

Ezekiel 40–48

Israel's Millennial Temple

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Introduction: A Literal Future Fulfilment

In the last section of the Book of Ezekiel the orderly arrangement of the restored nation of Israel is foretold along with a view of the sanctuary of Jehovah in the midst of the holy city, Jerusalem, then to be seen in all its millennial beauty and holiness.

And I think there is no reasonable ground whatever for assuming that hitherto these prophetic chapters have in any degree been fulfilled. I deny entirely that they have any direct application to the Christian Church. I also deny altogether that the chapters may be understood to have what is called a spiritual significance.

In these denials I am not referring to the whole of Ezekiel's writings. Truths having a general application are found in previous chapters. For example, Jehovah's promise that He will sprinkle clean water upon the house of Israel, give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them (Ezek. 36:25, 26) is of wide application, including the present day. Indeed, I have sought to preach the gospel from it, although I have not attempted to do so from the valley of dry bones!

As to these closing chapters of Ezekiel, I am convinced that there is no possible way in which they can be applied to the spiritual blessings that by faith we have found to be embodied in the church, that is, found to be in Christ Jesus for the possession of the church. Further, is not God to be allowed the liberty of acting according to His own counsels and plans for His own people, whether earthly or heavenly? Is it not possible for Him in the future to accept sacrifices and offerings in an appointed place? I am convinced that it would be rank apostasy for a Christian to offer sacrifices and burn incense. On this ground, many feel that those chapters in Ezekiel ought not to be taken literally for the church, the Christian body. This is true; but why should they not be for the nation of Israel when converted and settled in the holy land?

When the nation repents and receives the Messiah Whom they crucified, but Whom God has glorified, they will no doubt worship in a way suited to their new national life under Messiah's reign. The chapters that describe this worship are to be taken literally as applying to Israel in the millennial age.

Ezekiel 40-43: The Temple and the Return of the Glory

The prophet began to see these "visions of God" when among the captives by the river Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans (Ezek. 1:1-3). Ezekiel says that in these visions "brought He me into the land of Israel," that is, Ezekiel was merely transported there in spirit. The apostle John speaks similarly in the Revelation: "I became in the Spirit on the Lord's day"; "he carried me away in spirit to a desert"; "he carried me away in the Spirit, and set me on a great and high mountain" (Rev. 1:10; 17:3; 21:10). So we may say that it was the power of the Spirit of God that brought Ezekiel from the land of the Chaldeans to the land of Israel (Ezek. 40:2).

Then we learn that Ezekiel was shown a man who measured the various parts of the buildings the prophet saw. He names the outer court and the inner court, the wall and the windows, and the chambers, with which the structure was to be furnished. He measured everything with scrupulous precision -- the gateways, the porches, the posts, the thresholds, the arches, and the windows. All was exact, detailed, and literal. The temple described in Ezekiel 40-42 is a real building, with real dimensions, real courts, real chambers, real gates.

The central feature of these last visions granted to Ezekiel was the return of the Shechinah of Jehovah to dwell again in the midst of His people in Jerusalem (Ezek. 43:1-6). As related in his first chapters, the prophet had seen the abandonment of the city of Jerusalem as the abiding-place of that glory on earth. Now he beholds the return of the glory-cloud of the God of Israel "from the way of the east," a sight never known in this world since the day of the captivity of Jehovah's people in Babylon.

Sundry regulations are also given for the conduct of the priests, the sons of Zadok, who will be chosen to present Jehovah the fat and the blood of the sacrifices (Ezek. 43:15-31).

Ezekiel 44-46: The Prince, the Priests, and the Worship

Ezekiel 45 introduces a feature in the division of the holy land during the millennium, which will be a new one. "When the land is divided by lot for inheritance, a portion shall be presented to Jehovah for a heave-offering. This will be the 'holy portion of the land.'" It will be reserved for the service of the priests who do the service of the sanctuary (Ezek. 45:1-4).

There is also a regulation for any disposal of the prince's property (Ezek. 46:16-18). The prince's inheritance shall be to his sons, and shall remain in the family. If he bestows any property to his servants, it reverts to the prince at the year of liberty. He may not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession. This is in striking contrast with the oppressive kings of Israel's past history. The prince of the millennial age will be a faithful steward, not a tyrant; he will give his own, not take from others.

The worship of the millennial age, as described in Ezekiel 45-46, includes offerings and feasts that recall the old Mosaic system, yet are distinct from it. There will be a new passover, a new feast of tabernacles, new sabbaths -- all adapted to the new condition of the restored people under their Messiah. The principle is the same: the acknowledgment of Jehovah's sovereignty and grace; but the form is suited to the new age, to the new covenant, to the presence of the glorified Messiah in the midst of His people.

Ezekiel 47-48: The River and the Division of the Land

In Ezekiel 47 we have the wonderful vision of the river flowing from the threshold of the house -- growing deeper and wider as it goes, bringing life and

healing wherever it comes. "And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh" (Ezek. 47:9). This great river of life is the symbol of the abundant blessing that will flow from the presence of Jehovah in the midst of His people in the millennial age.

In Ezekiel 47-48 we have the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel in the millennial age. The arrangement is different from that under Joshua. The tribes will be arranged in parallel strips of territory extending eastward from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Jordan. The whole land from north to south will consist of twelve belt-like portions, divided in the neighborhood of Jerusalem by Jehovah's portion, called the holy oblation or heave-offering, which will be for the prince, the priests and the Levites, the sanctuary being in the midst (Ezek. 48:8-22).

In the allotment of the land among the tribes, Jehovah said, "Joseph shall have two portions" (Ezek. 47:13), that is, one for Manasseh and one for Ephraim. Levi is not included with the twelve, but has his share in the sacred heave-offering, of land devoted to Jehovah's service (Ezek. 48:13, 14). The land of Gilead and Bashan to the east of the Jordan, originally occupied by the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, is not mentioned here, being apparently included within the widened borders of the holy land in the millennial age, when the ancient boundaries will be greatly enlarged, as promised to Abraham (Gen. 15).

The closing verse of the book gives the name by which Jerusalem shall be called in the millennial age: "Jehovah-Shammah -- the Lord is there" (Ezek. 48:35). The glory that departed in the days of Ezekiel has returned; the Shekinah abides; and the city is known by the presence of the Lord in its midst. This is the

consummation of all the promises to Israel, the answer to all the prayers of the faithful through the centuries, the fulfillment of all the visions of the prophets. Jehovah is there -- and that is enough.

The Bible Treasury, New Series 2:32.