

# Ezekiel's Millennial Temple?

Ezekiel 37 - 48

Ezekiel speaks of a sanctuary that would be eternal (Ezek. 37:26-28), a law that would be eternal (Ezek. 37:23-26), and a king that would have an everlasting rule (Ezek. 37:23ff). The description of this sanctuary or temple is detailed in apocalyptic language in chapters 40 – 48. A battle would take place between Israel and Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38). Are these events literal or to be taken figuratively? Did the prophet give the dimensions of “Ezekiel’s Millennial Temple” (a temple to be built by Christ while He reigns a thousand years on earth) or a spiritual figurative temple that represents the kingdom of God? This short study shall examine the question.

Many Premillennialists believe that what is being described in Ezekiel 37-48 is a “millennial temple” that will be constructed during Christ’s 1000 year reign on the earth. The thrust of their argument has to do with hermeneutics (i.e., the science of Biblical interpretation). To the Premillennialist, the passages of Revelation 20-22 and Ezekiel 37 – 48 must be taken literally rather than figuratively. Charles Lee Feinberg stated, “Along with certain other key passages of the Old Testament, like Isaiah 7:14 and 52:13-53:12 and portions of Daniel, the concluding chapters of Ezekiel form a kind of continental divide in the area of Biblical interpretation. It is one of the areas where the literal interpretation of the Bible and the spiritualizing or allegorizing method diverge widely. Here amillennialists and Premillennialist are poles apart. When thirty-nine chapters of Ezekiel can be treated detailedly and seriously as well as literally, there is no valid reason a priori for treating this large division of the book in an entirely different manner” (The Prophecy of Ezekiel; pp. 233 taken from “The Millennial Temple of Ezekiel 40 – 48; An Exercise in Literal Interpretation by Dr. John C. Whitcomb). Though it will be admitted that the first step of interpretation is always to be literal, we must not be so blind as to ignore the obvious as well as the context. Ezekiel’s vision of God’s glory seen in the chariot (Ezek. 1:4ff), the vision of the seventy elders (Ezek. 8:8ff), the covering of sinners (Ezek. 13:17ff), Jehovah’s marriage to His people (Ezek. 16:8), and David being pronounced the future king of God’s kingdom (Ezek. 37:24) are a few examples where the prophet uses imagery and figurative language to get a point across.

The other side of the issue is the amillennialist who believes that sanctuary in Ezekiel 37-48 is not a literal building but a spiritual building depicted in figurative language (this I believe to be the interpretation of these 12 chapters of Ezekiel). Note that Paul quotes from Ezekiel 37:26 at II Cor. 6:16-18 in relation to the kingdom of God being within one. Clearly the sanctuary Ezekiel is speaking of in these chapters is the Kingdom of God that has Christ over it as king (cf. Ezek. 37:24). Furthermore, it becomes apparent that this future kingdom would be realized by the word of God so that the nature of the kingdom is not only spiritual (cf. Jn. 18:36; Rom. 14:17) but that it exists within each individual who accepts the teachings of Christ (i.e., His everlasting covenant of peace) (cf. Ezek. 37:26; Mk. 12:34; Lk. 17:21; II Cor. 6:16-18; Jn. 14:23; I Jn. 4:12-16). Jesus says His Kingdom would be established during the lifetime of some of those who stood and heard Him preach (Mk. 9:1). His kingdom came into existence on the day of Pentecost (Isa. 2:2-4; Acts 2:17ff; 3:24). Those who so receive this spiritual kingdom, through hearing the gospel preached (I Thess. 2:12), are added to the kingdom through baptism (Jn. 3:3-5). God’s Kingdom has a king (Col. 1:13) and a law (everlasting covenant; Gen. 17:19; Gal. 3:8, 16; Matt. 4:23; Heb. 13:20). Those who receive the law of Christ (i.e., are obedient through faith) become citizens of the Kingdom of God (Eph. 2:18ff). The collective group of citizens in the Kingdom of God are called the church of Christ (cf. Isa. 2:2ff; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28ff; Acts 2:17ff; 3:24; Rom. 16:16; Col. 1:13; I Thess. 2:12). Lastly, the kingdom of God represents heaven (I Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; James 2:5 etc.). The thought is clear; those who

accept the teachings of Christ (receive the Kingdom of God within) and are baptized enter into the Kingdom of God (the church) there remain (unless unfaithful) until they receive their eternal inheritance of heaven (i.e., the eternal Kingdom of God) (I Cor. 6:9).

Neither Ezekiel, Daniel, or the apostle John write of a literal thousand year reign of Christ that will occur after a rapture of righteous souls and seven years of tribulation (Premillennialism). There is no place for a literal temple in the kingdom era where animal sacrifices are to be made (cf. Ezek. 45:18ff). Ezekiel is simply speaking in a language in which those of his day could understand. A temple where God's glory will be present, He will be worshipped, and a river flows out of it with the power to make whole that which was spiritually sick (Ezek. 47 / Rev. 22:1ff). Here is a spiritual Kingdom where man receives the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with Jehovah God.

John C. Robertson