

Ezekiel

Ezekiel 1:1-48:35

By Phil Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2019-10-27

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I. Introduction - all of life is under God's inspection

Today is Reformation Sunday, and Ezekiel deals with a lot of the same issues that the Protestant Reformation did. It definitely contrasts pure sovereign grace with the works righteousness of the Jews of his generation. I love the sovereign grace of chapter 36. Ezekiel also confronted the enormous problem of the sacred/secular dichotomy, where they would worship God on the Sabbath and ignore Him in the rest of their week. Ezekiel seeks to bring reform to Israel's doctrine of God, its worship, how they treated the temple, the idolatry of both church and state, and many other areas.

And Ezekiel deals with what I consider to be the most central aspect of at least the Reformed side of the Reformation, and that is that the Lordship of Christ over all of life transforms all of life into the sacred. You can serve God just as effectively as a plumber as I am doing as a pastor - that was the viewpoint of the Reformation. So the Reformed church sought to bring reformation to economics, politics, art, and many other areas of life, and as a result it was more than a temporary revival - Reformation swept up all of life into God's kingdom in many countries. Of course, God is sovereign over the results - and chapter 33 will expose something that was a counterfeit of Reformation. He in effect says, "Nope. That's not enough. Don't get excited about that."

In any case, all of life comes under God's scrutiny in this book. He deals with marriage outside the bedroom and marriage inside the bedroom. He judges politics by God's Word, but also looks at the politician's heart and life. He takes offense at business practices that are unethical and economics that are false. One commentary says,

His [that is, Ezekiel's] words touch on finance and debt, economic development, honesty, allocation of capital, workplace evaluations, fair return on investment, economic opportunism, success and failure, whistle-blowing, teamwork, executive compensation, and corporate governance.¹

And you will have to read that commentary to see how this book deals with all of those things. Its a commentary on the whole Bible that seeks to apply the Bible to the workplace. But the point is, Ezekiel makes clear that God

¹ Theology of Work Project, *Genesis through Revelation*, ed. William Messenger, vol. 3, *Theology of Work Bible Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2014–2016), 55.

claims every square inch of the life outside of us and every square inch of the life inside of us.

What do I mean when I say He claims every square inch inside of us? There were people in Ezekiel's day who were outwardly upright, but God was offended with the pornography that was going on inside of their hearts. And in chapter 6:9 God says, "I was crushed by their adulterous heart..." What goes on inside of our hearts matters a great deal to God. Ezekiel wants us to clean up not just the outside of the cup, but have the Holy Spirit clean up the inside as well. That was a big part of the shepherding critique of chapter 34 and that was a big part of the Holy Spirit's work in chapter 36.

Too many Christians think that what goes on between their two ears is nobody's business. But God sees every thought as clearly, and more clearly than you do. In chapter 14:3 God judges the idols that have been set up in the hearts of His people. Our hearts are idol factories - unless we subject them to God's grace. He addresses that in Ezekiel 14. If you watch inappropriate videos on your phone, Ezekiel 14:3 says that He won't listen to your prayers. He says, "Son of man, these men... put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them?" And the implied answer is, "No! I'm not going to listen to their prayers." Ezekiel is a hard hitting book that rips the facade and pretense out of our lives and exposes us to the clear view of God Himself. It's such an appropriate book for Reformation Day. So that's what I mean by every square inch inside of us.

What do I mean by every square inch outside of us? In chapter 20:16 he notices when we don't take seriously His Sabbaths. In 18:6 God says that there are certain common sexual practices in marriages that He takes great offense to. Your bodies are not your own; they belong to God. In 18:7 he goes after people for taking advantage of the naive in their business practices. The same commentary said of that verse:

God's denunciation of arrangements that provide no benefit for buyers doesn't have to be limited to securitized debt obligations. Ezekiel 18:7 is about loans, but the same principle applies to products of all kinds. Withholding information about product flaws and risks, selling more expensive products than the buyer needs, mismatching the product's benefits to the buyer's needs—all of these practices are similar to the oppression depicted in Ezekiel 18:7. They can creep into even well-intentioned businesses, unless the seller makes the buyer's well-being an inviolable goal of the sales transaction. To care for the buyer is to "live," in the terminology of Ezekiel.²

So the first half of the book is a detailed critique of every imaginable kind of compromise that Christians can make, and guarantees that when we do that,

² Theology of Work Project, *Ibid.*, 60.

we will suffer. It's never in our best interests to sin.

The second half of the book gives hope to Israel that God will be with them. It's direction, not perfection. God knows we won't be perfect, but if we keep getting up in the boxing ring and going after the world, the flesh, and the devil, God is pleased with us. By grace He can be pleased with us even when we get knocked down in the boxing ring. Its those who give up and who too easily concede their defeat that begin grieving the Holy Spirit. Hebrews says, "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin." Where are the broken noses and the cuts on your face; where is the sweat (to use a boxing metaphor)? You don't seem like you have been taking the battle seriously.

Of course, the second half of the book does not tell us to do it alone - so the boxing metaphor is not really adequate. Christ will be in the boxing ring (so to speak) strengthening our will power, giving us motivation, changing our hearts, and helping us to land our punches strategically. And in chapter 36, He promised to do inside of them what they could not do on their own. The second half of the book gives such confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit that we realize that eventually the supernatural waters of the Holy Spirit will bring healing to the whole world (that's chapter 47).

So where the first half of the book is a dark picture of every area of life stained by sin, the second half of the book moves to the Messianic kingdom when every area of life will eventually be transformed by God and be made holy by God. The grace of God's kingdom will extend more pervasively than sin had extended in the first half of the book. When you see how far sin had extended in the first half of the book, that is an astonishing promise! As Romans 5:20 worded it, "where sin abounded (that's the first half of the book), grace abounded much more (that's the second half of the book)." I love that phrase "much more." It will indeed be an awesome thing when thoughts will be holy, conversations will be holy, sex will be holy, eating, drinking, and whatever we do will be holy and will be done to the glory of God. Zechariah promises that even the bells on the horses will be holy to the Lord.

II. The person and times of Ezekiel

So let's look at this interesting character, Ezekiel. Ezekiel had already seen a lot of depravity, war, and trouble in Israel before he was deported in the second deportation. He was 17 years old when Daniel had earlier been deported in 605 BC and may have been about the same age as Daniel. But

Ezekiel was left in Israel during that first deportation, and no doubt sorrowed as Daniel, Shadrack, Mesheck, and Abednego were taken captive.

You see, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in three stages. He first defeated Jehoiakim in 605 BC and carried off some of the cream of the crop of citizens, including Daniel and his three friends. When Jehoiakim & Jehoiachin rebelled again, there was further punishment, and Nebuchadnezzar carried off another 10,000 hostages, including King Jehoiachin and Ezekiel. Ezekiel would have been 25 years old when he was taken to Babylon - perhaps having just started his apprenticeship to be a priest in the temple. So Ezekiel's captivity started 13 years after Daniel 1, and six years before the book of Lamentations. It is helpful to see where these books line up. Chapter 1:1 says,

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year...

Thirtieth year of what? The thirtieth year of Ezekiel's life. That let's you know that when Ezekiel was in Israel (five years before this) he wasn't old enough to be a priest yet. Priests entered the ministry at the age of 30, though they could start apprenticing at the age of 25. He grew up in the temple, was hugely interested in the purity of the temple, was intimately aware of everything about priestly ministry in the temple because he was no doubt trained for it his whole life, but he didn't get to be a priest.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

So his prophetic ministry started in that year. Verses 2-3 place this in terms of the chronology of Israel as a whole.

On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. So if Jehoiachin was taken into captivity in 597 BC, and if this is five years later, then we are in 592 BC, and just 6 years before Jerusalem would be totally destroyed in Nebuchadnezzar's third invasion.

III. Overview of the book

Let's do an overview of the whole book. In verse 4 God suddenly gave Ezekiel his first vision. It was a vision of a magnificent cloud with four cherubim angels, standing on wheels within wheels, and forming the foundation for a chariot throne on which sat a glorious being representing "the glory of Yehowah." The Hebrew word for "glory" clues us in to the fact that this is none other than the glory cloud that used to reside at the temple. What on earth is the glory cloud doing in pagan Babylon? This would have

puzzled a Hebrew reader. The glory cloud and cherubim were supposed to be in the temple! That was the throne of God.

Well, the whole of the first section will resolve this puzzle. God systematically informs Ezekiel that the nation called Judah in Palestine is no longer His people. Look at chapter 2:3.

And He said to me: “Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

You won’t catch the significance of this as strongly in the English. He calls them a rebellious nation - and the Hebrew word for “nation” is the word *goy* that is reserved for the Gentiles. This is one of the rare times that Israel is called a *goy*. Israel has become one of the *goyim* - the Gentiles. In other words, it had become pagan. In fact, in chapter 16, he will repeatedly speak of Judah as Sodom. That’s the same thing that Revelation does in AD 66.

So these first two chapters alone completely overturn the message of the false prophets in Judah who had claimed that King Zedekiah (the last king) would restore Israel’s glory and that the Jews who had been exiled so far were accursed by God and abandoned. They told the people to not listen to Ezekiel because Ezekiel was obviously abandoned by God - otherwise he wouldn’t be in Babylon. Of course, Jeremiah had already predicted that it was the good figs who would be cast into exile and the bad rotten figs who remained in the land to rot. But the false prophets didn’t believe Jeremiah either. They thought, “We are the people of the land. God is in favor of us.” They had the same theology that the Dispensationalists have about the Talmudists today. Dispensationalists think that they are God’s special people regardless of what they do. Ezekiel argues against that.

Well, in chapter 1 we find that the glory cloud had abandoned Judah and was now with the exiles in Babylon. God would reconstitute a new Israel from the remnant, would leave the temple and reside with his people as a new sanctuary in Babylon. This vision is a remarkable theological statement and serves as the perfect introduction to section 1.

Section 1, which is chapters 1-11, explores the question of why the glory cloud is in Babylon. God commissions Ezekiel to bring a series of accusations against Israel. We have already looked at some of those in the introduction. They basically ignored God’s laws in every area of their lives. He has to warn them that the first two deportations of people are nothing compared to the total destruction of city and temple that is about to happen in less than 7 years.

This is the section where Ezekiel does some rather interesting public drama (a kind of street theater) that helps to illustrate his messages of judgment. He builds a small model of Jerusalem and stages an attack against it with model horses and soldiers. I think that drama would have been kind of fun to do.

He shaves off his hair and carefully weighs it, burning one third, striking one third with the sword, and scattering one third to the wind. That symbolized that one third would die of pestilence and famine, one third would die by the sword, and one third would be scattered to the winds.

Probably the most bizarre of all of the street theatrics is found in chapter 4, where Ezekiel is tied up and left lying on his left side for 390 days with Israel's sins symbolically laid on him, then lying on his right side for another 40 days. And God supernaturally kept Ezekiel from being able to move his body during that time. He ate and drank very limited rations the whole time and was supposed to eat barley cakes cooked on human dung to symbolize the dire straights that the citizens of Jerusalem would experience under the imminent siege of Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel begged off from having to cook with human dung, so God relented and let his food be cooked over cow dung instead. But still - it was tough going for Ezekiel during this particular street theater.

I've often wondered how he went to the bathroom or cleaned up if he couldn't move for well over a year. Were there people who took care of him? He did have a wife up until chapter 24. She died when Nebuchadnezzar began the siege of Jerusalem, so it may be that she was his caretaker during this time of supernatural immobility. But it is obvious that prophets didn't have an easy job. It is not a job you would want to sign up for. Of course, God prepares his heart for that difficult office and he fulfills it faithfully.

And these early chapters are just filled with drama and powerful metaphors. He was obviously very skilled in what God called him to do.

In chapters 8-11 Ezekiel is lifted up by his hair and flown (in a vision - obviously this was not a literal flying, but flown in a vision) to Judah where he sees public worship of a pagan image in the outer court of the temple, women worshiping Tammuz, sun worship inside the temple and other forms of idolatry that are so bad that he realizes that there is no hope for the nation. In chapter 9 God commands His angels to put a mark on the foreheads of the faithful remnant who weep over this ungodliness. That mark would protect them from the judgments to come. I find great encouragement in that action. God can protect his remnant during catastrophic judgments.

In chapter 10 the glory cloud of God abandons the temple and flies east to Babylon. So that explains why the glory cloud that was supposed to be in the temple ended up in Babylon with the remnant. God couldn't stand being in that temple any longer. And he ends chapter 10 by saying that this was what he saw in chapter 1. It brings it around full circle. It explains the presence of God's glory in Babylon. God had abandoned His temple completely.

But He also makes the important point that He hadn't abandoned His people. God went into exile with His people and promised to return a remnant back to Israel in the future. But that God would go into exile with His people is such a comforting thought. Even in our most dire circumstances God promises that He will never leave us nor forsake us. He was there with Paul and Silas in the prison. He was with Paul when his ship sank. And He continues to abide with His remnant today. Praise God for His presence and help.

So the first 11 chapters serve as an explanation for the coming judgments predicted in the next two sections. Chapters 12-24 predicts imminent and catastrophic judgment on Israel, and chapters 25-32 promise imminent and catastrophic judgment on the nations. God is an equal opportunity judge. All nations must bow before His Lordship or face the music. All nations must submit to His laws, receive His grace, or be similarly judged. People who deny that our nation could possibly be subject to catastrophic judgment for its iniquities have either not read the prophets of the Old Testament or have read them with blinders on their eyes. Ezekiel is not simply quaint history. Ezekiel is instruction on how God tends to judge nations and gives us the signs that would indicate that catastrophic judgment might be imminent.

Well, let's go through section two. In chapter 12 God asks Ezekiel to destroy the wall of his house by digging a hole in it, crawling through that hole with some belongings on his shoulder. It was another form of street theater. When the people asked him what on earth he was doing, he told them that soon the king of Judah would try to escape from Jerusalem by digging a hole in the wall, crawling through that hole with some belongings. But then the king would be caught, blinded, and then brought to Babylon. And of course, this prophecy was fulfilled to a "t" shortly. 2 Kings 25:7 says,

Then they killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him with bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

The last thing the king saw was his sons being killed. What a ghastly last memory of your sight.

In chapter 15 Ezekiel likens Judah to the wood of a wild vine to show why

God is throwing Judah away. And if you have ever tried to work with a vine, you will appreciate that metaphor. A wild vine is useless. It is useless for fruit, useless to make furniture, can't function as a peg in the wall since it is so bendy, and isn't even good for fuel in the fire. It is hard to burn and only fit to be thrown away. What a powerful metaphor of how useless Judah had become to God.

In chapter 16 he likens Judah to an orphan whom God had raised up, clothed, provided for, and eventually married. Yet Judah proved to be a rebellious and adulterous wife. And yikes, the description of her harlotries is quite graphic. She is never satisfied with adulteries, and unlike a harlot who charges people to sin with her, she pays everyone to sin with her. Indeed, she was worse than a harlot, and is then called Sodom.

The whole section is filled with metaphors and more street dramas that stand as a powerful indictment of Judah. Some of the most risqué language in the Bible is used to describe Israel with the metaphor of two promiscuous sisters in chapter 23. It's almost embarrassing to read. All of this stands as a covenant lawsuit against Judah. And it is such vivid language that it captures the hearts of the Jews who heard it.

The next section, chapters 25-33 pronounces judgments against the pagan nations of Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, and Egypt. And most of the chapters focus upon Tyre and Egypt because Judah looked up to them so much and imported so much of their paganism. They seemed so powerful, but they would become as nothing against Nebuchadnezzar.

In chapter 33 Ezekiel is told that he must be a faithful watchman, warning the people of danger to come so as not to have blood upon his hands. It is a message that I take to heart as a pastor. I dare not give messages that soft-pedal God's Word, or God will hold me accountable for your sins - not just my own, and He will hold me accountable for your judgments.

Anyway, at the end of chapter 33 a messenger comes to tell Jeremiah that all of this was fulfilled - Jerusalem has fallen. And then comes a stirring message in verses 30-33, to close off that section. Let me read that for you.

Ezek. 33:30 "As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the LORD.' 31 So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. 32 Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words,

but they do not do them. 33 And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them.”

Ezekiel was pretty excited that a revival might be happening because the crowds loved to hear him. But God warns Ezekiel that this is not true revival and it is certainly not Reformation yet. He gives six things that can still happen without revival happening. These six things can counterfeit true Reformation. And you see these six things in churches that I believe are currently under God’s judgment.

First, God says in verse 30 that interest in the pastor and his message is not a sign of success or revival, and is certainly not a sign of Reformation. Though the people listened, it was for the wrong motives. According to Matthew 7:22 there will be many who have sat under good preaching who will end up in hell.

Second, verse 30 indicates that these people were spreading the message. They were witnessing and engaged in evangelism; they were inviting people to church. But God saw their heart.

Third, they had faithful attendance at church. Verse 31 says “they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people...” But God did not consider that to be a sign of revival - because He knew their heart.

Fourth, they seemed to understand. Verse 32 says, “for they hear your words, but they do not do them...” Understanding without obedience just makes them more guilty.

Fifth, they loved worship and gave great devotion to God in worship. I can just see them raising their hands and telling God how much they love Him. Verse 31 says, “with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain...” God was great in worship, but was nowhere to be seen in their business.

Sixth, they enjoyed the preaching immensely. It was as interesting to them as going to a concert: “Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.”

How can lives seem so right and be so wrong? Ezekiel is one of those books that looks at the heart and says that without our hearts engaged by God, it is all for nothing. These verses call for our minds, wills, and emotions to be engaged with God completely. It calls for radical holiness. Holiness of heart and holiness of life.

And what a great way to end the first half of the book and to gradually transition into what God will do in order to change that situation. The second half of the book shows that Reformation can happen. It shows that it would happen after the exile and would happen again in a far greater way during the age of the Messiah. I love the second half of Ezekiel. It gives hope for Israel, for the nations, and finally for all of creation.

The hope for Israel is in chapters 34-46. God tells the exiles that as a result of God's future judgment upon Babylon, Israel will escape and come back to their land. He promises that the false shepherds of chapter 34 will be replaced eventually with a Good Shepherd, Jesus. But in the meantime, God would raise up leaders who would care for Israel and shepherd Israel in faithfulness just like Jesus was promised to do. There is much that elders and fathers can learn from those chapters about their own shepherding ministry. You dads are called to be shepherds of your families. You will get a lot of good ideas of how to do so in chapter 34.

But first they must be restored to Israel. Ezekiel 36 speaks of Cyrus' future overthrow of Babylon and Israel returning to the Lord and beginning to rebuild the cities of Israel. And I especially like the language of chapter 36:24-34, which shows that God will do it by means of His Holy Spirit within their hearts. This is not merely a political renewal; it is a spiritual renewal. We read part of this before the sermon, but let me read it again within its context. Ezekiel 36:24-34.

Ezek. 36:24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 Not for your sake do I do this," says the Lord GOD, "let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!" 33 "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. 34 The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by.

Now I read more context this time so that you wouldn't assume that this occurs during the time of the New Covenant. It applies New Covenant

language to the post-exilic community. Some people speak of that community as the Prelude to the New Covenant. But what a marvelous promise.

Chapter 37 gives the valley of dry bones being raised up and restored to Israel. It is the same wind of God's Spirit that gives new hearts in the previous chapter that can also raise up a people willing to return to Israel. I used to think it was a literal resurrection, but it is not - and most commentaries (whether Dispensational, Amillennial, Postmillennial, or other) agree that it is not a literal resurrection. There are hints within the chapter that it is metaphorical. It is a metaphor for the seemingly impossible dream of Israel being restored to the land. This had never happened before - for a nation to completely 100% die and to be scattered and then to come to life again. It is the resurrection of a nation from death.

This is immediately followed by the battle of Gog and Magog in chapters 38-39. That took place in the time of Esther, Mordecai, and Nehemiah. Every Jewish man, woman, and child was slated by the wicked prince Haman to be killed, but God miraculously turned it around where every one of the Amalekites associated with Haman the Agagite were killed themselves.

I've written a paper³ outlining 25 reasons for identifying this battle with the battle in Esther, but I'll just give you a few hints. And this really is a pivotal passage to understand if you are to get your eschatology right.

- First, Haman the Agagite (the villain of the book of Esther) is mentioned in three verses in chapter 39 (verses 11,15,16), but instead of using the word "Agagite," it uses the root of that word, "Gog." So Ezekiel calls him Hamon of Gog, or Hamon from Gog. But that makes him an Agogite.
- Second, according to chapter 38:11, Jerusalem and other towns have no walls. That was not true in the time of AD 70, where some preterists place this. In fact, the only time it has been true was during the first years of Nehemiah.
- Third, the battle engages exactly the same nations that were in the empire under Darius in the book of Esther in his twelfth year (Ezek. 38:5,6,8,12,23,13; 39:1,6,7,21,27,28 with Esther 3:12-14). India was not conquered by Darius until his sixteenth year, and so it makes sense that India would be the only nation excluded from this listing. So there is only a small window of time when this battle fits. It fits the battle of Esther.
- Fourth, there are three verses in Ezekiel 38-39 that indicate that this empire-wide conflict was led by a mere prince rather than the emperor, and yet this prince is called the "chief prince," indicating that there were other princes. Well, that perfectly fits the situation of Haman in the book of Esther. The emperor was deceived and not involved. Prince Haman alone led and organized the attack.

3 <https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/Old%20Testament/Esther/battle%20of%20Ezek.md>

- Fifth, in both books, Israel has just recently come back into the land.
- Sixth, this occurs at a time in history when Israel is divided up into tribes (37:19). This rules out any time after the Middle Ages when Israel was so intermixed that there are no tribal divisions discernible anymore. It had to have been fulfilled prior to AD 300.
- Seventh, the people only used horses (38:15), swords (38:4), arrows, bows, war clubs (39:9), and other ancient wooden instruments (39:10). Again, it wouldn't make sense to put this into our future, as Premillennialists do. The Gog and Magog at the end of Revelation is this Gog and Magog being resurrected just prior to judgment day. You don't have to posit a different Gog and Magog, even though it is a different attempted battle. Gog and Magog will get resurrected.
- Eighth, though it is true that the fighting occurs in every province in Esther, and that the focus in Ezekiel is upon the battle in Israel, chapter 39 gives two verses that hint that this was also empire wide. 39:21 says, "all the nations shall see the punishment," and 39:6 says that God will "send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands." So both passages portray fighting throughout the empire, and not just in Palestine.
- Ninth, both books mention that it was anti-Jewish hatred that motivated it (Esth. 3:6,8-10; 9:1,10; Ezek. 38:16)
- Tenth, both books mention that the people wanted to plunder the Jews (Ezek. 38:12,13; 39:10; Esther 3:13)
- Both passages say that the planned destruction was reversed and came upon the enemy.
- Both passages show that there are Gentiles who side with Israel (Ezek. 38:21; Esther 9:3; 8:17)
- In both passages the fear of the Lord falls upon the Gentiles and there is a conversion of Gentiles to the true faith (Ezek. 38:23; 39:7; Esther 8:17)
- In both passages, Israel gains respect and influence among the nations (Ezek. 39:21; ,23,27; Esther 8:17; 9:3-4; 10:1-3)

So this was the battle that occurred in the early years of Nehemiah. Well, all of this being the case, it makes chronological sense that the temple would be built next. And that is what the next chapters (chapters 40-46) are concerned with. If you want a super-brief introduction to this huge topic, Philip Mauro⁴ does a good job of showing that the intricate blueprints given in Ezekiel 40-46 are indeed the blueprints for Ezra and Zerubbabel's temple. This is in his book, *The Hope of Israel*. There are other scholars who have dug deep on the measurements and the history of it,⁵ but I won't have time to do so.

But it's obvious that not everyone agrees, so let me briefly refute the only two alternative theories. The first theory is held to by Dispensationalists, who claim that this temple was never built and therefore it must refer to a

4 Philip Mauro, *The Hope of Israel* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, nd), chapter XI.

5 Though Duncan Heaster is a heretic, he has some helpful material in *The Exiles* (Menai NSW Australia: Aletheia Publications, nd). Another helpful book is Peter Southgate, *God's Temple: Past, Present & Future* (Sutton Dawn Ecclesia, 1975).

future millennial temple. Here are the problems with that view.

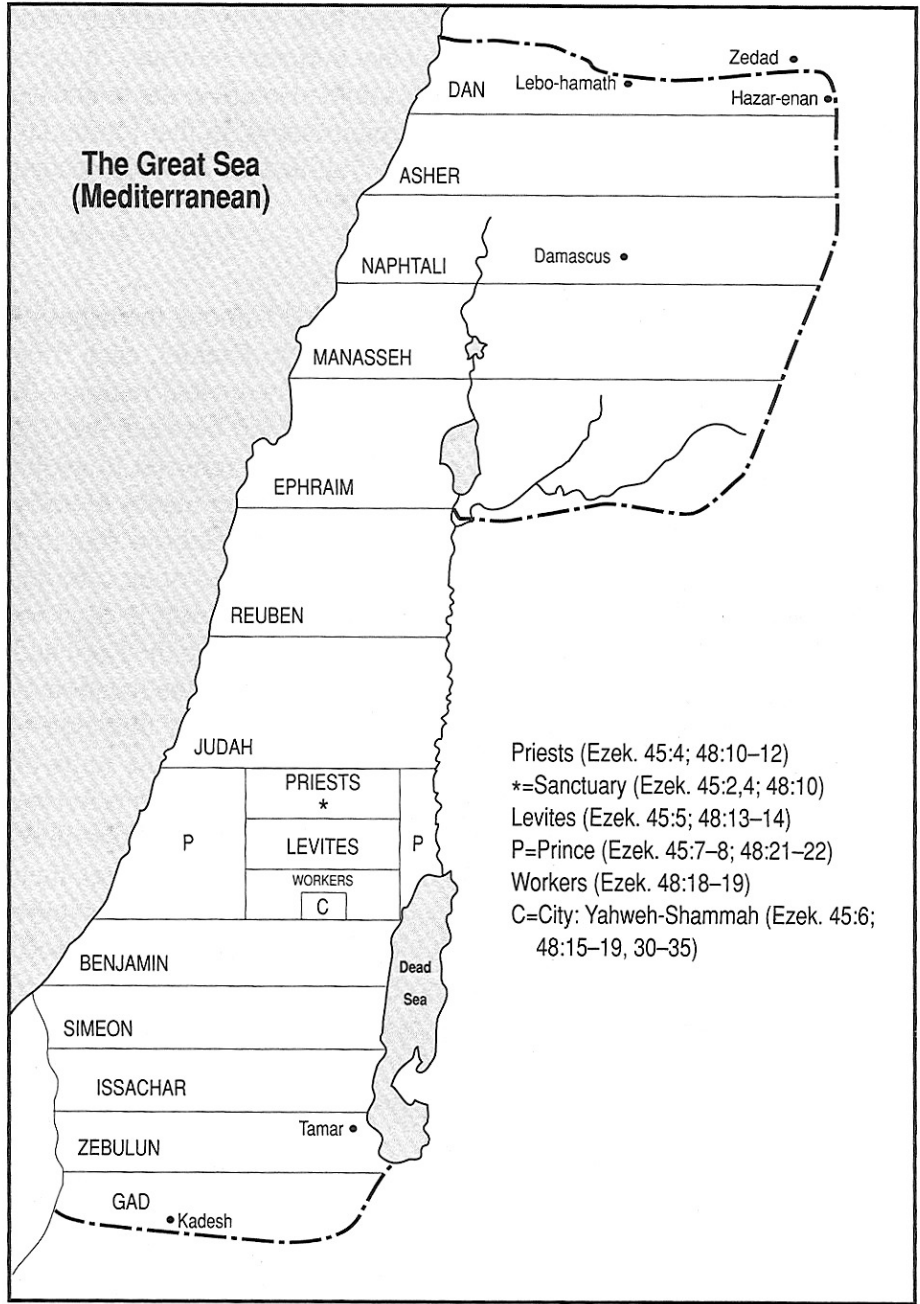
First, Ezekiel is quite clear that the entire Levitical system of sacrifices must be literally restored in this temple. I'll just give you one example: Ezekiel 43:18-19 says,

Ezek. 43:18 And He said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: 'These are the ordinances for the altar on the day when it is made, for sacrificing burnt offerings on it, and for sprinkling blood on it. 19 You shall give a young bull for a sin offering to the priests, the Levites, who are of the seed of Zadok, who approach Me to minister to Me,' says the Lord GOD.

Premillennialists insist that this would not be sacrifice for purposes of atonement, but only for purposes of memorial. But the very next verse denies that, saying, that the blood was for atonement. So does verse 26. So does Ezekiel 45:15, which says, "These shall be for grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them." And verse 17 calls the sacrifices "offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel." To claim that this whole Levitical system will be resurrected in a future millennium for atonement is a blasphemy against the finished work of Christ and completely contradicts the whole book of Hebrews. They are right in making this a literal temple, but they are absolutely wrong in making this temple future to us. This was Ezra's temple.

Secondly, Ezekiel mentions a "prince" and where this prince was allowed to make sacrifices and what his role would be. Premillennialists say that this prince is Jesus in a future millennium. By the way, so do those who hold to the opposite viewpoint which takes everything non-literally. They too say that the prince is Jesus. The problem is that this prince has to offer sacrifices for his own sins (Ezek. 45:22; 46:12). Jesus didn't have any sin. That doesn't fit Christ. And this prince owns only part of the land and is prohibited from taking eminent domain over other people's property (46:18). That doesn't fit Christ. He is Lord and owner of all. Prohibition of eminent domain simply does not apply to Him. Furthermore, Ezekiel has rules which govern how his sons can inherit his land (46:16-18), and where he is allowed to enter (44:3; 46:2,8) and where he can sit (44:3). None of that can even remotely fit Jesus. That fits Zerubbabel and all the later rulers of Israel after the exile - they were princes, not kings. These were instructions for the postexilic princes.

Third, chapter 48 gives the borders of the land around this temple. There are very specific borders that you can see in your outlines for the tribe of Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, and all the tribes. Those tribes no longer exist.



Map of Israel in the Kingdom

--John Schmitt

Any Jewish rabbi will tell you that all genealogies were long ago lost and

that by the Middle Ages the tribes were so intermarried and mixed up that it is absolutely impossible to distinguish even one tribe, let alone all the tribes. There is no way that these tribal divisions could be accomplished in our future. Premillennialists will respond “Hey, God could have miraculously kept them separate without their knowing it and that God might reveal each person’s tribal identity by special revelation in the future.” But there is absolutely nothing in the text that even hints at that. The text is quite clear that these people will know their ancestry. And it gets even more specific. The offerings couldn’t be done by just any Levite. It had to be the Levitical family of Zadok who performs the sacrifices (40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11). No one could do the work without a genealogy to prove they were from Zadok. There is no family of Zadok today. For these and numerous other reasons, the Premillennial idea that a temple and all of its sacrifices will be restored in our future with God’s blessing is grossly unbiblical and undermines the atonement of Jesus. And its just not exegetically feasible.

But I find just as many problems with the people who ignore 98% of the details of this magnificent building and say that it is simply a vision of what the essence of New Covenant worship is. For example, the Geneva Study Bible says, “Ezekiel’s restored temple is not a blueprint, but a vision that stresses the purity and spiritual vitality of the ideal place of worship and those who will worship there. It is not intended for an earthly, physical fulfillment, but expresses the truth found in the name of the new city: THE LORD IS THERE (Ezek. 48:35). God will dwell in the new temple and among His people.”⁶

But if that is all that was intended to be communicated, why not say it in one paragraph instead of confusing us by giving 9 chapters (or 260 verses) of detailed measurements of every nook and cranny of this temple, including window sizes and insets, thickness of wall, stairs, thresholds, vestibules, hallways, gateways, doors, storage cupboards, cooking hearths, intricate carvings and decorations, tables, and a bunch of other blueprint oriented details. I could show you pictures of how the archways and gates are built and beautifully staggered into each other, and how multiple stories were safely made. That makes no sense if this was not intended to be a blueprint, but was instead intended to only symbolize the simplicity of spiritual worship in the New Covenant. It seems anything but that. This is Old Covenant worship entirely.

And why the detailed instructions on how sacrifices were to be offered, what

6 Whitlock, Sproul, et al (eds), *The New Geneva Study Bible" (Nasville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1315.

clothing the priests would have to wear so as not to sweat. If these aren't real priests, why does 44:22 say "They shall not take as wife a widow of a divorced woman, but take virgins of the descendants of the house of Israel, or widows of priests." Even on the surface it appears to be literal blueprints and instructions sufficient to guide Ezra and the priests on how to do everything that needed to be done in the temple. It even specifies that the priest is to cover his head when he represents Israel before God in the Holy Place, but he is commanded to uncover his head when he comes out to represent God to the people. Why? Because all glory but the glory of God must be covered. When he represents the people he is the the glory of the people and wears their names on his breastplate. So his head must be covered. When he comes out he represents God's authority to the people and preaches to the people, and since he represents God's glory, his head must not be covered. This is why Paul said that his teaching on headcoverings and even long hair and short hair was simply an exposition of the Old Testament. There isn't anything new in Paul's teaching in that chapter. It sure looks like these instructions were intended to be followed by literal priests.

Second, what I have just said seems to be the case, is explicitly said in chapter 43:10-11. In that paragraph God explicitly tells Ezekiel that Israel must follow every detail of this blueprint. They are not to just ignore it as a generalized symbol. Let me read that. It says,

Ezek. 43:10 "Son of man, describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. 11 And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple and its arrangement, its exits and its entrances, its entire design and all its ordinances, all its forms and all its laws. Write it down in their sight, so that they may keep its whole design and all its ordinances, and perform them.

I don't see how anything could be more clear. These were blueprints intended by God to be followed. In fact, a synonym of "blueprint" is used right in that verse - "design."

Of course, the spiritualizers have two objections. First, they say that the temple is too large to fit into Palestine since it measures as 60 miles square and would require God to change the geography of Palestine if we took it literally. Thus, it is obviously a symbol in their thinking. But they base this on a faulty translation in the King James Version. Ezekiel doesn't mention the measuring unit that he was using. Why he doesn't mention it, we don't know. Maybe he assumed we would use the same measuring unit that Solomon's temple was built with - cubits, not reeds. But unfortunately, the King James inserted an italicized guess of "reeds" into their translation. And it is italicized because it is not in the Hebrew. And that is why so many

images that you see of the temple are way bigger than it was supposed to be. If it was cubits, we are back to a normal sized temple. If it was reeds, then yes, the temple would extend out over the Mediterranean and there would be no place for the city.

But the second objection they bring is that everyone agrees that the trickle coming out of the east gate of the temple that keeps miraculously getting larger and larger until you can't swim over it; indeed, until it brings healing to the whole world, is obviously not a literal river. And if that is not a literal river, then the temple should not be seen as being literal. And actually, that objection makes more sense. If one thing is not literal, maybe the whole temple that the river comes out of is not literal - that is their logic.

But even that is not entirely true. Yes the temple is symbolic, just like Solomon's temple symbolized every detail of the person and work of Christ. But they are still literal temples that symbolize. The same is true of the river - at least as it is in the temple and flowing out of the temple. And I think I will end this sermon by looking at this strange (but I think very encouraging) river. Ezekiel 47, beginning to read at verse 1.

Ezek. 47:1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. 2 He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side. Was this part literal? I believe so. And if not, it was at least symbolized by the literal water that literally flowed out of the literal temple in the first century. The Gihon Spring was a powerful siphon spring that had sufficient force to push water up Warren's Shaft and into the temple.

George Wesley Buchan,⁷ Ernest Martin,⁸ and a number of others have done some fabulous archaeological and historical work to show which of the four theories for the temple's location is the correct one. There is still debate on that in academic circles. Their theory is that the temple was built right over the Gihon Spring rather than a little further northwest where the Dome of the Rock or Haram al-Shariff currently stands. I pointed out in a previous sermon that the huge platform area of Haram al-Shariff is the remnants of Roman Fort Antonia and the temple was immediately southeast of it but right next to it. If that is the case, then everything fits perfectly.

There are certainly solid historical sources proving that the Gihon spring was

7 George Wesley Buchanan, "In Search of King Solomon's Temple," Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, PO Box 25000, Portland, OR 97298-0990.

8 Dr. Ernest Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*. Portland: ASK Publications, 2000.

under the temple. Aristeas reported to King Ptolemy in the 2nd century BC his own eyewitness account of the glories of the temple. In one place in that letter he said, “And there is an inexhaustible supply of water, because an abundant natural spring gushes up from within the temple area.” (Aristeas 89). There never has been a spring in the place where the Dome of the Rock is. But on the oldest theory of the temple’s location you do.

Anyway, Aristeas said that this vast water supply was carried under the temple through an intricate array of pipes that dumped water into cisterns and eventually flowed out of the temple and into the city and providing all the water that the city needed. What a wonderful symbol of the whole city being supplied by water from the temple - the earthly replica of the throne room of God. It symbolized that all of Jerusalem must drink of the Holy Spirit if they are to have life. Aristeas pointed out that some of the water supply under the temple flowed to the area for sacrifices and was used to wash away the blood of sacrifices so quickly that he said the blood was removed in “the twinkling of an eye” out through a different sewer system.⁹

So even the sacrificial area was always pristinely clean. I always wondered how they got rid of the blood; well, he describes it. And the water stream was loud enough that it could be heard running underfoot as you walked throughout the temple. And there are Scriptures that speak of the noise of many waters under God’s throne (Ps. 29:3; 93:4; Rev. 19:6). Well, Aristeas describes the sound of many waters under the temple.

The Book of Enoch, written around the same time, also mentions a stream flowing under the temple (see 1 Enoch 26:2-3).

The Roman historian Tacitus said that the temple “contained an inexhaustible spring.”¹⁰ That is impossible if that was on the huge platform where the Dome of the Rock is. And Tacitus would have known exactly where this temple was. He described the details of the war and the destruction of that temple. There is not a trace of Herod’s temple left - not one stone. The Wailing Wall was part of the Roman Fort - which makes it so ironic for the modern Talmudists to treat that wall as being holy. That wall

⁹ This portion of the account is important. It says, “There are moreover wonderful and indescribable cisterns underground, as they pointed out to me, at a distance of five furlongs all round the site of the temple, and each of them has countless pipes so that the different streams converge together. And all these were fastened with lead at the bottom and at the sidewalls, and over them a great quantity of plaster had been spread, and every part of the work had been most carefully carried out. There are many openings for water at the base [of the altar] which are invisible to all except to those who are engaged in the ministrations, so that all the blood of the sacrifices which is collected in great quantities is washed away in the twinkling of an eye.” (The Letter of Aristeas 1:89-90)

¹⁰ The History of Tacitus, Book V, 12. See <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/histories.html>

represents their enemy, as some modern Jewish scholars have even showed.

But what the inspired Scripture itself says about the water under the temple is most noteworthy. These verses do not make sense if the temple was on the spot of the Dome of the Rock. Psalm 87:7 speaks of springs of water being in Zion. Psalm 29:10 says that “the Lord sits enthroned over the flood” (ESV; see NIV, NET, NAB, Geneva, Amplified, LXX, etc). So that would imply that the mercy seat and Holy of Holies was over a flood of waters. In fact, verse 3 says that He is over the waters (plural). Joel 3:18 says, “a fountain shall flow from the house of the LORD.” Psalm 46:4 says, “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.” The literal river of waters that flowed from the temple¹¹ symbolized the Spirit that would flow from the temple at Pentecost.

But because of the way this stream was diverted eastward, it may well have brought temporary healing to the Dead Sea. I haven’t been able to find any historical evidence of that, but it makes sense to me.

Back to Ezekiel 47. The literal flow of water out from under one of the gates (the East gate) symbolizes Pentecost falling on the disciples gathered in an upper room of the temple premises, and as they left via that east gate, they took the Spirit with them since they were filled with the Spirit. And the flow of the Spirit grew larger and larger until it is destined to fill the world with Spirit-filled Christians. Continuing to read at verse 3.

Ezek. 47:3 And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. 4 Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. 5 Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

So this is describing a miraculous river. He has fluidly moved from symbol to the thing symbolized - the healing influence of the Holy Spirit. He continues to describe this healing using symbolic language from earth.

6 He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. 7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. 8 Then he said to me: “This water flows toward the eastern region [the eastern region was the desert region; the pagan region. So it symbolizes the Gospel going way beyond Israel], goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. [That would be a reference to the Dead Sea.] When it reaches the sea, its waters

11 On the physical location see 2 Chron. 23:10-11; 1 Kings 1:38,39; 2 Sam. 6:17; Ezek. 47:1ff. On how this spring symbolized living waters, see Zech. 14:8; Joel 3:16-18; Is. 30:19-26; see symbols Psalm . 93:1-5 ;65:4,9 ;46:3,5 ;36:7-9

are healed. 9 And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. 10 It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many. 11 But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt. 12 Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

Did God heal the Dead Sea for a period of time in order to serve as a symbol? I don't know. But if he did, then the strength of the symbolism is even better. But it is not necessary to hold that.

How much is literal and how much is symbolic is hard to make out sometimes because Scripture often moves fluidly between the symbol and that which is symbolized; between the sign and the thing signified. If the river symbolized Pentecost, then the river of life brings life in history as the Spirit transforms the planet. And it means that there is no restored Paradise in our marriages or anywhere else without the Holy Spirit.

So my position is really a blend of the strongest features of the literalist position of the Premillennialists and the symbolic position of the rest of commentators. And most types in the Bible aren't either/or; they are both/and. Most types were literal historical realities that symbolized spiritual realities. Like the literal rock Moses struck symbolizing Jesus being struck by God, and the water that flowed out symbolizing the Spirit's flow.

IV. Conclusion

So what are we to make of the overall flow of the book? You can look at it through the lens of the Holy Spirit's presence.

The first part has the Holy Spirit forsaking the land of Israel and moving to Babylon. That's a scary state for the land to be in, but it is an encouraging thing for the exiles. The Holy Spirit was with them.

Chapter 36 shows the wind of the Holy Spirit blowing upon the hearts of individuals and making them ready to return.

Chapter 37 shows the same wind of the Holy Spirit blowing upon the bones of national Israel - a nation no longer alive. Yet by God's power they are made alive as a nation and restored to the land.

Chapter 39:29 says, “I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall

have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel,' says the Lord GOD." This is the Spirit of God preserving His people during the battle of Gog and Magog.

Next, the Spirit of God instructs Israel on how to make every detail of the temple, and in 43:5 the Holy Spirit lifted Ezekiel up in the air like he did earlier in the book, and via vision takes him to this new future temple that would be built under Ezra by the postexilic community. And it says, "the glory of the LORD filled the temple." Finally, the Spirit is once again in the temple.

But chapter 47 shows that out of this temple would come Pentecost. Christ's parting instructions to His disciples in Luke 24:49-53 was to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued from on high by the Holy Spirit. Just as Ezekiel says that we can't do our service without the filling of the Spirit, Christ told the disciples that they can't do their service without the filling of the Spirit. And so Luke 24 ends, "they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." It was in that temple upper room that Pentecost filled the 120, and as they preached, others were converted and filled with the Spirit. And as they left the temple via the east gate, the river of the Holy Spirit's presence kept growing and growing. And it is destined to bring healing to all the earth. That is the beautiful message of Ezekiel. Let's pray.