

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 17

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:18-27

INTRO: We are back in our series on heaven. Sometimes when I battle with my own human frailties and weaknesses, and when the trials of life become heavy, I long to leave for that city, where the song writer says the roses never fade. None of us would battle the battles of the Christian life, if it were not for our future hope. When Paul spoke to the Ephesians of his ceaseless prayers for them, he said that he prayed that the Lord would give to them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God so that the eyes of their understanding might be opened. And when these spiritual eyes were opened he prayed that there were three things they would learn to know and the very first thing he wished them to know was the hope of God's calling. If we are to have our spiritual eyes opened to what the hope of our calling is, then we must learn the kind of things we are learning in this series. Scripture says of the Lord Jesus that He endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. It was hope that took Him through.

So to expand our knowledge of the hope of his calling, we have made effort in these messages to show what believers do after they die but before they are resurrected, and then what they do after they are resurrected. We are now in the millennium. In this time period we both resurrected and non resurrected people inhabit the earth together.

Well, we are in the millennium. We have come past Daniel's 75 days. Satan has been cast into prison. The beast and the false prophet have been cast into hell. Tribulation and OT saints have been resurrected and now dwell together with the Church, the bride of Christ. Those believers who survived the tribulation alive have been invited by Christ to come and inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

We have seen that the temple will be rebuilt during the millennium. It is described in great detail in Ezekiel 40-48. I mentioned in the last message that this temple will be the government center of planet earth for the duration of the millennium. To put it in our language today, Church and state will be run together from the same place.

So I think after Daniel's 75 days, and when the millennium is officially begun, the rebuilding of this temple will immediately begin. Herod's temple, that was in existence in Jesus' day, took 46 years to build. It was an incredible work! We Canadians must realize it was not built of wood. It was built of quarried rock, and it was magnificent! How long will it take to build this millennial temple which will exceed Herod's temple considerably? Well, no doubt at all, this temple will be built out of rock and it will take some time to build.

Let me read to you from Zondervan Encyclopedia regarding the workmen required for Solomon's temple. It says, "The foundryman was a Phoenician, Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 7:13. Other workmen were Sidonians of another Hiram, king of Tyre (5:6), whose workmen felled the Lebanese cedars for the temple. They were called into service because there were no Israelites proficient in this work. In addition Solomon conscripted 30,000 Israelites (5:13) to labor in courses in Lebanon with the lumbering operation (v. 14). In addition there were 153,600 'strangers'... in Israel (2 Chron. 2:17) over whom were 3,000 overseers to direct their labors (v. 18). These laborers were divided into 70,000 bearers of burdens and 80,000 hewers" (627-28).

How long do you think it will take to build the millennial temple and how many workmen will it take? Well, not to worry. There is plenty of time because this time is 1000 years long. And, by the way, I remind you that all of this takes place in that which we simply call 'heaven'. So, we want to take a look at the temple as the worship center of planet earth.

-Worship centre cont'd

We want to continue where we left off in the last message, that the temple will be the worship centre of all the earth. We saw in the last message that the secular affairs of this earth will be run from the temple. That has never been the case in any Biblical temple before. But, this temple will still be the spiritual centre of faith, as it was in times past only now it will be the spiritual centre of planet earth. Ezekiel 43:1-5 records the return of the glory of God to the temple. The glory of the Lord returns through the eastern gate. This is the same gate he saw

this glory leave (10:19). One of the most common pictures of Jerusalem is looking at the Muslim holy place on Mount Moriah, the golden dome of the rock. And there, before the original site of the Jewish temple is the eastern gate.

Today, when you look at the eastern gate you will see it has been walled shut with rocks. This was done by the Muslims in the 1500's just about the time the first Roman Catholics got saved that would later become known as the Mennonites.

Why did the Muslims seal it off? I have been told that it is so that the Lord cannot enter through this gate when He comes, as He has promised. Today, before this gate there are many Arab graves. This too, I have been told, is to keep the Messiah from entering by this gate because to do so He would have to desecrate these graves.

Now there is a matter recorded by Ezekiel here, and some of the other prophets as well, that has caused great concern to Christians and they reject a literal interpretation of such passages for this reason. We had Ezekiel 43:18-27 read for us earlier. Let us read verses 18-21 again (read).

If one takes a literal interpretation of these chapters, then there will be sacrifices in the millennium and that causes great concern. Let me advise you here, always hold to the literal or normal view of interpreting prophecy. In the future, this view always shows itself to be true, and it will again with regard to these temple sacrifices. Before Israel became a nation again in 1948, the amillennialist laughed at those who held to a literal interpretation of Scripture. They said, "Ridiculous. Anybody can see that this can never happen. It is a sheer impossibility." And then it happened. The same holds true in so called science. When science seems to contradict a literal reading of creation in Genesis, don't worry about it. If 'so called science' remains true to real science it will yet catch up with the Bible and find it true.

Well, if you read from Ezekiel 43:18 through to 46:24 you will read all about the millennial sacrifices. So our amillennialist friends say it would be an absolute backward step to go back to sacrificing animals when Christ made one sacrifice forever, as the book of Hebrews so clearly states. Now that is an interpretational error. And the key to the error made by the amillennialist is this, and I give it in the words of Oswald T. Allis, an amillennialist who says about these sacrifices that if one holds to a literal interpretation of Scripture, and I quote, "They must be expiatory in exactly the same sense as the sacrifices described in Leviticus were expiatory. To take any other view of them is to surrender the principle of literal interpretation of prophecy which is fundamental to Dispensationalism..."

Now there is a very key error made by this writer, and he was no little student of the Word, an error which many Christians make. They think that the OT sacrifices were expiatory; that is, God forgave sins by the sacrifices that were made. But after Christ came, we do not sacrifice any more because we receive forgiveness by the one sacrifice of Christ Himself on the cross. This is a very common error, and a rather crucial error. Let us go to Hebrews 10 to correct this faulty view (read 1-4). What is the error? Mark it down. Old Testament sacrifices were NOT expiatory. No forgiveness of sins ever came by the OT sacrifices.

Now I ask you, if those sacrifices did not cleanse away sin, why did they offer them? All the blood sacrifices of the OT never forgave one sin, so what was the point of the sacrifices? Here it is, and note it well: all the OT sacrifices pointed forward to the Lamb of God who would come and shed His blood for them, and thus become the real sacrifice that does take away sins. The OT sacrifices pictured the salvation that was to come through Christ's death on the cross. If the shedding of animal blood could have forgiven sins in OT times, God would have been extremely foolish to give His only Son on the

cross. As a matter of fact, Jesus would not have needed to be born as a human.

Today, in the Church, we do not keep the Passover. We have communion in its place. And in communion we have a cup of grape juice that represents Jesus' blood. This grape juice does not turn into Christ's blood as the Catholic insisted to our Mennonite forefathers that it did. It is representative of His blood. Now when we drink that cup, is that expiatory? Does that forgive our sins? Of course not! We do it in memory of His death. You see, in the OT, the sacrifices pointed forward to His death. They were a reminder that Christ must die for sin. In communion, the bread and grape juice point back to His death. They remind us that He did die for our sins.

And now I ask, why sacrifices in the millennium? Because it is a memorial event, just like communion is today. I want to remind you that this time period is 1000 years long. It is a time of unsurpassed peace. Death is experienced very little compared to today. Multiplied millions of people are born who can only read in history books about a time when people killed each other and they had wars and abortions and so on. Many of these may never have seen such things themselves. And they must have the Gospel presented to them and they must hear how the Messiah, who is now ruling the world suffered a very cruel death for them. And all the things you tell them have very little impact. And then the father says to his son or daughter, "This Passover, you must come with us and see what God the Father did for us when He gave Jesus, the Messiah, to die on the cross for us." And so, all the sacrifices are like our communion now. They point back to what Christ did. They are commemorative, not expiatory, as this amillennialist, whom I quoted, so very wrongly held.

I propose that it is in these sacrifices that people will gain much of their understanding of the Gospel in the millennium! You see, they are

still born with a sin nature and must still be saved. In our day, in the Church age, we understand death and killing and the horror of such a thing. In the millennium it will be different and it may well require these sacrifices in order for people to get a grasp of the Gospel. You see, those born in the millennium, and there will be billions upon billions, must be saved, or they will go to hell, just like we. But the environment in which they grow up is very, very different from the one in which we grow up, and therefore, I think, the need of these sacrifices. Certainly, if the Bible says there will be sacrifices during that time, we can rest assured there will be sacrifices during that time. And certainly we acknowledge the wisdom of God in our commemoration of Christ's death every communion day we have. And just as certainly we must acknowledge that if there will be sacrifices in the millennium, there is the best of reasons for it to be so.

Some time ago one of our folk gave me an internet article on this millennial temple. It comes from www.sonstoglory.com. By the way, if you have internet you can look at pictures of artist's conceptions of this tremendous temple at that site. This writer says, "Throughout this study we want to relate the significance and purposes of God for having a Millennial Temple on earth during the allotted 1,000 years (Rev. 20). **The fact must be emphasized over and over again that WE God's children are His ultimate temple,** and that all other temples are for the purpose of teaching us how to be the holy, pure, and undefiled dwelling place of the Great God Yahweh. He deserves nothing less than our best" (emphasis his).

Earlier I mentioned that when science catches up with the Bible, it finds it to be true. I propose it is like that with prophecy. The future always reveals the literal view as correct. Many years ago the amillennialist said that premillennialism could not be correct. Here is one of the reasons. Turn with me to a very interesting passage in Zechariah 14 (read 16-19). It appears that the

last of Israel's seven feasts is a very important feast in the millennium. That is understandable, because all seven feasts were prophetic of future events and the feast of tabernacles is prophetic of the millennium. When the premillennial view of prophecy was reborn in the 17-1800's the amillennialist listed many problems with such a view of prophecy. You see, in this passage in Zechariah it prophesies that all nations will go up to Jerusalem yearly to keep this feast. And there is discipline for those who do not come. And so, in earlier years the amillennialist said that this was proof that the premillennial view could not be correct, for it would not be possible for people from all over the world to travel this far. But David Baron, a premillennialist, writing in 1918 said this, "But we do not yet know what the facilities of travel will be in the millennium." J. Alva McLain, who writes about this in his book, 'The Greatness Of The Kingdom' says, "Of course, the whole problem has since become obsolete by modern developments in the field of travel."

So, let me add a question for your thought. Will the millennium start where the tribulation left off, with electricity, cars, computers, and jet airplanes? It is well possible that shortly into the millennium man may progress beyond those things. I believe that for once man will be obedient to the original commands of God at creation to be fruitful and fill the earth. And there is absolutely no doubt man will have dominion over the earth as God commanded at creation; and then, just as surely, man will subdue the earth as God commanded which includes bringing the elements God created under man's subjection. That is what cars and airplanes and computers are. Our problem with these things today is not the discovery or even the use of them, but the abuse.

g. Topographical changes in the millennium

I want to make another point as we are considering the beginning of this time. There will be some topographical changes when the Lord

returns to earth in Israel. The lay of the land will change considerably. As a matter of fact, at the end of the tribulation an earthquake occurs that is bigger than all other earthquakes that have ever been. I doubt the Richter Scale will be able to measure this earthquake. The Bible says every Island will be moved.

But there is a change that occurs when Jesus comes back to earth as well. We read that in Zechariah earlier. Go to chapter 47 (read 1-12). The one great lack of the city of Jerusalem is water. But according to this passage, there will be a very unique river in Jerusalem in the millennium, created by the return of Jesus Christ. We read earlier in Zechariah 14 that the valley in which this river runs happened when the Lord Jesus touched down on the Mount of Olives. Zechariah calls these waters, living waters. Half of this river runs West, to the Mediteranian Sea, and half runs East, into the Dead Sea. And when this water runs into the Dead Sea, it is dead no more. It comes to life and there are all kinds of fish in it.

Now let me take one moment to show you what happens when you interpret prophecy spiritually rather than literally. The river spoken of here is not a river but it represents the Gospel. And as this river goes east, so the Gospel first went to the east first. The river at first is shallow. That speaks of the easy doctrines of the Gospel. Then come the deeper waters, things like the doctrines of election and predestination. The trees along the river are saved people who are productive. So the Gospel went first to the east and then to the desert or the Gentiles. The bitter waters that are healed show the sweet influences of the Gospel. The fishermen are the apostles. En Gedi, and En Eglaim indicate that the Gospel will go into the whole world. So, when you spiritualize prophecy then, in our day, rather than foretelling the future, it becomes history. It has all happened already. And that is the exact opposite of what was intended by God!

A while ago, in my devotions I read Isaiah 51. Turn there with me and let us read the first three verses (read). Today, when you drive out of Jerusalem, toward the wilderness you do not go far and you have rocks and bare land. When we are set up in our new building we will show you the pictures. But in the Lord's kingdom Israel will be like the Garden of Eden. And the one thing lacking now for this to become true today is water. That problem will be resolved by this river.

When we drove through some of this wilderness we drove past where David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel lived in his retirement years. And our guide said that Ben Gurion had said, "We must learn to tame the wilderness or the wilderness will overtake us." But, alas, the one great lack; water! But in the millennium, Ben Gurion's dream of taming the wilderness will happen.

Now Ezekiel says that the waters of the Dead Sea will be healed and there will be as many kinds of fish in the sea that was dead as in the Great Sea, which is the Mediteranian Sea. Now you do not get the variety of fish that are in the ocean in a lake. The Dead Sea is a lake, by our standards. How could there be all these kinds of ocean fish? Well, when we were in Israel I think I saw why. You see, the Dead Sea is dead because a river runs into it but no water runs out of it. The surface of the Dead Sea is some 1300 feet below sea level. So, if you start in the valley of Megiddo, in Israel's northernmost parts, the valley goes down, down, down until you come to the Dead Sea. When you go to Eilat, Israel's southernmost tip today which is at one of the tips of the Red Sea, and go to the Dead Sea, once more you go down. I propose to you that the topographical changes in Israel brought on by the Lord's return will cause the Dead Sea to rise and run into the Red Sea and it will have all the fish of the Med Sea.

CONCL: So we bring this message to a conclusion. Will there be sacrifices in the millennium? Yes! Why, to forgive sins?

No! It must be remembered that no shedding of animal blood ever forgave one sin in the past, nor will these. They will be commemorative of what Jesus, the Messiah who then rules the world, did when He died on the cross. The Gospel will be revealed to those living in this time period through these sacrifices. People who are born in this time period must be saved and to be saved they must understand the Gospel.

Second, in the millennium the lay of the land will change. Today, when you fly over Israel or drive about in the country or look at a topographical map, only a small part of this small land is arable. That will all change in the millennium. True, much arid land has already become productive in Israel today, but most of it lies dry and useless.

And then I want to remind us once more that all of this, for us as Christians, will be what we now simply and wrongly refer to as heaven. We will experience this after we have received resurrected bodies. If the Bible is to be interpreted literally, these are the facts. If it is to be spiritualized, I have wasted a lot of your time. But I rest in the view that prophecy is as true literally as the account of the six day creation is. Prophecy was true literally with regard to Christ's first coming, no doubt then the same will hold true with regard to His second coming.