

# **Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Temple**

By Randall Price

One of the most crucial texts for the futurist interpretation of prophecy concerning Israel is the vision of the prophet Ezekiel in chapters 40-48. In this text the prophet presents God's instructions for the construction of a new Temple to be built as part of the promise of Israel's divine restoration. The concern of the exiles, as exemplified by Daniel's prayer, was for a literal rebuilding of both the city of Jerusalem and its Temple (Daniel 9:3-19). Ezekiel's prophecy of the Temple, delivered to these exiles, should be interpreted in light of this literal concern. Recognizing that the Second Temple constructed by the Jewish remnant that returned from the Exile (538-515 B.C.) did not implement Ezekiel's detailed plan, Futurism, therefore, interprets the literal fulfillment of this prophecy eschatologically with the erection of a restoration Temple in the earthly Millennial Kingdom. This text is crucial to futurism because if literal interpretation fails with respect to this prophecy, then there is no reason to insist on a literal interpretation of any Old Testament prophecy, including messianic prophecy, which is an inseparable part of the restoration prophecies.

Despite this caution, the symbolic interpretation of this portion of Ezekiel's prophecy is the dominant view advanced by critical scholars and conservative non-futurists (historicists, preterists, idealists) based on their contention that prophetic visions employ apocalyptic language that uses the literary device of hyperbole (exaggerated speech) to convey idealistic or symbolic, rather than literal, concepts. Therefore, non-futurists explain that the reason why the builders of the Second Temple did not follow Ezekiel's plans for the Temple was because the Jewish audience understood apocalyptic as symbolic rather than literal. However, the symbolic school of interpretation is divided on what this symbolism was intended to portray. Some interpreters believe it was meant to preserve the memory of the First Temple through an idealistic remembrance, others say it idealistically describes the Second Temple, which was constructed upon the Jews return to Judah after the Exile (538-515 B.C.), while others see it illustrating a spiritual ideal (God's dwelling in holiness in the midst of His people) or a spiritual reality (heaven, the eternal state, the Church). It is necessary to evaluate the symbolic school's interpretive theories of this pivotal text and compare it with the literal school's interpretation, to determine whether the intended fulfillment is to be understood as timeless (idealistic), to have occurred in the past (with the First or Second Temples), or is reserved for the eschatological age (the Millennial Temple).

## **An Idealistic Remembrance of the First Temple**

This view draws its support from the need of the returning exiles, some of whom wept when the foundation of the Second Temple was laid, because they had seen the greater grandeur of the First Temple, and others, who born in the Captivity, lacked such a reference point in the past and therefore shouted for joy (Ezra 3:12-13), to share a common historical memory. To satisfy this need, Ezekiel shared his priestly memories in order to preserve the historical heritage of the Temple and its services for a new generation and to comfort them with the message that God was with them as He had been in the past. This interpretation raises a number of textual and historical objections.

First, Ezekiel states that this vision was communicated during the Captivity, not after the Return (Ezekiel 40:1-2). If it was given in the Exile and was meant to unite the Israelites in a common memory of the past and assure them of God's presence, it apparently failed in its purpose since the Israelites were divided in their reaction to the construction of the Second Temple. The argument that God's message was only received, but not delivered, by the prophet in the Exile, cannot be sustained in view of Ezekiel 11:25 which states "Then I told the exiles all the things that the Lord had shown me." Although this applies to the judgment section of the book, is it reasonable to assume the prophet would share only the bad news (the destruction of the First Temple), but not the good news (the prophetic promise of a restored Temple)? However, it is clear that Ezekiel did deliver his prophetic vision to the exilic community, for God's command to him was to describe the plan of the Temple to a still unrepentant "house of Israel" who had "defiled My holy name by their abominations" (Ezekiel 43:8). In fact, the purpose of Ezekiel's description of the plans for the Temple is so "they may be ashamed of their iniquities" (Ezekiel 43:10-11). This is in harmony with the judgment of the book in which Ezekiel is commanded to deliver his message to "the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me" (Ezekiel 2:3-4). By contrast, those who had returned to Judah to rebuild the Temple displayed repentance (Ezra 1:5; Haggai 1:12; Zechariah 1:6; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:38) and therefore could not have been the original recipients of Ezekiel's message.

Second, there was no need for Ezekiel to give a description of the First Temple since such a description already existed, as preserved in the books of Kings and Chronicles (1 Kings 5:1-8:66; 2 Chronicles 2:1-7:22). Moreover, it is obvious from a comparison of the details given in both these texts that the description of the Temple and its services given by Ezekiel varies radically from the historical record of the construction of Solomon's Temple and its services recorded by the traditional authors Jeremiah (Kings) and Ezra (Chronicles). These differences include unprecedented divergences in structure (immensely larger dimensions), style, and ceremony, as well as a river that flows eastward out of the Temple to refresh the arid areas of the Arabah and the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:1-12). Moreover, some of Ezekiel's instructions for the Temple and its service contradict or are a departure from those in the Mosaic Law. For example, Ezekiel's instruction to make the Altar of Burnt Offering with steps (Ezekiel 43:17) violates a specific commandment in the Mosaic ceremonial legislation against such a construction (Exodus 20:26). Some of the apparent departures from the Mosaic Law include the absence of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, no mention of the table for the shew-bread or lampstand in the outer Holy Place, no anointing oil within the Temple or its court, the absence of the High-Priesthood. These factors argue strongly that Ezekiel could not have had the First Temple in view since it was constructed in accordance with the Mosaic legislation (2 Kings 6:12; 8:56-58; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 6:16; 8:12-13).

### **A Plan for the Post-Exilic (Second) Temple**

Another interpretation holds that Ezekiel's description was a visionary plan for the rebuilding of the post-exilic (Second) Temple. This view argues that since the expectation of the exilic community was to rebuild the Temple and restore its service (Ezra 5:11-14), Ezekiel as their priest-in-exile provided these plans to enable them to do so. While this appears on the surface to be the logical position, it requires a non-literal interpretation because the post-exilic High Priest Zerubbabel did not literally employ these plans. However, the same objections to the previous view also apply, since Zerubbabel's Second Temple was a reduced form of the Solomonic Temple and the reinstated services were strictly in accordance with the Mosaic Law (Ezra 3:2-4; Nehemiah 8:1-18; 10:28-39). Too, if Ezekiel's model

formed the basis, even symbolically, for the Second Temple, there should have been some reference to this in the post-exilic prophets who oversaw its construction. However, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah, who led the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, made no mention of Ezekiel's prior instructions. This is quite inexplicable if the purpose for the prophecy was to provide the exiles returning from Babylon a description for renewing the Temple and its services. Moreover, if this were the case, these prophets, critical of the post-exilic delay in rebuilding the Temple, would certainly have included in their address to the exiles an appeal to rebuild based on Ezekiel's Temple plans.

In response, this view has offered some areas of compatibility to the Second Temple, yet such would be expected for any rebuilding of the Temple, and again, the significant differences in topography, dimensions, details, and priestly performance with that of the Second Temple, including the fact that the post-exilic Land of Israel was never divided among the tribes as Ezekiel's prophecy required, argue against the utilization of Ezekiel's model. However, the most significant difference between Ezekiel's Temple and the Second Temple was the absence of the Shekinah Glory. Ezekiel made the departure of the Shekinah the sign of God's judgment on Israel (Ezekiel 10:18; 11:22-23) and envisioned its return as the sign of the Nation's divine restoration (Ezekiel 43:1-7; 44:1-4; 48:35; cf. Ezekiel 37:25-28).

### **A Symbol of a Spiritual Reality**

A final interpretation proposes that Ezekiel's Temple is symbolic of either a spiritual ideal or a spiritual reality. No consensus exist among proponents as to what these symbols signify; consequently, Ezekiel's vision has been said to represent variously the returned Israelite Nation, Jesus, the Church, Christ and the believing community, heaven, and the new heavens and the new earth. Among evangelical and Reformed non-futurists the most common symbol is of Christ as the spiritual temple, taking the statement in John 2:21 concerning "the temple of His body" as teaching that the resurrected Christ would replace the physical Temple in Jerusalem as the place where the presence of God would forevermore be centered. Similarly, the view that Ezekiel's Temple symbolizes the Church on earth or the redeemed saints (Church) in heaven is based on New Testament texts that speak of the Church or Christians as a spiritual temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Ephesians 2:21-22). Again, this analogy is said to indicate that the spiritual organism of the Church replaced the material edifice of the Temple as the site of the indwelling presence of God (the Holy Spirit). In particular, the interpretation of the Temple as figurative of the righteous in heaven or the eternal state is based on a number of correspondences (proponents would say "parallels") between Ezekiel 40-48 and Revelation 21-22. Both accounts are visionary and deal with Jerusalem; therefore, reading the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, especially with a Christological focus, the New Jerusalem of Revelation is read back into Ezekiel's text.

### **A Critique of the Symbolic Interpretation**

Beginning with the aforementioned use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, let us consider the weaknesses of symbolic view in these chapters. While there are a number of impressive correspondences between Ezekiel and Revelation, these would be expected in the shared nature and subject of the visions, especially if both shared an eschatological perspective. Therefore, when one considers these similarities through a comparison of the Millennial Temple and the Heavenly Temple one finds a literal fulfillment and completion of restoration: what was lost in the Garden of Eden (a place

on earth) is restored in the Temple of the Millennial Kingdom (a place on earth). Likewise, both are characterized by the divine presence and universal holiness (seen in the latter by a reversal of previous conditions). However, when we compare the text of Ezekiel with that of Revelation from a symbolic perspective, we find that there are more profound differences than striking similarities. The most significant difference is with the makeup of the objects described. Ezekiel's description of the Temple (aside from its dimensions) is quite ordinary, with the Temple and its implements built of carved wood and common stones (Ezekiel 40:16, 22, 26, 34, 37, 42; 41:16-22, 25-26). It's priests' dress in linen, and sometimes wool (Ezekiel 44:17), sweat (Ezekiel 44:18), need to trim their hair (Ezekiel 44:20), marry (Ezekiel 44:22), need to be cleansed after contact with the dead (Ezekiel 44:25-27), and eat grain and meat (Ezekiel 44:29, 31). This sounds like an earthly arrangement both in structure and service. By contrast, John's description in Revelation of the New Jerusalem is of a celestial city constructed of gold, pearls, and rare gemstones (Revelation 21:16-21), while its priests wear only white robes, never sleep, and never hunger or thirst (Revelation 7:14-16). Another significant contrast is that Ezekiel's city has a well-defined structural Temple while in the New Jerusalem John said he "saw no temple in it" for its spiritual sanctuary will be comprised of "the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb" (Revelation 22:21). Yet another significant difference is Ezekiel's declaration that in his new Temple there will be the reinstatement of the sacrificial system offering "peace offerings," "guilt offerings," "sin offerings" (Ezekiel 44:27) and "burnt offerings" of "fat and blood" (Ezekiel 44:15) "for atonement" (Ezekiel 43:19-20), with the priests and people alike keeping God's appointed feasts and sabbaths" (Ezekiel 44:24). While Christ offered His the sacrifice of Himself in the heavenly Temple and is said to have sprinkled its vessels with blood (Hebrews 9:11, 21-26), there is no statement that the saints will offer sacrifices or celebrate the ceremonial feasts in the New Jerusalem.

This comparison reveals the greatest difficulty for the symbolic interpretation in attempting to explain the spiritual sense of the detailed architectural and geographical measurements, and the intricate instructions concerning priestly dress and the preparation of the sacrifices and offerings. For example, when the text says that eight steps led up to the vestibule of the inner court (Ezekiel 40:31), is it more appropriate to interpret this as a cryptic symbol or as an architectural measurement? It has no discernable sense if taken as a symbol, but the meaning is simply understood if it is part of an actual design. Both Moses (Exodus 25:8-40) and King David (1 Chronicles 28:11-19) were shown a visionary plan (Hebrew *tabnit*) of the sanctuary and went on to construct the literal Tabernacle and (with Solomon) Temple based on what they had seen. The descriptions of structures and vessels in these accounts are identical to that in Ezekiel and there is no reason to believe he was not shown the same divinely constructed model, as were they. In fact, the terms "plan" (Hebrew *tabnit*) and "design" (Hebrew *tzurat*) in Ezekiel 43:10-11 in the instructions concerning the visionary Temple are best understood as architectural terms that expect the activity of literal construction. Moreover, the claim that Ezekiel is here using figurative language does not explain why his measurements differ so radically from those of the only Temple (Solomon's Temple) with which he and all the exiles were familiar. If it is an intended exaggeration for some symbolic purpose, what in the text determines for us this purpose? For the exiles, there would be far greater comfort in actual plans to rebuild the Temple (which demonstrated the tangible reality of restoration) than an intangible symbol that was not self-interpreting and therefore subject to various applications (as seen in the variety of interpretations in the symbolic school).

If Ezekiel's only intention were to convey spiritual truth through visionary symbols, why would he diverge from accepted ritual standards and established Jewish law? This would not engender spiritual

contemplation but spiritual confusion, for how could such deviations from God's holy requirements be understood spiritually? On the other hand, the returning exiles were quite familiar with Ezekiel's priestly language from the descriptions of the Sanctuary and its service in the books of Exodus and Leviticus (as demonstrated by Jeremiah and Ezra's recording of the Temple's construction in the books of Kings and Chronicles). They would have expected to see these instructions literally fulfilled in the promised divine restoration in continuity with God's previously revealed commands to rebuild. While one might object that the returning Jews could never have hoped to rebuild according to Ezekiel's extraordinary design, there is no suggestion that this Temple was meant for the immediate return, which occurred during the time of Gentile dominion and was inferior in every respect, but was reserved for the eschatological age (as the preceding context of chapters 33-39 argues). Even though the post-exilic community would not experience the promised restoration, they could take real comfort in knowing that the God was with them and would fulfill this promise for their Nation at the end of the age. The same hope of Christ's literal coming at the end of the age has encouraged the saints down through the millennia despite their failure to experience it in their generation.

Unless one has been predisposed to see the Church in the Old Testament through a presupposed theological system and to view ritual language as spiritually anticipating a "New [spiritual] Israel," there is nothing in Ezekiel's prophecy that corresponds to the New Testament Church. As mentioned earlier, Ezekiel 40-48 offers no textual clues that it is to be interpreted symbolically. The entire section is devoid of the kind of unrealistic features that would indicate figurative use, a fact that contrast dramatically with Ezekiel's prolific use of symbols in the early chapters of his book. Indeed, these chapters are said to represent one of the greatest uses of symbols among the Prophets. For example, in the vision of chapter 1:4-28, Ezekiel is called upon by God to perform symbolic acts (concerning the siege and destruction of Jerusalem) such as eating a scroll (Ezekiel 2:8-3:3), writing on a brick and setting up an iron plate (Ezekiel 4:1-3), lying on his side (Ezekiel 4:4-8), cooking strange bread (Ezekiel 4:9-15), shaving his head and beard and burning the hair (Ezekiel 5:1-4), carrying baggage (Ezekiel 12:1-7), eating and drinking with trembling (Ezekiel 12:17-18), and restraint in mourning for his dead wife (Ezekiel 24:15-17). In addition, the book has a number of parables (chapters 15-17, 23-24, 34, 37), which by nature are meant to be understood figuratively (though applied literally).

As demonstrated by the many commentaries adopting the symbolic view, the diversity in interpretation reveals that no shared interpretation is possible. The lack of interpretive clues in these chapters results in the many details in the text being assigned arbitrary meanings or ignored as irrelevant or meaningless by the symbolic school. Yet, this result is the opposite of what the prophet himself desired: "Then I said, 'Ah Lord God! They are saying of me, 'Is he not just speaking parables?'" (Ezekiel 20:49). His concern was that they did not understand the literal interpretation of his symbolic acts (which demanded literal application), but only understood them as symbols (which would result in inaction and so spell their doom). However, some of the people did come to their senses and asked for the literal meaning: "And the people said to me, 'Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?'" (Ezekiel 24:19). Therefore, while Ezekiel could have continued his symbolic imagery in chapters 40-48, and still had in mind a literal structure, the absence of language that would plainly indicate this (as previously), emphasizes his intention that this section be understood as a literal promise for the future.

## The Promise of a Literal Eschatological Temple

Given the objections against the views of the symbolic school presented above, the only remaining option is to take Ezekiel chapters 40-48 literally and its application as eschatological, that is, for the period of the future restoration of National Israel during the Millennial Kingdom. A number of arguments based on internal and external evidence can be made in support of the literal and eschatological interpretation of this section.

(1) *The literary unity of the book requires a literal Temple be understood throughout its chapters.* Chapters 40-48 form an inseparable literary conclusion to the book. Although these chapters constitute a new vision in the prophecy, they are linked with chapters 1-39 in repeating earlier themes in a more detailed fashion. This linkage may be seen in the fact that the beginnings of both chapters 1 and 40 share a number of similar features. For example, Ezekiel's vision of the presence of God in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1; compare 8:1) finds its complement and completion in the vision in the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 40:2). In like manner, the problem created by the departure of God's Presence in the opening section of the book (chapters 9-11) finds an anticipated resolution with its return in this section (Ezekiel 43:1-7). In fact, the concern for the Presence of God could be argued as the uniting theme of the entire text of Ezekiel. Without chapters 40-48 there is no answer to the outcome of Israel, and in particular Jerusalem and the Temple, no resolution to the Nation's history of sacred scandal, and no grand finale to the divine drama centered from Sinai on the Chosen Nation.

Ezekiel's prophecy of the future Temple is the means to restoring the Presence of God to Israel (a physical as well as spiritual concern). Its focus in the book falls into three divisions: (1) Prophecies of the Temple's desecration and destruction (Ezekiel 4:1-24:27), (2) Prophecies of Israel's return and restoration (Ezekiel 33:1-39:29), and (3) Prophecies of the Temple's rebuilding and ritual (40:1-48:35). If it were a literal Temple (the First Temple) whose desecration and destruction was discussed in the first section of the book, the last section's discussion of a Temple's restoration would also expect a structure of the same kind. A comparative view of the exilic understanding of return from captivity reveals the prophets saw the rebuilding the physical Temple as essential to restoration (Daniel 9:20; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-11; Haggai 1:2-2:9; Zechariah 1:16; 6:12-15; 8:3). Would Ezekiel as a like-minded prophet (or God as the ultimate Author) have attempted to comfort his people's physical and spiritual loss with anything other than the literal restoration of a Temple to which the Divine Presence could return?

If it is countered that chapters 40-48 are a spiritual vision and therefore not meant to be a literal reality, the literary structure of the book argues against this possibility. In chapters 8-11 all interpreters are in agreement that the literal First Temple in Jerusalem is in view. Although Ezekiel's depiction of its desecration is visionary and serves as the basis for a spiritual warning to the exilic community of impending divine judgment, not one commentator doubts that an actual structure is described. Again, it must be emphasized that Ezekiel was not physically in Jerusalem when he reported these things, but in Babylon with the Judean exiles. It was "in the visions of God" that he was spiritually transported to Jerusalem (Ezekiel 8:3). Therefore, everything he mentions in this first section concerning the Temple, its "inner court" (8:3), "porch" (8:16), "altar" (8:16), "threshold" (9:3), and "East gate" (10:19), were all seen in a vision. Despite this fact, the symbolic school is unanimous in accepting this as a vision of the literal Temple. Why then in chapters 40-48, when the prophet, still "in the visions of God" (Ezekiel 40:2), mentions the exact same places in the same order: "inner court" (40:27), "porch" (40:48), "altar"

(43:18), and “East gate” (43:3), are these structures now declared to be only spiritual symbols? If the desecration and destruction of a literal Temple was described in a vision, the vision of the restoration and reconsecration of a Temple should also be understood as literal.

(2) *The context of the Temple’s restoration requires an eschatological and literal interpretation.* Chapters 40-48 open with a statement marking the specific date of Ezekiel’s vision: “the tenth of the month [of Tishri]” (Ezekiel 40:1). The Jewish Sages viewed the purpose of this chronological note as marking an eschatological context, since the tenth of Tishri is reckoned as a Jubilee year [Hebrew, *yovel*], and the date of Ezekiel’s vision was determined to be the first Day of Atonement [Hebrew, *Yom Kippur*] of the Jubilee year. Together, this date prefigured Israel’s Day of Redemption in both its physical (Land) and spiritual (repentance) aspects. Rabbi Joseph Breuer notes: “On that day, which summoned the subjugated and estranged among God’s people to accept freedom and called upon all the sons of Israel to return to their God, on that day it was given to the Prophet to behold a vision of the rebuilt, eternal Sanctuary of the future and to receive the basic instructions for the establishment of the State of God that would endure forever”(Sepher Yechezkel, 353). Therefore, from the very first verse the Rabbis considered the context both eschatological and literal.

The restored Presence of God with Israel in His Sanctuary (Ezekiel 37:26-28) appears as the climatic event in the restoration context of Ezekiel 33-37 as well as in chapters 40-48 where it returns to fill the Temple and consecrate it as God’s throne (Ezekiel 43:1-7). The Ezekiel 37 text reveals its eschatological setting by describing this restoration as a time when “David will [again] be king over them (Israel)” (verse 24), an “everlasting covenant of peace” (verse 26) will be established between God and Israel, God’s Sanctuary will [again] be in their midst” (verse 26), and “the nations will know I am the Lord” (verse 28). In particular, the “everlasting covenant of peace” (the idea being of security and well-being in the Hebrew term *shalom*) is unique, being described in more detail in Ezekiel 34:25-29 as Land-centered, completely eliminating harmful animals, guaranteeing security from any foreign invasion, and bringing unparalleled agricultural renewal accompanied by divinely-sent seasonal rains (cf. Zechariah 14:17). Such a covenant was never enacted with Israel in the past and therefore must have its fulfillment in the eschatological age (Millennial Kingdom).

The terms used for the Temple in Ezekiel 37:26-28 likewise indicate an eschatological setting. The Temple is called a *mishkan*, the Hebrew word used formerly for the Tabernacle, and said to be “over them” (Hebrew, *lyhm*). This pictures God’s “sheltering Presence” as once the pitched Tabernacle in the wilderness protected the Israelite tribes. One of the false hopes of the past was in the inviolability of the Temple and its ability to preserve the disobedient Nation simply because it existed. In the future, however, the Nation will not sin and the Temple, with the *Shekinah*, will serve as the source of the Nation’s, and the world’s, prosperity and peace. The Temple is also called *miqdash* “Sanctuary,” emphasizing its holiness, and is said to be, like the covenant and the restoration of God’s Presence, “eternal” (verses 26, 28). Again, such a Temple could only find its fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom where the protective “Glory-cloud” of God will return to fulfill this concept of the Temple (see Isaiah 4:5-6). This Temple, presented as part of the eternal covenant, is that which is expanded upon in greater detail in the prophecy of chapters 40--48.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For additional confirmation of this connection see Mark F. Rooker, “Evidence from Ezekiel,” A Case for Premillennialism: A New Concensus, eds. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 128-129.

The fivefold repetition of “forever” in Ezekiel 37:25-28 serves to show the irreversibility of Israel’s new condition and experience. The Temple is presented here as part of the “eternal covenant,” undoubtedly a reference to the New Covenant. This may also apply to Ezekiel’s Temple since it is said to be built according to “the law of the house” (Ezekiel 43:12), an independent (new) law that rightly belongs to the New Covenant rather than the old.

The restoration Temple introduced in chapter 37 is expanded upon in greater detail in the prophecy of chapters 40—48 as a proleptic [anticipatory] corroboration of these promises. Understanding the nature of the promised restoration in Ezekiel 37 to be eschatological, the exilic community surely must have understood the nature of Ezekiel’s Temple in chapters 40-48 to be the same. For this reason, the rebuilding of the Second Temple did not attempt to implement the architectural design or priestly instructions since they were reserved for the eschatological age. Their assessment of the limited return and restoration they were experiencing under foreign clemency had to be weighed against several factors: (1) The larger proportion of the Jewish population had chosen to remain in Persia and Egypt, (2) Only 49,897 of the Jewish remnant had returned to Judah (Ezra 2:64-65), (3) the low level of spiritual life and commitment to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem evident among the resident Jewish population in the Land (Ezra 3:6; 5:16; 9:1-4; Haggai 1:2-6; Nehemiah 1:3-7), (4) the opposition in the Land and from foreign authorities that postponed rebuilding and restoration of the city and Temple and the inferior state of the completed work (Haggai 1:9; 2:3; Ezra 3:12-13; 4:1-24; Nehemiah 4:7-12). These realities further confirmed that their return and rebuilding was not the fulfillment of the final restoration described in Ezekiel 40-48 but awaited the complete promise of restoration at the coming of the Messiah (Ezekiel 34:11-31). At that time a full regathering of the Jewish Remnant as well a national spiritual regeneration would be affected in keeping with the provisions of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:27-34, 38-40; 33:6-21) as Ezekiel had prophesied (Ezekiel 36:24-28; 37:1-14). If Ezekiel’s readers were interpreting his restoration program for the eschatological age, then they would understand the interruption of Ezekiel’s “Gog and Magog” battle (Ezekiel 38-39) between the discussions of the Temple in chapters 37:25-28 and 40-48. This literary placement not only helped the readers understand an eschatological context for the Temple prophecy, but added the assurance that, unlike the foreign invasions of the past, even this greatest of foreign invasions in the future would not prevent the final fulfillment of God’s plans for Jerusalem and the Temple.

(3) *The description of the Temple indicates that it is to be a literal construction.* The impression the reader has when reading in this section of precise measurements, the detailed design of its courts, pillars, galleries, rooms, chambers, doors, ornamentation, vessels, and the careful instructions concerning the priestly service, is that an actual Temple is intended. Despite this obvious reading, Daniel Block, one of the leading commentators on the book, has contended: “the description of the temple is not presented as a blueprint for some future building to be constructed with human hands ... nowhere is anyone commanded to build it”(NICOT 2:505). Yet, in Ezekiel 43:10-11 it is clearly stated: “As for you, son of man [Ezekiel], describe the Temple to the house of Israel ... and let them measure the plan ... *and do them.*” These verses declare that those Jews who will live in the time of the final restoration (when the prophecy will be fulfilled) are to build the Temple according to Ezekiel’s instructions. Later in this context (43:13-27) when the same kind of architectural measurements as given for the Temple are given for the altar, it is stated that “these are the statutes for the altar on the day it is *built ...*” (verse 18). Literary consistency (as well as logic) demands that if the altar of the Temple is to be built, then so must the Temple itself. This deduction is substantiated by the wording in the command

in Ezekiel 43:11 to the “house of Israel.” The words “observe its whole design and all its statutes, and do them” is parallel in expression to God’s original command to build a Sanctuary in Exodus 25:8-9. If Israel at the beginning of its national history interpreted God’s instructions to build the Tabernacle and carry out the priestly service literally, why would they not interpret its restatement in Ezekiel as literal? When a further comparison is made between the details for the construction of the Temple, buildings, and the sacrificial system in Ezekiel and those recorded elsewhere for the construction of the Tabernacle and First Temple and their service in Kings and Chronicles, there is no reason to take them as less literal or historical. Would the house of Israel be expected to interpret them in any manner other than that which was historically consistent with God’s previous revelation, especially in the absence of any textual guidelines for an alternate (symbolic) interpretation? There is a suitable test that can be applied to this question. If Ezekiel 40-48 is to be interpreted literally and the Temple plans are intended to function as blueprints, then it should be possible to construct an actual model based on these plans. Conversely, if these plans are merely symbolic and never expected to render an actual construction, then no such construction should be possible. But in fact, three-dimensional miniature scale models of Ezekiel’s Temple have been successfully built (see diagram). Is it conceivable that Ezekiel would have communicated such practical instructions if only spiritual or symbolic realities were intended?

Although commentators have long found symbolical and spiritual significance in the many details of the Tabernacle and Temple’s construction and ceremonies, no such symbolism is to be actually found in the biblical text. Of course, there is an analogous use of ritual language in relation to the spiritual service of the believer (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19) and of the Spirit-filled Church (Ephesians 2:21-22), but this is not the same as typological usage in which a type is fulfilled by an antitype. Even in the Book of Hebrews, in which a comparison is made between Israel’s liturgical system and the believer’s gracious access in Christ, where such a symbolic significance might be expected, only a description of the Tabernacle and its furniture is given (Hebrews 9:1-5). This passage does refer to the “outer Tabernacle” as a “symbol” (Greek *parabole*, “figure,” “illustration”) for “the present time” (verses 8-9). While the interpretation of these verses are much debated, the main point is that the Levitical system was inferior in that it offered only limited and exclusive access to God’s Presence. However, this does not mean that the Levitical system did not accomplish the purpose for which God instituted it, nor that it could not be reinstated with purpose in the future. Yet, even if the Scriptures were replete with symbolical and spiritual uses of the entire Levitical system with its Sanctuary, this would in no way affect their literal interpretation since they were, in fact, an historical structure and service. In the same way, finding spiritual or symbolic significance in Ezekiel’s Temple would not affect a literal interpretation. Therefore, even if one could impute symbolic meaning to the Temple and ritual descriptions in Ezekiel 40-48 (although there is no clues for this in the immediate text and no precedence for this in other texts), the interpretation should be considered as literal as were similar descriptions for previous Temples in Israel’s past.

(4) *The eschatological interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48 is in harmony with other Old Testament prophetic passages.* As a restoration text, Ezekiel 40-48 should exhibit traits familiar to and consonant with other such texts in the prophetic corpus. For example, in examining the text that commands the house of Israel to build the Temple (Ezekiel 43:10-11), we find that the time for this is stated to be after “they are ashamed of all that they have done.” The nature of this national “shame” as spiritual repentance was already defined in Ezekiel 36:22-38 as part of the regenerative work of the Spirit (verse 33). The occasion of this national repentance accords with numerous references in the Prophets (Isaiah 55:3-5; 66:7-9; Jeremiah 31:34; Hosea 3:4-5; Zechariah 12:10-13:2), as well as by Jesus (Matthew

24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27), Luke (Acts 3:19-21) and Paul (Romans 11:25-30). These Old Testament passages in their prophetic contexts reflect an ultimate hope for the Nation, which in continuity with the New Testament writers, must be projected into an eschatological Kingdom. This is especially so with respect to Ezekiel's Temple when compared with similar accounts of a future Temple, a raised Temple Mount, and the transformed conditions for its worshippers in the prophetic books, most of which contain eschatological time markers (Isaiah 2:2-4; 56:6-7; 60:10-22; Jeremiah 3:16-17; 31:27-40; 33:14-18; Joel 3:18-21; Micah 4:1-8; Haggai 2:7-9; Zechariah 6:12-15; 14:16, 20-21. As a point of comparison we may consider the statements in Ezekiel 40-46 that speak of the sacrificial system and especially of making atonement for Israel through blood sacrifices. The symbolic school argues that interpreting Ezekiel 40-48 literally means that one must accept a future reinstatement of the sacrificial system, which they believe has been completely fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9-10). While this theological conclusion can be debated, the immediate problem for those who take this position is that a number of other prophets also envisioned both a restored Temple and sacrifices in the eschatological future.

<u>Prophecies of a Millennial Temple</u>	<u>Prophecies of Sacrifices in Future Temple</u>
Joel 3:18	Isaiah 56:6-7
Isaiah 2:3	Isaiah 60:7
Isaiah 60:13	Jeremiah 33:18
Daniel 9:24	Zechariah 14:16-21
Haggai 2:7, 9	

Moreover, not only is Ezekiel in concert with other prophets who predict the restoration of the Levitical priesthood in the future, but Ezekiel's prophecy contains the most important statement of this fulfillment upon which messianic interpretation (which understands a literal fulfillment in Jesus Christ) depends. God promised to Zadok, the Aaronide high priest at the time of David and Solomon (1 Samuel 8:17; 15:24; 1 Kings 1:34; 1 Chronicles 12:29), and his descendants an *everlasting* priesthood (1 Samuel 2:35; 1 Kings 2:27, 35). This promise was the reconfirmation of similar promises made to Zadok's ancestor Phinehas (Numbers 25:13), and Phinehas' grandfather Aaron, the progenitor of the Israelite priesthood (Exodus 29:9; 40:15). The Zadokite priesthood was the dominant priesthood up until the time of the Maccabean Revolt, after which it was corrupted and replaced by political appointments to the priesthood under the Hasmonean dynasty. Thus, the last priests serving the Temple when it was last destroyed in A.D. 70 were not of the legitimate Zadokite line. Jewish sects like those at Qumran, who claimed to be Zadokite priests (1QS 5:2, 9; 1Qsa 1:2, 24; 2:3; 1Qsb 3:22), rejected the Jerusalem Temple and its priesthood and expected their priesthood to regain its position of service in a future Temple to be rebuilt after a climatic end time war in which the Hasmonean priests would be punished (1 QpHab 9:4-7; 4QpNah 1:11). Only Ezekiel unequivocally provides the fulfillment of the promise to the sons of Zadok by designating their priestly line to serve the Temple (Ezekiel 40:46; 44:15).

Ezekiel's contemporary Jeremiah in his prophecy linked the perpetuity of the Levitical priesthood with the perpetuity of the Davidic dynasty and guaranteed it by the perpetuity of the earth's rotation on its axis (Jeremiah 33:17-22). If Ezekiel's prophecy of a future Zadokite priesthood is spiritualized, then, according to the textual link with Jeremiah's prophecy, the promises of the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7:13, 16) could also be spiritualized. This would put New Testament messianic fulfillment in jeopardy since Jesus' messiahship is qualified by His Davidic descent and the promise that

He will be given David's throne (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 1:3). Consequently, if we accept a literal and eschatological fulfillment for the Levitical priesthood we must also accept it for the Temple that they serve, and in harmony with other prophets, Ezekiel depicts an eschatological restoration of which the Temple and its priesthood are an essential part.

Finally, the fulfillment of Ezekiel 40-48 cannot be limited to a temporary restoration such as that which occurred under the Persian administration of Darius I. If Ezekiel's restoration was meant to find fulfillment in the Second Temple, then it must be considered a failure, unless one abandons literal interpretation, which the foregoing arguments will not allow. For this reason Jewish interpreters such as Rashi concluded that the post-exilic community did not experience the predicted restoration and that the Second Temple was not built according to Ezekiel's plan: "The return to Israel in the days of Ezra could have been like the first time the Jewish people entered Israel in the days of Joshua ... However, sin prevented this, for their repentance was imperfect. Since they were not worthy, they did not have permission to build the Temple, which was designated as the Temple for the eternal redemption, for when it will be built according to this design, the [divine] glory will rest upon it forever."

Even though Ezekiel 40-48 lacks some of eschatological language associated with an eschatological context such as "on that day," "in the latter days," these phrases appear in chapters 34-37, and in the immediately preceding chapters (38-39). Moreover, the literary linkage of chapters 40-48 with other prophetic texts that concern the same theme, establishes an eschatological setting. Ezekiel's descriptions include transformations and enlarged boundaries of the Land, Jerusalem, the Temple and priesthood (Ezekiel 44:1-31; 47:1-23; 48:1-35), the return of the Glory of God (Ezekiel 43:1-12), and the unprecedented change from the laws of the past (e.g., Ezekiel 43:17) also indicate that the time of fulfillment is eschatological. In addition, Ezekiel, in conjunction with several of the prophets, report extraordinary topographical changes that will occur to the Land of Israel provide the answer to this objection. During the Tribulation period the earth will experience violent changes as earthquakes alter both cities and terrain. One of the cities hardest hit is Jerusalem (Revelation 11:13), which will also suffer a mountain splitting earthquake at the end of the Tribulation with the ascent of Messiah to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4-5). Zechariah also speaks of the flattening of huge portions of land and the elevation of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8, 10). Other prophets also say the Temple Mount itself will be raised up above all other mountains (see Isaiah 2:3; 60:14; 61:6; Zechariah 8:20-23). Ezekiel reflects these changes not only in its enlarged territory for the tribal allotments (Ezekiel 47:13-23; 48:1-14, 23-29), but also by the changes it describes taking place in the southern part of the country (Ezekiel 47:1-12). According to Jeremiah 3:17 and Zechariah 14:20-21 the entire city of Jerusalem will become the Throne of the Lord and be a dedicated holy place. This means that Ezekiel's Temple will occupy an elevated and greatly expanded Temple Mount, which will include the former city of Jerusalem itself (Ezekiel 48:10). To the north of this will be the place of the priests (Ezekiel 48:11-12), south of the Temple will be the place of the Levites (Ezekiel 48:13-14), and south of this a new city will be built for workers out of the Israelite tribes (Ezekiel 48:18-19). To the east and west of it will be an administrative center for the prince (Ezekiel 48:21-22). In this list, one of the most distinguishing factors in Ezekiel's Temple is that the restoration of the rest of Land of Israel appears to be sourced out of the Temple. In Ezekiel 47:1-12 fructated waters will flow from beneath the Sanctuary transforming the Dead Sea into a body of water teeming with aquatic life and from there possibly renewing all of the Land so that it resembles the Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 36:35). Therefore, given the predicted topographical changes predicted in the prophets, the new boundaries and dimensions of the Temple in Ezekiel 40-48 are realistic and expected.

(5) *The theological resolution of progressive revelation demands that Ezekiel 40-48 be fulfilled literally and eschatologically.* The demand for literary resolution argues that the departure of the Shekinah Glory in Ezekiel 9-11 be completed by its return in Ezekiel 43:1-7. Ezekiel presents the return of the Shekinah along the path of its previous departure, carefully describing the order of return to match the order of abandonment detailed in chapters 9-11: *departure*: Holy of Holies to Inner Court to Eastern Gate to east; *return*: east to Eastern Gate to Inner Court to Holy of Holies. This reverse progression was obviously intended to convey the sense that what had been lost (the Divine Presence) was being restored. None of Ezekiel's original audience would have understood these two events other than as complementary events, the latter resolving the former. If (and no commentator doubts it) the Divine Presence literally left the First Temple before its destruction, why should not it literally return to the Final Temple after its rebuilding? However, theological resolution also demands this be literally fulfilled. Nowhere in Scripture (or in extra-biblical Jewish literature) is it stated that the Divine Presence filled the Second Temple as it did the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the First Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:13-14; 7:13). Rather, Jewish sources (e.g., *Tosefta Yom Tov*) made a point of its absence and relegated such a hope to the eschatological period. Progressive revelation also requires that the theological dilemma created for Israel by divine judgment in a literal exile be resolved by a divine grace in a literal return and restoration. These are the two sides of prophetic prediction in the prophets, of which Ezekiel is a part. The rebuilding of the Temple and its dedication by the installation of the Shekinah resolves is the center point of the restoration program because it rejoins God to His people restoring them to their chosen status as a holy Nation and a kingdom of priests as well as a light to the nations (cf. Ezekiel 37:27-28). If there is not a literal restoration (not a symbolic restoration through the Church) of what was literally lost through a national repentance toward the Messiah, national regeneration, return and restoration in a Messianic Kingdom, then the consummation in history is reduced to an ideal that makes all of the promises to Israel subject to reinterpretation rather than actual resolution. While the symbolic school has opted for this interpretation, it is not consistent with Scripture, as salvation history has been progressively revealed on an earthly stage with the promise of restoration understood to be experienced in the same place and with the same people as the penalty of judgment was imposed.

Since a literal fulfillment did not historically occur on the earthly stage with the return from exile to the extent it was originally predicted, the symbolic view argues that fulfillment must have been intended other than literal. However, the first advent of Christ did not historically fulfill all that was predicted to the extent originally predicted. The lack of Israel's political and spiritual redemption, the continued domination of the Gentile nations, the absence of a messianic reign over a restored Jerusalem in perfect, universal peace and undefilable holiness, was, and continues to be, a major stumbling block for Jews. Yet, if these events will be fulfilled literally at His second advent, as were those at His first advent, then a prophetic postponement is to be understood. Regardless of one's interpretive stance, all evangelical interpreters still accept a literal return of Christ and resurrection of the dead, yet these are inseparable from Israel's prophetic promises as those concerning the restoration of its Temple. Therefore, in order to consistently resolve the theological tension created by Israel's failure, there must be a return of her fortunes (both physical and spiritual). In this resolution the prophecy of Ezekiel's Temple figures prominently, concluding with the realization of restoration and the guarantee of its success by the declaration that "the Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35).