

"THE IDEALIZED TEMPLE"

I. Introduction

- A. We are told in verse 1 of chapter 40 that this vision was given fourteen years after Jerusalem's fall and twenty-five years after the first wave of exile happened.
1. It is worth noting that this vision was given to Ezekiel on the tenth day of the month.
 2. The tenth day had symbolic significance in Israel.
 3. The tenth day of the seventh month was the Day of Atonement, the annual day when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place to present sacrificial blood to symbolize God's provision of atonement for his people's sin.
 4. And every fifty years, this same day marked the beginning of the Jubilee year, when all land that had been bought and sold over last fifty years would revert to its original owners.
 5. The fact that this vision was given on the tenth of the month may very well underscore that it is about the Lord's provision for his people's forgiveness so that they can be restored to their inheritance.
- B. Ezekiel's vision of the new temple extends to the end of chapter 48.
1. It mirrors Ezekiel's visionary tour of the temple in chapters 8-11, a vision in which the prophet was shown various abominations in the temple.
 2. While that vision culminated in the departure of the glory of the Lord from the temple, this vision culminates in the return of the glory of the Lord to the temple.

3. It declares the reversal of God's abandonment of his people to their deserved judgment.
4. While some of the prophecies of restoration in Ezekiel focus on Israel's restoration to the Promised Land, the vision set forth in the book's last nine chapters goes well beyond this.
5. This is a depiction of the consummated kingdom of God in terms of a new temple and its revitalized worship.
6. It is very similar to what we see at end of the book of Revelation.
7. As we begin our study of this vision this evening, we will first consider the question of what kind of temple is being envisioned here, and then we will reflect upon how the vision finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

II. Literal, or Figurative?

- A. Some interpreters (especially dispensationalists) believe these chapters are describing a literal physical temple that will be built in Israel in the latter days.
 1. This is the view of those who embrace the dispensational interpretive framework.
 2. They see these chapters as a blueprint for what will eventually be erected in Jerusalem during this present age.
 3. While this may seem like a straightforward way of reading this passage, there are a number of factors that indicate that it is much better to interpret this vision in a figurative manner rather than in a literal one.
 1. To begin with, there is the obvious fact that this is a vision.
 2. In the Bible, visionary prophecy is highly symbolic, providing its recipients with a dramatic presentation of reality.

3. We saw this in our study of the vision of the valley of dry bones in chapter 37.
 4. While that vision does point forward to a literal resurrection hope, it would be a mistake to insist that what is described in that vision is going to take place in a strictly literal sense.
 5. The context of that vision makes it clear that the primary thing that it is symbolizing is the restoration of God's scattered people and the reversal of the covenant curse.
 6. To interpret the vision of the valley of dry bones in a strictly literal sense would be to miss the point that it is conveying.
 7. The same can be said of the vision of the new temple in chapters 40-48.
- B. Another factor that argues against interpreting this vision in a literal sense is some of the details that are provided and omitted in it.
1. We are told in verse 2 that the Lord showed Ezekiel this vision by setting him on a "very high mountain" that overlooks the city where the temple is located, which is surely the city of Jerusalem.
 2. The problem is that there is no "very high mountain" in Jerusalem.
 3. There is Mount Zion, but it is only 2,400 feet above sea level.
 4. It is not even the highest point in the land of Palestine.
 5. Yet the Scriptures often speak of Zion as the highest of all mountains in a figurative sense because of its theological significance.
 6. If the mountain in the vision is figurative, then it makes sense to say that the temple is figurative too.

7. Furthermore, there are other details in this vision that would not make sense if it was a description of a literal temple.
 8. The tribal allotments, the measurements, the water that flows from the temple — these things ignore basic facts of Jerusalem's geography.
 9. On top of that, one detail that is omitted argues against a literal interpretation.
 10. Unlike the other Old Testament passages where the dimensions of the tabernacle or temple are given, there is no mention at all of the specific materials that are to be used to build this temple.
 11. Why, when God was so careful to specify those details in previous instances, would he leave it completely unaddressed in this instance?
- C. Another factor to take into account is that the design of this temple is highly idealized.
1. The dimensions are dominated by multiples of the number five, with the number twenty-five featuring predominantly.
 2. Everything is perfectly proportioned.
 3. It is a square structure that is perfectly symmetrical, with the innermost sanctuary located in the innermost and uppermost section.
 4. While it is possible that this temple's proportionality was intended to be brought to a literal realization, it is just as possible that this is another indication that it is a figurative representation of a spiritual reality.
- D. It is also significant that there are no instructions for anyone to build this temple.

1. This stands in sharp contrast to the other Old Testament passages that contain the dimensions of the tabernacle and the temple.
 2. And there is a clear reason why there is no command for this temple to be built.
 3. There is no such command because this temple is already in existence.
 4. Ezekiel is being given a vision of the great heavenly temple that God is presently building, the temple that will descend to the earth in its consummated form at the end of history.
- E. Lastly, it is extremely difficult to reconcile a literal interpretation of this vision with the teaching of the New Testament.
1. Chapter 47 says that sojourners from the Gentiles will come to Jerusalem and receive an inheritance among God's people.
 2. But if Gentiles need come to a literal temple in the literal Jerusalem to know God, then Jesus's words to the Samaritan woman would seem to be contradicted when he said, "the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father."
 3. Even more significantly, Ezekiel's new temple includes the offering of sacrifices.
 4. But how can this be done now that Christ has been offered up as the one true sacrifice for sins? (see Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10-18)
- F. One of the features that stands out in the first part of the description of this temple is its massive walls and gates.
1. The outer wall is ten feet thick and ten feet tall.
 2. This gives the impression that this is a mighty fortress that separates the sacred from the profane.

3. Notice how this is underscored by the final sentence of chapter 42: “It had a wall around it, 500 cubits long and 500 cubits broad, to make a separation between the holy and the common.”
4. There is absolutely no possibility of contamination in this temple.
5. This is a significant comfort given that it was the contamination of the old temple that resulted in the glory of the Lord departing from it.
6. This is providing the same assurance that is given in Revelation 21 when it says this of the new Jerusalem: “nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

III. Fulfilled in Christ, the True Temple

- A. The other thing for us to consider as we reflect upon Ezekiel’s vision of the end-times temple is that it is ultimately focused on Jesus Christ.
 1. This vision is not about a man-made structure but about the temple that God is building for himself in Jesus Christ.
 2. Even the old temple in Jerusalem was pointing to that great reality.
 3. The temple was just a shadowy picture.
 4. Jesus is the reality to which it was pointing.
 5. In the words of Edmund Clowney, “It is not so much that Christ fulfills what the temple means; rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed.” [cited in Duguid, 483]
 6. Jesus himself expressed this when he said in the Gospel of John, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
 7. While the Jewish leaders thought that Jesus was referring to the Jerusalem temple when he spoke those words, John tells us that

Jesus was speaking of a different temple, the temple of his body.

8. He was saying that he is the reality to which the temple had always pointed.
 9. This tells us that the Jerusalem temple was only a typological foreshadowing of Christ.
- B. The reason why Jesus is the true temple is because his death fulfilled the function that was symbolically carried out in the old temple.
1. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
 2. He is the one true sacrifice for sin.
 3. This is why we cannot agree with our dispensationalist brothers and sisters who believe there will be a future temple in Jerusalem that will have genuine spiritual significance.
 4. In Christ, the reality to which the temple pointed has come.
 5. Why in the world would we return to the shadows?
- C. The perfect separation of the holy from the profane that is depicted in Ezekiel's visionary temple is also fulfilled in Jesus.
1. He remained perfectly undefiled even as he tabernacled with us in the flesh.
 2. Through his atoning death, he secures the way for all who believe in him to have access to God's presence in his Most Holy Place.
 3. And he calls his church to proclaim this way of salvation to the world, even as we maintain our distinction from the world and separate ourselves from the sin that so easily entangles us.
- D. The Christocentric nature of Ezekiel's temple is also seen in the fact that the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21 and 22 is clearly modeled on Ezekiel's

temple.

1. Like Ezekiel, John is brought to a high mountain to see the holy city. (Rev. 21:10)
2. Like Ezekiel, John is accompanied by an angel with measuring rod. (21:15)
3. The city that John sees is also square, with a great high wall and prominent gates.
4. The river of life flows from the center of the city-temple that John sees. (22:1)
5. At same time, there are differences between Ezekiel's temple and the temple-city in Revelation.
6. John's vision shows how the same themes look different when viewed through the lens of fulfillment in Christ.
7. In John's vision, the entire city has become a giant Most Holy Place, to which all Christians have access.
8. In the new Jerusalem of Revelation there is no temple, because the Lamb himself is its temple.
9. And there is no altar there because the cross has fulfilled that function forever.

IV. Conclusion

- A. The vision of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 40-48 employs language and images that were familiar and meaningful to Ezekiel and his contemporaries in order to assure them of the final triumph of God's kingdom.
 1. God accommodated the revelation that he gave in this vision to the capacities of its recipients.

2. For Ezekiel and the other Jews of his day, the best way to convey this was through the image of a perfectly ideal temple.
 3. As with the images in the book of Revelation, the point is not to give us a picture that we can perfectly envision.
 4. In fact, some of the descriptions of this temple are extremely difficult for us to envision, perhaps even impossible.
 5. The point is to overwhelm our imagination so that we can reflect upon the glory of what lies in store for us as God's redeemed people.
- B. Ezekiel's vision of the idealized temple is a picture of the glorious future that lies ahead of us.
1. We are quick to lose sight of this future as we go about our day to day lives.
 2. We get so caught up in the things of this world that we forget that in Christ we possess an inheritance in a world whose greatness infinitely surpasses the bounds of our imagination.
 3. God gave us this vision of the future so that we could draw encouragement from it and renew our hope amid the discouragements and cares of this life.
 4. On the last day, the veil that hides heavenly reality from our view will be removed.
 5. Jesus' glorious dominion and our union with him will be fully evident for all the world to see.
 6. On that day, we will be fully revealed for what we truly are in Christ: a holy temple in the Lord.