



Correspondence

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Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

Will there be a literal temple in the Kingdom?

I have followed Brother Geoff Cave's series of articles ([Dec. 2001](#) to [July 2002](#)), the article by Brother Dennis Elliott ([Sept. 2002, p. 332](#)), and the correspondence on this subject ([Sept. 2002](#) to [Jan. 2003](#)), which is one which has always presented me with a dilemma. Yet if we apply the principles of allowing Scripture its initial meaning within its context of time and place, and afterwards seek applications in the light of comparative teaching, then some of the difficulties seem to me to disappear. The writer to the Hebrews had so much to say about the better covenant and the reality of God's sanctuary; should we not give greater emphasis to these?

So, we ask, for whom was Ezekiel's vision of the temple first revealed, and what should it have meant to them? Explicit information is given on these points:

"Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your mind upon all that I shall show you . . . declare all that you see to the house of Israel" (40:4);*

"And you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple and its appearance and plan, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities. And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, portray the temple . . . make known to them all its ordinances and all its laws" (43:10,11).

So the prime reason for the detailed description was to shame Israel, and in so doing make an appeal to them as a nation. They were being encouraged to re-establish, even surpass, the glory and ritual associated with the temple of Solomon destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in about 587 B.C. We remember that the nobility of Jerusalem were taken into exile, together with Daniel and his compatriots, some time before—about 606 B.C.

The temple vision was given to Ezekiel in approximately 572 B.C., midterm in the seventy

years' exile prophesied by Jeremiah. So the people had about thirty-five years to repent, respond, prepare and plan a glorious return to Zion upon the edict of Cyrus being given in about 536 B.C.

Sadly, the return in its first wave under Zerubbabel was a weak effort, and even the second wave under Ezra fell very short of the glory that could have been. No wonder the old men wept when they surveyed the foundations of the new diminutive structure that was to replace the temple of Solomon (see Ezra 3:12). Some 126 years passed after Ezekiel's vision to the time of Nehemiah. He lamented that Jerusalem remained in semi-ruin, and that led to his determination to rise up and rebuild the city walls.

Clearly, God's message through Ezekiel did not have the response from and impact upon Israel which it was intended to have. In consequence, the instructions concerning the temple and its ordinances were not fulfilled by its people. But had Israel turned to God, undoubtedly He would have overseen the reconstruction of the temple to the wonderful specification given. The prince would surely have been Zerubbabel, who was heir to the throne of David (1 Chron. 3:17-19; Mt. 1:12,13). The officiating priest would have been Ezra, who was a lineal descendant from Aaron, and also from Seraiah, the chief priest put to death at Riblah (Ezra 7:1-5; 2 Kgs. 25:18-21). He also came through the line of Zadok, fulfilling so much required in the ordinances of Ezekiel's prophecy.

Then the Old Testament style of sacrificial ritual would have been perfectly meaningful, and would have prepared the nation for the coming of Messiah. Yet if we read chapters 40-48 of Ezekiel's prophecy with an open mind we see not a hint of a mortal population and an immortal population coexisting, with duties delineated for each. These ideas are only transposed upon the text to fit a predetermined interpretation.

The conditional requisites of the prophecy were just not fulfilled. So we should apply our normal means of exposition, seeking a further application, a more glorious fulfilment in Jesus

* Quotations from the RSV.

Christ and the “better covenant” established in him. He will fulfil the role of prophet, priest and king in God’s Kingdom when he returns.

So why were Ezekiel’s aspirations for a glorious temple not attained? Perhaps Malachi, as the last of the prophets, supplies some answers. The living relationship of God as Father to His children, Israel, was broken by their not keeping covenant with Him (Mal. 1:6; 2:10,11). It is seen that the priests in particular violated this covenant (2:1-8). The will of the people was never stirred to respond with generous giving, and even their sacrificial offerings became contemptible (1:13,14; 3:8,9).

God would intervene in a new and more dramatic way: “Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the *covenant* in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts” (3:1). Purification would commence with the coming of John the Baptist, not to Herod’s temple in Jerusalem but to the house of Israel in the wilderness. Refinement and judgement would be vested in the Righteous One to follow (4:2). This alone would bring meaning to the declaration, “For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to My name, and a *pure offering*; for My name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts” (1:11).

Zechariah proclaims a similar message that consecration of “things” will not be important in the Kingdom age. “Holy to the LORD”, an engraving under the Levitical order preserved for the turban of the high priest, will be applied to the bells of working horses. The pots in the house of the Lord become common cooking vessels used by true worshippers for their peace offerings. Conversely, the cauldrons in which the cooking will be done will be just as sacred as the bowls which had been used to sprinkle the sacrificial blood on the altar (14:20,21).

The temple of the old covenant, therefore, merely symbolised the true temple which it imperfectly portrayed (Mk. 14:58; Jno. 2:19). This too would be ‘destroyed’, but raised to full glory in the presence of the Father. This too was conditional. Though he was in every respect tempted as we are, he was without sin, obedient to his Father even to death on the cross. So he is the head of the corner of the true Kingdom temple which can never be destroyed, “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

God’s law and testimony will indeed go forth from Zion. His glory will reside there. All nations will go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles, because God’s Kingdom will be the fulfilment of the type which first existed in a ritualistic feast pointing to that Kingdom age. But there will be no need for animal sacrifice, no need for a Zerubabel or Ezra as prince or priest to officiate on Old Testament principles. There may not even be a need for a massive and resplendent physical building. Stephen explained that “it was Solomon who built a house for Him [God]. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands . . . What house will you build for Me, says the Lord . . . ?” (Acts 7:47-49).

Is this not the thrust of the message given in the letter to the Hebrews? “For since the law has but a *shadow of the good things* to come instead of the *true form* of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, *make perfect* those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have *ceased to be offered?*” (10:1,2); “He *abolishes the first* in order to *establish the second*. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*” (vv. 9,10). The Greek for “once for all” here is *ephapax*, a strengthened form of *hapax*, which, according to Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, means: “once for all, of what is of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition”.

The ultimate fulfilment of Ezekiel’s temple vision is taken up for us in Revelation 21, where the holy city Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. That has a wall, lies four-square and has a holy of holies, with its length and breadth and height equal. The glory of that city far surpasses anything built by the hands of men, and so far as temples are concerned John records: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (v. 22).

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Reply

Brother Hughes rightly quotes Ezekiel 40:4 and 43:10,11 as evidence that the prophet was shown the details of the sanctuary so that, in turn, he might reveal them to the house of Israel. However, he was only to show the details to Israel “if they be ashamed of all that they have done” (43:11). Although the nation did not repent in the days of Ezekiel, I believe that when they

“look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zech. 12:10) they will repent and Ezekiel will “shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof”. Thus the prophet who witnessed the abominations of the house of Israel (ch. 8) will be privileged to show a repentant nation the new house of prayer, which will not be defiled.

I believe this will be fulfilled at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ for the following reasons:

- 1 Ezekiel clearly states: “For in Mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, there shall *all* the house of Israel, *all of them in the land*, serve Me: there will I accept them, and *there will I require your offerings*, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things. I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; *and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen*” (20:40,41).
- 2 Again Ezekiel declares: “And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, *when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore*” (37:28). Thus will the Divine purpose with Israel, which was declared from their beginning as a nation (Ex. 19:5,6), be accomplished.
- 3 It is surely inconceivable that nine detailed chapters of Scripture were given in the knowledge that they would never be fulfilled.
- 4 Ezekiel is not the only prophet who speaks of animal sacrifice and the temple in the age to come.
- 5 Part of Ezekiel’s vision concerns the waters which flow from under the threshold of the temple; these waters become a river which divides into two. The result of this is the healing of the waters of the Dead Sea. For this to be accomplished, geological changes will have to be made in the land of Israel. These changes will be the result of the earthquake described by Zechariah when the feet of our Lord touch the Mount of Olives.

This being said, it is important to restate that the animal sacrifices will only be for the mortal population of Israel and for any Gentile who wishes to be joined to the Lord (Isa. 56:3-7); the immortal saints will not be involved. This is possibly the reason why Brother Hughes cannot see any hint of a mortal and immortal population coexisting; in this respect they will not.

The purpose of animal sacrifices was never to take away sins, as Brother Hughes shows from

Hebrews. Animal sacrifice may be described as a visual aid to teach those involved the seriousness of sin and the enormous achievement accomplished by our Lord in his perfect sacrifice. The mortals of the coming age who wish to draw near to the Lord will have to learn this. When the righteous King reigns in Jerusalem, and the priesthood has been purified, for the first time in its history the nation will give acceptable offerings on a regular basis which will be pleasing to their God.

Regarding Revelation 21, this is surely a symbolic vision that speaks of the spiritual Jerusalem. Every symbol in Scripture requires something literal as a foundation. Ezekiel speaks of the literal Jerusalem, a literal river, literal trees, etc. These literal things are used by the Spirit as symbols to describe the qualities of spiritual Jerusalem. There is no temple in this vision, and the reason for this becomes apparent when the purpose of the literal temple is considered; it is to separate between holy and profane. Everything in Revelation 21 is holy, it comes down from God; thus there is no need for a temple.

Geoff Cave

Hebrew and Greek important, not Aramaic

As a Christadelphian, I have always believed and understood that the Old Testament Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, with parts in Aramaic, and that the New Testament Scriptures were originally written in Greek. I believe these original Scriptures were Divinely inspired, and are utterly incapable of error except for errors in transcription or translation. This view is undermined by the Catholic Church, for example, which regards the Latin Vulgate translation as Divinely approved, and therefore incapable of error even where it conflicts with the Hebrew or Greek.

Unfortunately, the article “The importance of Aramaic” (Dec. 2002, p. 459) in my view goes down the same route by stating that the patriarchs spoke Aramaic, that the Jews abandoned Hebrew for Aramaic after the exile, and that Aramaic was used by Jesus and the New Testament writers and even by non-Jews. An extension of this is that the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures are merely translations and either not inspired or not as inspired as the Aramaic. This mistaken view is vigorously promoted by a ‘Christian’