed for four-hundred years mainly at Shiloh before Solomon's temple was built.

**2. Solomon's Temple:**

*"And for the house he made windows of narrow lights. And against the wall of the house he built chambers round about, against the walls of the house round about, both of the temple and of the oracle: and he made chambers round about: The nethermost chamber was five cubits broad, and the middle was six cubits broad, and the third was seven cubits broad: for without in the wall of the house he made narrowed rests round about, that the beams should not be fastened in the walls of the house"* (KJV; I Kings 6:4-6). First Kings calls this construction a temple, built by the king with the material his father King David had gather around 970 B.C. This temple was literal as well as the tabernacle built by Moses. It was so literal in fact it is even recorded in secular history as being destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 585 B.C. and the contents were taken away into Babylon.

**3. Zerubbabel's Temple:**

Another literal temple recorded in the Old Testament book of Ezra. *"Now when the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the people of the exile were building a temple to the LORD God of Israel, <sup>2</sup> they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of fathers' households, and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we, like you, seek your God; and we have been sacrificing to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here." <sup>3</sup> But Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel said to them, "You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves will together build to the LORD God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia has commanded us." <sup>4</sup> Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building,"* (NASB – Ezra 4:1-4). This temple was rebuilt by the returning exiles in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was nothing like Solomon's temple; in fact it was so insignificant in comparison that many people wept. Martin writes: *"the enemies used two methods of opposition to try to keep the temple from being built. First they offered to help in the construction process, thereby hoping to infiltrate the ranks and sidetrack the building project. When that did not work, they frightened the builders (perhaps with threats on their lives) and even hired counselors to frustrate them"* (Walvoord & Zuck, 1985, p. 660). This temple was completed around 516 B.C. and stood for over 500 years and then was destroyed by Antiochus Epiphanes.

**4. Herod's Temple:**

The fourth mention of a temple was the temple of Herod the Great in the time of Christ. *"The Jews then said, It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"* (NASB – John 2:20). Yes this also was a literal temple because even the Jews indicated to Christ that there would be no possible way He could raise it up in three days because it took forty-six years to build it. This temple was built by Herod and later destroyed by Titus the Roman Emperor in 70 A.D. just as the LORD Jesus Christ had predicted in the Olivet Discourse. *"Then Jesus went out and departed*

*from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (NKJV – Matthew 24:1-2).*

5. The Antichrist's Temple:

All though there is not a detail description given of this temple we know from the Scriptures that it is literal from the writings of the Apostle Paul. *"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God"* (KJV; II Thessalonians 2:4). The Dome of the Rock mosque that currently stands in Jerusalem will somehow be demolished and a new temple will be built for the son of perdition "that man of sin."

6. Ezekiel's Temple:

Ezekiel's temple recorded in Ezekiel chapters 40 through 48 will be the millennial temple built for Christ's return to the earth for the second coming after the period of the great tribulation period which is also known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week. His entry into the gates of the city and the temple will usher in the Millennial Reign of the King of kings and the LORD of Lords.

7. Heaven's Temple:

The seventh and final temple recorded in the Scriptures of course is Heaven's temple after the Great White throne judgment, which is none other than Christ Himself. *"And I saw no temple therein: for the LORD God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"* (Revelation 21:22).

This temple in Revelation is the only one that the meaning of the temple could be taken figuratively, because God Himself is the temple. All the others mentioned and recorded within the Scriptures with great detailed descriptions give the clear notion that these are literal places of worship; meant to be a literal interpretation and not to be taken figuratively.

Dr. Fienberg points out that the last nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel can be divided as follows: *"(1) the new temple, 40:1-43:12; (2) the new worship of God, 43:13-46:24; and (3) the new appointment of the land among the tribes, 47:1-48:35"* (Feinberg, 1974, p. 240). In Ezekiel chapter forty we have the man with the measuring rod. The immense details given with the dimensions that could be very easily drawn to scale with the wall, the gate and lodges (40:5-16). Then there is the outer and the inner courts (40:17-37) leading on to the chambers for the priests (40:38:47). The Prophet ends this chapter with the details for the porch (40:48-49). He continued to give precise details making it increasingly difficult for anyone to interpret this temple description as something figurative in manner. If this were figurative descriptions to be interpreted than what purpose would this abundance of minute details serve? They would be worthless and meaningless because everything in God's Word serves a key purpose in His Sovereign plan, and there would be no possible way to ever understand the figurative meanings to these measurements.

*"Throughout the Word of God it is revealed what infinite value God places on the work of His blessed Son. No detail is too much if it will serve to underscore the limitless worth of Christ's redemptive work. Why should this not be so in or thinking as well?"* (Feinberg, 1974, p. 244). If this is figurative what would all this confusion about these measurements and details serve to give honor and glory to Christ? If it is a literal description of Christ's Millennial Temple in the Kingdom Dispensation then it

would serve to bring Him honor and glory in the fitting description of His rightful temple during an age in which He continues His redemptive work for 1,000 years.

In reference to Ezekiel chapter forty-one Dr. Fienberg states: *"Because it is instructive and important to notice the difference between this sanctuary and Solomon's temple, this chapter should be studied in the light of I Kings 6-7"* (Feinberg, 1974, p. 245). Noted within Ezekiel forty-one are the details of the posts of the temple (41:1-4), the wall and the side chambers (41:5-11), the building before the separate place (41:12-14), the galleries round about the temple (41:15-20) and the altar of incense (41:21-26). The righteous will indeed be blessed and flourish in His Millennial Kingdom. Christ will cast out all those who do iniquity and offend His Righteousness. *"He cannot have in His presence those who do not stand in His righteousness alone"* (Feinberg, 1974, p. 247).

Ezekiel chapter forty-two continues with the measuring of the chambers of the court. The inner court of the chambers (42:1-12) and the Priests' use of the chambers (42:13-14). The last portion of this chapter details the measurement of the outer wall and the whole complex (42:15-20) and the separating of the Holy and the Common.

Chapter forty-three deals with the details of the return of the Glory, the glory of God filling the house with details on the measurements of the altar. In forty-four we move on to the ungodly and godly priests. Chapters forty-three through forty-six deals in great detail with the new worship of God. In chapter forty-six the nation of Israel will bring their offering into the temple and they will see Christ in them. Showing even then as now, everything pre-cross pointed to the Sacrifice and everything post cross points back to the Sacrifice. The real reason for praise, the true cause of worship. Chapters forty-seven and forty-eight deal with the literal new appointment of the land among the tribes of the nation of Israel.

Note some of the key descriptions given that lend weight to the thought of a literal interpretation of the temple:

1. *Ezekiel 40* – The house, the building, the porch and the outward and the inner courts.
2. *Ezekiel 41* – The temple, the most holy place. Yet there is no mention of a veil, or the ark of the covenant or the high priest.
3. *Ezekiel 43* – The glory of the God of Israel in the person of our LORD Jesus Christ with His entry through the eastern gate.
4. *Ezekiel 44* – The prince is mentioned again and again now and in the succeeding chapters.
5. *Ezekiel 45* – The feast of Passover is kept and the feast of Tabernacles yet there is never any mention of the feast of Pentecost, or Trumpets or of the Day of Atonement.
6. *Ezekiel 45* – Sacrifices are offered but they are for memorial purposes and Hebrews 10:12 is not violated. It is just like today in the observance of the LORD's Supper, we have in our church's the table for the breaking of bread in remembrance and as a memorial of what was accomplished at Calvary in Christ.

7. *Ezekiel 46* – In the millennium God's people the nation of Israel will see Christ in the offerings which is something that the nation as a whole has never experienced before.
8. *Ezekiel 47* – The healing waters are flowing from the temple eastern side into the Dead Sea and the Great Sea in which shall be healing and all shall be made alive.
9. *Ezekiel 48* – The land portions to the tribes are divided and distributed. All receive a portion with the exception of Joseph and Levi. Joseph's portion is divided between his two sons and Levi is the priestly tribe who is never given a separate inheritance.
10. *Ezekiel 48* – The name of the city from that day shall be called "Jehovah Shammah," the LORD is there.

How anyone could take the notion that some of these writings within this same group of Scripture text are literal and some are figurative is beyond me. We know He "the LORD Jesus Christ" is coming back in a literal return; We know he returns with His Saints; *"And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean"* (KJV – Revelation 19:14). *"And the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee"* (Zechariah 14:5).

We know His literal feet shall stand upon the literal Mount of Olives in that Day. *"Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south"*(KJV – Zechariah 14:3-4). *"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth"* (KJV- Job 19:25).

We know that literal living waters shall go forth out of Jerusalem in that Day. *"And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out of Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in the summer and in the winter shall it be"* (Zechariah 14:8).

We know that He will literally Judge the nations and rid the world of sin. *"And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God"* (KJV – Revelation 19:15). *"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one"* (KJV – Zechariah 14:9).

We know that David will literally reign with the LORD Jesus in the Kingdom. *"But they shall serve the LORD THEIR God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them"* (KJV – Jeremiah 30:9). *"Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days"* (KJV – Hosea 3:5). *"And I will set up one shepherd over them, and shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd"* (Ezekiel 34:23).

And we know that it is a literal reign of Christ in the millennium. *"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"* (KJV – Psalm 2:8-9). *"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not*

*worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).*

The primary concern of Ezekiel’s last and final vision is not one to cause debate or confusion. It is not at all misleading if you take God at His word. *“Herein lies the hope of Ezekiel’s message for Christians. In Jesus the Messiah, the glory of Yahweh, has descended and dwells among us”* (Block, 1998, p. 746).

In conclusion, when one is reading these last nine chapters of the book of Ezekiel and wandering if it should be taken literally or figuratively there are two simple statements to remember. First, let the Word of God speak to you, let Scripture interpret Scripture. Secondly, He is returning in all of His Glory to establish His Kingdom. Why should He not have a literal temple for all men to come near “bring in their offering” and worship their Creator and their God?

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