

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

by Harry Whittaker

A Fresh Look at Ezekiel's Temple

For many years it has been traditional among Christadelphians that the memorable temple described in Ezekiel 40-48 will function in the Holy Land during the millennial reign of Christ.

That a temple will exist during that time of blessedness would appear to be clear enough. But what kind of temple will it be?

Since the publication of a monumental work on the subject in 1892, by Henry Sulley of Nottingham, most Christadelphians have been accustomed to thinking of that temple as consisting essentially of three main parts:

- (i) an outer set of buildings about a mile square and about 150 feet wide at any point, with massive corner towers rather like New York skyscrapers.
- (ii) an inner circle of buildings divided into thirty segments.
- (iii) a steep central mountain surmounted by an immense altar, from which comes living water to pour out of the temple buildings on the south side and form a growing river running eastwards.

It is the main point of the present study — a negative one, alas! — to suggest that such a view is altogether mistaken, that it is based on a large number of erroneous interpretations of detail in Ezekiel 40-48, and that a careful scrutiny of the exposition set out in the volume named raises so many doubts as to make it well-nigh impossible to accept the author's thesis. To the present writer one of the most amazing features of this study is the fact that those numerous problems have not apparently been faced up to or at least have not been given wider publicity during the past seventy years. More positively, it may be possible later to suggest an alternative and less dubious interpretation of these enigmatic chapters.

For simplicity's sake and ease of reference the criticisms to be advanced will be numbered. Page references are, of course, to the first edition of *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy* by Henry Sulley.

1. Concerning the altar which is described as being "before the House" (40:47), the author, having already decided in favor of a square frame of buildings, cannot put this altar "before the House" without putting it outside the House altogether. So he asserts (very dubiously) that the Hebrew preposition really means "in the presence of," and from this he infers that the altar will be at the center. But the word used is the ordinary Hebrew word for "before." It is so translated scores and scores of times (Young's Concordance does not attempt to list more than a few, and on this Strong's is only bewildering to the student who has no Hebrew) in such phrases as "before the Lord", "before the tabernacle": e.g., Lev. 1:5 and 3:8. By contrast, the reconstruction of the temple on a pattern similar to that of Solomon's temple — which is the kind of conclusion reached by practically all students of this prophecy except H. Sulley — puts the altar in the court of the temple, east of the Sanctuary and therefore literally and precisely "before the House."
2. A second argument for this central siting of the altar is put thus, on p. 51: "This altar is hypostatically representative of the divine presence" - therefore it must be at the center! but was not the altar of burnt offering in the Tabernacle and in the First Temple just as "hypostatically representative of the divine presence"? Yet neither of those was in the center of the Sanctuary. The argument is a poor one.
3. A third argument is adduced: "this altar must of necessity be in the center, because those who approach to it in the performance of priestly duty enter the Most Holy for that purpose" (p.51). But does Ezekiel say so? The present writer has not been able to find any such statement. The author is surely assuming what he wants to prove.
4. Finally on this point: "Ezekiel gives the detailed measurements of the altar when he is in the Most Holy" — and this is mentioned on p. 151 as "confirmation of this conclusion." Again there is something suspiciously like carelessness. For Ezekiel does not say the altar is in the Most Holy (Eze. 43:12 is about the entire temple area; cp. 42:2; and RV rightly begins a new paragraph at v. 13). Nor is it true that Ezekiel went into the Most Holy. On the contrary, when the Most Holy is being measured, Ezekiel is careful to say: "Then went he (the angel) inward, and measured...." (41:3). As a priest who was not a High Priest, Ezekiel knew that he himself had no right to enter the Most Holy.

These four points, none of them at all satisfactory, constitute all the reasons advanced for the highly revolutionary theory that the altar must be in the center of the temple. But there are other features about this altar which raise doubts in the mind.

5. Because “waters come down from under the right side of the house, at the south side of the altar” (47:1), it is inferred “that the altar must be considerably elevated.” But is one at liberty to deduce from the verb “come down” that the waters descend from the top of a mountain? The seven steps and eight steps (40: 22,31) by which the house was higher than its surroundings would be adequate to explain why the waters “come down.”
6. Ezekiel 43:17 mentions “his stairs” on the eastward side of the altar. Our author rejects this translation in favor of another just as valid: “ascent” (p. 53b.) He then proceeds: “If we adopt ascent as the meaning, it would indicate that the altar would be difficult of approach, if not, humanly speaking, inaccessible from any other than the east side.” Does this really follow? The logic of this conclusion is not easy to grasp. Yet this becomes a ground for putting the altar on a mountain peak unclimbable on three sides! When, however, it is observed that the record about Israel’s altar in the wilderness and also the detail about the throne of Solomon has the same word translated “steps” (Exod. 20:26; 1 Kgs. 10:19), there seems to be little enough reason for disallowing “stairs” here. The same word occurs translated “steps” in 40: 22,26,31, and the AV reading here is accepted without demur. Then why not in 43:17?
7. One is left wondering also how the priests would transport the hundreds of sacrifices to the altar-summit of this mountain. But perhaps the powers of immortality are to make light of this toil.
8. The dimensions of the altar present further grievous difficulty. In height it appears to be 2 cubits (for the lower ‘settle’) plus 4 cubits (for the greater ‘settle’) plus 4 cubits (for the altar itself) = total 10 cubits. The length and breadth (over all) = 14 cubits (43:14-17). But in these latter dimensions the word “cubit” is supplied by the translators. Their common sense conclusion that all the units are cubits is curtly discarded by our author. “But this is not the case,” he asserts, though not without reason given. And the reason given is this. “The measure of 14 cubits does not even attain to the dimensions of the altar made by Solomon.” Such a state of affairs is, to his mind, unthinkable. Yet, why should it? Solomon’s temple had gold and silver and brass in abundance, almost beyond weight, whereas in this temple there is no hint of any use at all being made of any of them. One looks for more solid argument before changing cubits into reeds, six times as long. “We have far more reason for supplying the word ‘reed’ rather than cubit.” But what that reason may be is not apparent to this reader.
9. The result of inflating the dimensions of the altar is that it is now at least 108 feet on each side — big enough to take hundreds of carcasses at once. But one is left wondering how the priest would succeed in arranging these sacrifices, at a distance of more than 50 feet away. Would he walk on the altar, or would he be equipped with modern mechanical handling plant?
10. Again, according to this view, the “horns” of the altar are small square towers at its corners, each a nine-foot cube. Why these should be termed “horns” is not very apparent. But how is the height of 9 ft. (= 2 + 4 cubits) arrived at? The 4 cubits is derived from 43:15: “And the altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar and upward shall be four cubits.” In all this context, there is no word of “horns” at all. Surely our architect’s conclusions are, to put it mildly, somewhat intuitive.
11. On p. 55a it is inferred that the altar has a trench filled with water all round it “to keep the whole structure cool and prevent fusion of the materials comprising it.” This round an altar with a great roaring fire burning hundreds of carcasses! The priest would surely be ministering in a perpetual cloud of steam. But in another place (p. 66a) it is suggested that divine fire will signify acceptance of the sacrifice. In that case the fire will surely be selective, burning sacrifices but not the altar; or else the altar itself will be unable to withstand this intense heat, even though water-cooled. In the same category as this speculation is the highly imaginative and not too stimulating picture on p. 65 of the wicked being rejected and himself being “removed to the place of execution.” Yet the author writes with evident conviction on such details.
12. The acceptance of the sacrifice by fire from heaven raises another practical problem. Since the altar would obviously take an enormous number of sacrifices, how could the waiting crowd know whose offering was being found acceptable? - especially, too, since they would be at least half a mile away at the foot of the mountain! Practical problems of this nature do not seem to have received sufficient attention. If the general picture formulated about the temple described by Ezekiel were correct, would so many snags become evident?
13. One last point about the altar. Its name Ariel (43:16 mg) is accepted as meaning “the lion of God,” with this comment: “It (the altar) will typify the terror of Yahweh: and its existence in His House will be a warning to one and all not to perform the part of the wicked....” (p. 54a). But since only the priest would see it or come near to it (the rest being, as already mentioned, more than half a mile away), this does not seem wonderfully appropriate, the more so since the priest would need the warning least of

- all, being a “son of Zadok (righteousness)”. It seems to have been overlooked not only that “Lion of God” is condemned by its obvious unfitness as a name for an altar, but that Ariel may also mean “I will provide a ram,” with evident suitability and allusion to Gen. 22:13,14.
14. It is now time to consider the Holy Place which is taken to be a circle of thirty self-contained and identical “cellae” (as the author is fond of calling them) round the foot of the hill. What are the grounds for concluding that these buildings are circular in arrangement? One is able to discover only two points of evidence, both of which — on examination — are palpably wrong. The first is 43:12: “Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold this is the law of the House.” Apparently that phrase “round about” is taken to require a circular shape (p. 48). But the Hebrew word thus translated carries no suggestion whatever of circular shape. It is used (40:5 and 45:2) of the square enclosure of the Sanctuary, of the rectangular enclosure of the Tabernacle court (Exod. 27:17), of the circuit of the square altar (43:13). If more examples are needed: Ezek. 40:16,43 and 41:5-8,10-12; Exod. 38:16,20,31 and 40:8,33. As a point of evidence this “round about” is worthless. In any case 43:12 says: “At the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy,” whereas H.S. puts his circle of buildings at the foot of the hill.
 15. The only other point of evidence — what is called “the leading indication of a circular form” — is 41:1: “he brought me to the temple (i.e., the holy place), and measured the posts, six cubits broad on the one side and six cubits broad on the other side, the breadth of the tabernacle.” Here the RV mg. refers to Exod. 26:25, where the breadth of the Tabernacle in the wilderness is made up of eight “boards” of one and one half cubits each. By most students this would be considered satisfactory, even though it still leaves open the question why there should be in the entrance to the holy place (as it would seem) a width identical with the Tabernacle. However our author prefers a quite different approach. He first points out that the word “tabernacle” is really “tent” (true!). And then this: “Now most tents are, and all tents were originally, round or ring-shaped” (p. 39). Is this really true? The present writer has schoolboy memories of improvised tents vastly different in shape from that of a right circular cone! And is it not a fact that the vast majority of tents in lands of the Near East were and are usually constructed on anything but that pattern? However, p. 49 goes on to develop the notion by quoting Isa. 40:22: “He stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.” The rather vague comment is added: “The simile gives indication of the nature of the type from which it is drawn: namely, of a covered circular enclosed space.” But even if this highly figurative passage were admissible as evidence (which it surely isn’t), is there any reader who gets the impression that the dome of heaven looks like a hollow cone? Yet here is all the evidence the book advances for the highly revolutionary idea it propounds of a conical mountain with a circle of buildings at its base! The question has to be asked in all seriousness: Is the evidence good enough?
 16. There are a number of other details about the reconstruction of this Holy Place which wrinkle the forehead: e.g., in 41:26 the word “porch” is taken to mean “porches”.
 17. The word for “side-chamber” (41: 5,6) is replaced by “rib”, although in Solomon’s Temple (which should be a fairly good guide) it clearly means “side-chamber” (1 Kings 6:5).
 18. On p. 38b “the cellae (chambers for singers and priests on duty: 40: 44-46) are undoubtedly the Temple mentioned in ch. 41.”
 19. Again, the outside wall of the House (41:9) is shown in the elaborate diagram opposite p. 41 as being really an inside wall - but it does not really answer to the description “wall” inasmuch as it is pictured as a series of empty spaces interspersed by “pillars” and “posts”. Also the spaces called “gates” in this outside inside wall appear to serve no useful purpose since they open on to a straight drop too high to be negotiated, for there are no stairs to correspond to those on the other side of the building.
 20. On p. 42 the “winding about” (41:7) which is fairly obviously a spiral staircase to connect one floor of chambers with the next above, becomes a groined vaulting which has no “winding” — and this many centuries before groined vaulting was invented!
 21. In 41:4 the measures of the Most Holy are given as: “the length, twenty cubits; and the breadth, twenty cubits.” Without any hint from the text, our author first applies this to the Holy Place instead, then he repeats the measurement three times (p. 43a), but also turns the word “breadth” into “height”, thus transforming the Most Holy twenty by twenty (exactly the same as in Solomon’s temple) into a three-storied Holy Place with three avenues twenty-cubits wide in it. Also, on p. 48 the statement is renewed that twenty by twenty are not the dimensions of the Most Holy Place but “undoubtedly” they are “the measurements that take us up to the Most Holy.” The reader can look at 41:4 again and judge for himself.
 22. This turning of “breadth” into “height” crops up in several other places in the volume: e.g., from 41:14 a height of a hundred cubits for the Most Holy Place is inferred (pp. 45a and 47a); and since so far there has been only sixty cubits appropriated for the three stories, the remaining forty (or most of this) must be assigned to the foundation: “This foundation therefore, rises to a great height.” Yet 41:8

states specifically that the foundation is six cubits only! It is a comparatively easy matter to verify that the Hebrew word employed always means breadth, and never means height. If height were intended, the Hebrew language has several other words any of which would be more appropriate for the purpose than this one.

23. Even if the general idea of this temple plan were to be conceded, it now turns out that the architect's mathematics (pp. 44, 45) are at fault in no less than four places:
 - a. In the second calculation on p. 44b, the outside porch (20 cubits) has been omitted. This error throws out the next calculation.
 - b. At the top of p. 45a, the "thirty times 5 cubits" should be "sixty times 5 cubits", because there are 30 chambers each with a 5-cubit wall at each end.
 - c. The two calculations on p. 45a are in effect one and the same, the second simply being the first worked backwards. Naturally the same answer is arrived at both times, yet this is claimed as a neat check of accuracy!: "What can be more satisfactory than this?"
 - d. In this second calculation on p. 45a it is impressively claimed that the inner circumference (less wall space) amounts to precisely 6,224 cubits which - miraculously! - is exactly divisible by 16, thus giving 389 spaces between the "posts". But it is not explained how these 389 spaces are to be shared between 30 cellae. 30 into 389 goes how many times?
24. The "separate place" is a part of the Temple which has, admittedly, given rise to some uncertainty. Yet it would at least appear to be clear from 41:13,14 that, wherever it might be sited, its dimensions are a hundred cubits each way. Yet in this volume it is identified with the space between the outer square and the inner circle of buildings. Could this, by any stretch of imagination, be described as "an hundred cubits long. Also the breadth....of the separate place toward the east, an hundred cubits"?
25. According to 46:22, in each corner of the court there is a boiling house, for the sacrifices, "forty cubits long, and thirty broad." But in this volume the dimensions already adopted for the outer court will not allow of anything so small. So (perhaps permissibly) the cubits are turned into reeds. Another difficulty is that the courts formed at the corners of this square frame must themselves necessarily be square, and not 40 by 30. So the word for "long" is turned into "high", although in 37 other places in these nine chapters the same word plainly means "long." The result is four "monster towers....360 feet square and 480 feet high" for the boiling of sacrifices! "Such a building defies description." Here, at least, one is inclined to agree.
26. The same tendency to make everything about the Temple as big as possible shows in quite a number of places: e.g., on p. 42, on the basis of a bit of dubious Hebrew etymology, the 20 by 20 cubits measure for the Most Holy (41:4) is blown up to something fantastically bigger — and is then applied to the Holy Place! Similarly it would appear to most readers of 47:2 that the prophet describes a trickle of water out of the sanctuary and later becoming a deepening river. Instead of this, one is invited to contemplate a complex of streams from the mountain making a circuit of the base and flowing out of a dozen gateways.
27. There are also downright errors of fact of a rather elementary kind; e.g., on p. 52 the Tyropean valley is represented as passing through the Haram area instead of the south of it; and on the same page there is the common misreading of Zech. 14:2 that only half the city of Jerusalem will be captured in the last great conflict; and facing p. 46 is an entertaining picture of palm trees growing up lattice work for all the world as though they were ivy or grape vines!
28. P. 48b: "Our business is to accept the logic of the facts, and frame our theories in harmony with them, rather than resist the evidence of the facts in order to fit a preconceived theory"!

It will be evident from the foregoing that Henry Sulley's ideas of the pattern of the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy are not shared by the present writer. Then what?

Briefly, and without reasons stated, it is believed that:

- a. the proper understanding of Ezekiel 40-48 makes the temple rather like that of Solomon, but with significant modifications;
- b. this temple will not be built in the Millennium; it was not so intended,
- c. but it was for Israel on their return from Babylon;
- d. it has value for saints of the present day comparable to that of Solomon's temple and the tabernacle;
- e. there will be a temple in the future age.

It is hoped to develop these investigations in a series of studies.

Ezekiel's Temple not a Millennial Temple (1)

For many years there have been well-intentioned efforts by Christadelphians to interpret the last nine chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy as a picture of a new temple to be built in the Land of Promise, a center of worship for all nations during the Millennial Reign of Christ. Such efforts have been confined to a comparatively small handful of students, the rest being somewhat daunted by the difficulties involved.

Because of this there has been a tendency to accept somewhat uncritically the results achieved by others — a startling exception to the normal Christadelphian way of things, that a Biblical exposition shall only be accepted when the detailed evidence has been examined bit by bit and thereafter approved or rejected.

Thus it has come about that the monumental work of Bro. Henry Sulley of Nottingham, published in 1892, has been allowed to set the pattern of Christadelphian thinking with regard to this temple. His scheme has been accepted in a remarkably uncritical spirit, largely — one imagines — because he was a well-qualified and successful architect who was deemed to be equipped well beyond the rank-and-file reader for the task of producing a definitive interpretation of the temple chapters.

The present writer is persuaded, however, that the work of that well-intentioned author was completely vitiated from the start by certain seriously mistaken presuppositions which dominated and distorted his synthesis in nearly all its main essentials.

Nor is it possible, because of technical difficulties over the production of a big set of diagrams, to go into the question as to what Ezekiel's temple really was intended to look like. For the present it must suffice to say that the remarkable number of correspondences with Solomon's temple in measurements and in the phrasing of the descriptions leads one to believe that essentially this temple was to be a second edition of the first temple, with certain modifications appropriate to the changed circumstances of its use.

But certainly the idea of a massive square of buildings with an inner ring (the "Holy Place") equally magnificent, surrounding the base of an unscalable conical mountain which itself is crowned with a gigantic altar for countless animal sacrifices — this idea, it is emphasized, must be abandoned as being far away from a correct interpretation of Ezekiel's specification. Ezekiel's temple certainly has an enclosure about a mile square, but there is nothing to suggest that the buildings are that size. Actually the sanctuary itself is of much more modest proportions.

Probably it is the assumption that the temple was for use in the millennium which led to this mistaken notion of vast proportions. But where did that assumption come from? Primarily from the sequence of chapters in Ezekiel's prophecy:

- a. ch. 37 — the "resurrection" of Israel
- b. ch. 38, 39 — the great invasion of the Land, and the final divine intervention.
- c. ch. 40-48 — the temple of the future age, surely.

But a careful comparison of 32:1 with 40:1 reveals a gap of no less than thirteen years between items (b) and (c). The connection of the temple with the preceding chapters is now seen to be illusory. Chapters 40-48 stand well apart from all the rest, and are to be judged entirely on their own merits and not on context, for the context is non-existent.

When the investigation is pushed further, there soon piles up a veritable mountain of evidence all of which insists that a temple like Ezekiel's, with ritual such as is described there, was never intended for the abiding Kingdom of God with its divine King-Priest and immortal hierarchy.

The most casual reading reveals an intention to reinstitute sacrifice, ceremonial cleansing, the observance of Sabbaths and much else that was already made familiar through the Law of Moses.

But the New Testament is almost over-emphatic in its insistence that all these things, fulfilled (filled full) in Christ, have been taken away once and for all, and that the purpose of God has no further room for anything of the kind:

- a. Heb. 10:12: Christ has "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever."
- b. 10:14: "by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified (through association with him)."
- c. 10:18: "where remission of these (sins) is, there is no more offering for sin."
- d. 9:9: "gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience."

Then what could sacrifice in the kingdom achieve? If it be argued that these millennial sacrifices are not expiatory but commemorative, to remind mortals that their King of Glory once hung on a cross, the answer is fivefold:

- (i) the King himself bearing the marks of crucifixion in his immortal body will be sufficient reminder to any doubting Thomas's;
- (ii) the commemorative Bread and Wine instituted by Jesus himself will be sufficient reminder also: Luke 22: 16,18.
- (iii) Ezekiel explicitly states over and over again that the sacrifices are expiatory: e.g. 43: 19-26 and 45: 17,22.
- (iv) if commemorative sacrifices will be permissible then, why not in the period A.D. 30-70? Yet there is no mistaking Paul's vehemence against those who thought they could achieve a marriage of convenience between Mosaic observance and faith in Christ.
- (v) is there anywhere the slightest hint in scripture that God wants men to remember Jesus the Lamb of God through animal offerings? "The Law was added till the Seed should come" (Gal. 3: 19). The Seed has come, and accordingly the Law with all its institutions is gone forever.

But to return to the weight of N.T. witness:

- e. Heb. 7:12: "The priesthood being changed (from that of Aaron), there is also of necessity a change also of law." If, and only if, Aaron is to resume his priesthood in the age to come, can animal sacrifices be re-instituted.
- f. 7: 18,19: "The law made nothing perfect....the weakness and unprofitableness thereof".
- g. 10:9: "He taketh away the first (law), that he may establish the second." This word "take away" is translated in twenty other places "put to death." Is there to be a resurrection of that which the Lord has condemned to death?
- h. 8:8,9: "Behold, the days come when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." That new covenant has not yet been made with the nation of Israel, but only with the true Israel of God. Nor can it be made with the Jews until they say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." But when that covenant is made, it will be "not according to the covenant (ratified with animal sacrifices and associated with tabernacle service) that I made with your fathers...." But what Ezekiel describes is a re-institution of those very things. Therefore his code is not for Israel in the day when at last they receive the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ.
- i. In Gal. 4: 9,10, Paul reproached his converts for "turning again to the weak and beggarly elements" and "observing days and months and times and years." In that day when he rises from the dead, is he to spend his first millennium of immortality reversing that message?
- j. The last witness on this is Stephen: "The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hand" (Acts 7:48).

This part of the argument is conclusive in itself. The details of Ezekiel's vision present a picture of a system of worship utterly incompatible with the principles of redemption in Christ. The coming of Jesus as sacrifice and high-priest has made all other offering and any other mediatory priesthood utterly nugatory for all time.

If it be argued that the immortal saints are to be kings and priests in the coming age, then let it be remembered that a priest had and has other more important duties than the offering of animals. "A priest's lips shall keep knowledge: and they should seek the law at his mouth" (Mal. 2:7). It was in this sense that Israel was intended to be "a kingdom of priests" for the evangelization and instruction of the rest of the world. This honor will have all his saints when they share his Messianic glory.

In the next part of this study it is proposed to go back to Ezekiel 40-48 and demonstrate from the details there that a Millennial fulfillment is utterly out of question.

Ezekiel's Temple not a Millennial Temple (2)

In an earlier study, the point was stressed that the New Testament completely disallows the possibility of there ever being a future temple and ritual of the kind detailed by Ezekiel. It is now submitted that what Ezekiel himself wrote about it likewise leaves no doubt that the temple was not intended for the millennium but for the time when the Jews would return to the Land of their fathers from captivity in Babylon.

1. Who is the Prince of Ezekiel 45,46? Most assume that he is the Messiah. Others suggest that he is David. But what is stated concerning him rules out both of these possibilities. He is not a priest, certainly not a High Priest (46:2). He is to enter the Sanctuary no further than the gate of the court of the priests (46:2). He offers sacrifices for himself and for his sins (45:22 and 46:10-12). He is subject to death (46:17,18; note the word 'inheritance'). He has a wife and sons (46:16). He is allowed to bestow gifts only from his own inheritance (46:17,18). He is warned against exercising oppression (45:8 and 46:18). A succession of princes seems to be implied (45:8). Such details require reference to a mortal prince of Israel.
2. Again, if this temple is for the millennium, its priests are certainly immortal saints in Christ. But this cannot be true of Ezekiel's priests. They are liable to sweat (44:18). They are to drink no wine when serving in the sanctuary (v. 21); what a contrast with Matt. 26: 29! They marry — but only into the house of Israel (v. 22). They die (v. 22). They are permitted to defile themselves by contact with the dead, if it be a near relation (v. 25). They have no inheritance (v. 28). Such a catalog of facts once again rules out all reference to immortal saints in the Kingdom. Any attempt to meet this fairly substantial difficulty has been made by arguing that the sacrificing priests are spoken of only in vv. 15,16 — the sons of Zadok. These two verses, it is claimed, form a parenthesis (introduced by the word "But") concerning the sons of Zadok, whilst the rest of the chapter, before and after, relates to a subsidiary order — the Levites — who will be given the privilege of helping in the temple administration in a sub-ordinate capacity.

This argument is all too plainly an expedient to get away from an awkward set of facts, and a quite inadequate expedient at that, as the following considerations will demonstrate:

- (i) If this suggestion be correct, the entire section is seen to be right out of balance in its emphasis, with twenty verses (10-14, 17-31) devoted to the duties and responsibilities of these subsidiary Levites, and only two to the true (immortal) priests, "the sons of Zadok."
 - (ii) The argument for a parenthesis rests on thin air, for the Hebrew particle translated "But" which is supposed to introduce and indicate it, also begins twenty other verses in the same chapter, but is differently translated.
 - (iii) A careful use of marginal references fully demonstrates that every detail that is written in Ezekiel regarding the Levites has its exact counterpart in the Pentateuch in Moses' legislation for the priests. The only conclusion possible is that the distinction that is being made in Ezekiel is of a different kind — between priests like Jeremiah and Ezekiel who had been faithful and others who had not.
3. This introduces a further difficulty in the way of a millennial interpretation. In 44:10-14, "the Levites that went far from me, when Israel went astray" are to be degraded to less honorable duties in the Lord's House. But in the millennium such men will not be in the Lord's House at all, but will be cast out as an "abominable branch".
 4. What is the meaning of the exhortations and remonstrations addressed to "the house of Israel" except it be that this prophecy is specially for them and not for "saints" or "all nations"? The words speak for themselves: "declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel" (there is never any doubt about the words "these bones are the whole house of Israel")! "And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God: O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations". "Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel, remove violence and spoil" (40:4 and 44:6 and 45:9).
 5. In 47:22,23 there is explicit legislation to ensure that strangers in the Land shall not be dis-inherited but shall have their own portion alongside the children of Israel. This is difficult to reconcile with the many promises that, in the Kingdom Age, the Land is to be for Israel, ruled over by the twelve apostles. But as a solution of the inevitable difficulty that the Jews returning from Babylon would find people of other races already settled in their territory, it is eminently sensible and just.
 6. The maps that have been drawn to show how Ezekiel foretells the re-division of the Land are mostly packed with mistakes. The four most common are these:
 - a. The size of the Holy Oblation — usually measured in reeds instead of in cubits. It is proposed to omit discussion of this point here because the conclusion reached in no way affects the main issue about time of fulfillment.
 - b. 47:19: "And the south side southward, from Tamar even to the waters of strife in Kadesh, the river to the great sea." Kadesh in the Negeb is unmistakable. The great sea is certainly the Mediterranean. But many identify "the river" as being the Nile, and thus proceed to appropriate a big piece of the land of Egypt as part of Israel's future inheritance. But this is certainly not the true interpretation, as is proved by the mention of Kadesh. Also, the southern limit of the Land promised to the Fathers is "the river of Egypt," which is undeniably the wadi El Arish which

enters the sea just south of Gaza. Also, the Hebrew word for “river” here is that which describes a torrent and is certainly not the correct word for a mighty flood of waters like the Nile.

- c. 47:18. “The east side...shall be Jordan, from the (north) border unto the east sea.” This “east sea” is often taken to mean the Persian Gulf; and maps are drawn showing strips of Israel’s territory stretching across Arabia to the Euphrates. This just will not do. Apart from the plain simple clear fact that Jordan is specified here as the boundary, all the Bible evidence points to “the east sea” being the Dead Sea: Num. 34:3; Josh. 12:3; Joel 2:20. On this point no other conclusion is possible.
- d. Regarding the northern boundary, it has to be remembered that “the border of Damascus” and “the border of Hamath” do not mean Damascus and Hamath but the southern borders of those territories. This, similarly, requires the drawing of an east-west line appreciably further south than where it is usually assigned, and certainly not so far north as to reach the Euphrates.

Once these points are clear, it is evident that the extent of the Land indicated by Ezekiel is considerably less than that promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:18). Then how can this be the Kingdom of God?

7. There is a similar difference between the role of Jerusalem in Ezekiel’s scheme and in the rest of the prophets. The former pictures Jerusalem as one enormous Temple area a mile square, given over entirely to worship and sacrifice with a new city Jehovah-Shammah away to the south of it. But elsewhere there are pictures of “boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem” (Zech. 8:4,5). “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, for the multitude of men and cattle therein” (Zech. 2:4).
8. In 46:1 there is instruction that the east gate is to be shut on “the six working days” and open only on the sabbath and the day of new moon. How is this to be reconciled with Isaiah’s words: “Thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night”?

The list of difficulties in the way of a millennial interpretation is by no means complete, but sufficient have been cataloged to make it evident that the easy assumption of a future fulfillment of this prophecy is scarcely warranted. Until problems of the kind mentioned have been tidied up there might at least be a little less dogmatism about millennial expositions.

And now, in fairness, it is necessary to consider the one big objection to the view that Ezekiel was propounding God’s scheme for Israel’s resettlement in the Land on the return from Babylon — a plan, be it noted, which was to be from the very first dependent on Israel’s repentance and willingness to obey: “if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house” (43:11). The difficulty alluded to is this: 47:1-12 describes a growing stream going forth from the Sanctuary, taking healing to the seas and to the nations. Nothing of this kind, it is urged, has happened in history or has been possible at any time in the past; the very nature of the vision requires fulfillment in the Future Age.

To this it is answered: The vision of the healing river of God is plainly symbolic, and would be so understood by Ezekiel. The following reasons for this conclusion are submitted:

- a. Springs do not emerge from the summit of “a very high mountain”. Occasionally they spring from fairly near the highest point of a mountain, but never from the top-most peak. Nor does a normal stream deepen at such a fantastically rapid rate as to be crossed only by swimming when a mere one and a half miles from its source. Nor does any river grow in volume except through the contributions made by tributaries, and this river has no tributaries. It may, of course, be urged in reply that these living waters are to be altogether miraculous. And to such an “argument” there can be no answer. Nevertheless it is surely significant that this river, if real and not symbolic, is the only miraculous element connected with Ezekiel’s temple.
- b. It is also significant that the similar prophecy in Joel 3:18 has a markedly symbolic element in it: “And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hill shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim.”
- c. It is doubtful if even those who accept the view that there will be a literal river out of the temple would go so far as to accept all this part of the prophecy in a perfectly literal fashion. Is it believed that the ills of the nations will be cured by the mastication of leaves from the trees on the bank of the river? Here, surely, is a detail which shouts for symbolic interpretation — a thing which can hardly be said with confidence about other details concerning priestly defilement, princely offering, the dimensions of porches and chambers.
- d. The symbolic use of this very passage in Revelation 22:2 indicates expressly what is being argued for here as almost self-evident: “On either side of the river was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of

the nations.” He would be a bold man who would maintain the literal intention of these words in this context!

- e. Again, if this portion of Ezekiel 47 is to be taken literally, what is to be made of its self-contradictory character? This river of life goes to the Dead Sea and its waters are healed, so that they swarm with fish. Nevertheless “the miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt” (v.11). Literally the words are really difficult. Symbolically they suggest easily enough that whilst this rebuilt temple of an Israel returned from captivity will have wondrous possibilities of carrying divine influence and blessing to the most unlikely quarters, it was not to be expected that in that age a perfect and complete reformation would be accomplished.
- f. The special mention of abundant fish and a thriving fishing industry is difficult to understand, if intended literally. But the spiritual meaning of these words is too obvious to require elucidation. “As the fish of the Great Sea” certainly suggests the blessing of the Gentile nations through the godly influence of this new House of God.
- g. The force of the angel’s words to Ezekiel has been missed by many: “Son of man, hast thou seen this?” If this simply means: “Have you seen this growing river descending from the House?” the question borders on the ludicrous; for apparently it was put to the prophet in the vision whilst he was standing in the water, having just abandoned the attempt to cross because he couldn’t swim. “Hast thou seen this?” Of course he had — and felt it! In these circumstances the question could surely only mean: “Do you perceive the meaning of all this?” In other words: “Ezekiel, take care to consider the spiritual truth expressed by this which you now see.”

The evidence for a symbolic interpretation of this part of the prophecy is thus not inconsiderable, and there is more of a like character. The recognition of this element removes, it is claimed, the last obstacle in the way of acceptance of Ezekiel’s temple as a temple for the time of King Cyrus, not for the time of King Jesus. In a further study, it is hoped to show that there are reasons for believing that the Jews in the days of Cyrus themselves understood the prophecy in this way.

Ezekiel’s Temple not a Millennial Temple (3)

In this study of Ezekiel’s temple it has already been suggested:

- a. that it was not intended as a temple for the age to come, but
- b. for erection in Jerusalem when Israel returned from Babylon.

It is now possible to go a step further and show that there are indications that...

- c. the Jews themselves so understood it and endeavored to follow the prophet’s instructions.

But first it is desirable to emphasize how much Israel were in need of a new religious code. With the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, they lost not only their temple but also everything associated with it. The ark of the covenant was gone. There was therefore no mercy seat, and therefore no Day of Atonement was possible. The holy fire, which had been unquenched since God signified His good pleasure by accepting Solomon’s sacrifices (2 Chr. 7:1), was now gone out. So the offering of true burnt offerings was likewise out of question. Neither had they a high-priest with Urim and Thummim who could give a divine judgment in time of perplexity. Indeed all the indications were that God had altogether abolished the system of worship which had been given hundreds of years earlier for the guidance and help of His people: “He hath violently taken away his tabernacle... he hath destroyed his place of assembly: the Lord hath caused the sabbaths and solemn feasts to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest. The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary... the king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more” (Lam. 2: 6,7,9).

So unless God gave His nation a new start, Israel returned from captivity would be a people spiritually adrift.

Evidently, then, Ezekiel 40-48 was designed to show the Jews how they were to worship and serve God when their seventy years of exile were expired — what kind of temple they were to fashion; the character of their priesthood; their offerings and their feasts; the due status of priest and prince; the re-allocation of the Land to the tribes; and especially, they were to be inspired with the possibilities of Jerusalem as a center for worship, not only for Israel but also for the strangers in the Land, and — more than that — as a source of spiritual blessings radiating to all the nations of the world.

The phraseology of the prophecy plainly suggests this kind of aim and intention: “Declare all that thou seest to the house of Israel....Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Lord, and all the laws thereof....And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the

house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations....Show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities....And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house....that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them” (40:4 and 44:5 and 43:10,11).

The reason why this new house of God should be revealed to Ezekiel in particular is now evident. All through the captivity the godly amongst the exiles would be able to pore over it and by it would nurture their faith in the promised restoration. By its guidance, plans would be drawn up and details worked out for the renewal of divine worship and praise in Jerusalem. What an inspiration it would be to them during the long years “by the waters of Babylon”!

And yet there would also be the sad recognition that even when re-established on mount Zion, the service of Jehovah in such a temple could never again be considered adequate. For Ezekiel’s vision had no mention of a Day of Atonement, it gave no hint of a golden candlestick or table of shewbread before the Lord, neither was there a hint of the lavish use of gold and silver which had contributed so much to the splendor of Solomon’s temple; and the high-priestly garments for glory and for beauty were lost; and the genealogies of the priests had gone up in the flames of Nebuchadnezzar’s holocaust.

Splendid and holy as their new temple was to be, its limitations only emphasized in their minds the abiding need for a new and better order, with a Messiah who would be both Prince and Priest ministering a Sacrifice which would be all-sufficient, and not merely temporary and typical.

The hints in Ezra and Nehemiah which connect their new temple with that described by Ezekiel are interesting and instructive.

In Ezra 6:3 the details of the decree of Cyrus include the actual dimensions as given by Ezekiel — central sanctuary 60 cubits long and 60 cubits high. These are the identical measurements which are to be deduced from Eze. 41:2,4.

Further, Ezra records that when the temple was finished, “they builded and finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, etc.” (6:14).

If it be asked what command of God is referred to here, there is none to which reference can be made except Ezekiel 40-48. Unless some divine instruction which is not included in the Scriptures be presupposed, there seems to be no evading the conclusion that Ezra’s temple was regarded as being an attempt to fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel.

It is useful also to recall that Ezekiel’s scheme required that Jerusalem be developed as a sanctuary area one mile square — approximately the size of the ancient city. There was to be no rebuilding of the business or residential area of the city, but instead Ezekiel planned another city called Jehovah-Shammah south of Jerusalem.

In harmony with this scheme there are certain remarkable features about the record in Nehemiah. when the temple was erected, apparently no town buildings were constructed in the vicinity. The grant of timber from the king’s forest was “for the gates of the palace (temple) which appertained to the House, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I (Nehemiah) shall enter into” (2:8). There is no mention of ordinary civilian dwellings.

The decree of Artaxerxes similarly emphasized: “Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven (in Ezekiel 40-48?), let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?” (Ezra 7:23).

Apparently at this time other cities were being or had already been built, but not so the civilian part of Jerusalem (Neh. 11: 20). This is a very extraordinary and significant fact. It is almost as though after World War II all the cities of England were speedily and completely restored whilst all that was done in London was the patching up of St. Paul’s. Such would have been a fair parallel to the unique state of affairs existing in Judea at this time. Can anything be found to explain it except the highly probable idea that these returned captives were seeking to pattern their development of the Land on Ezekiel’s instructions.

Similarly, as Ezekiel had planned for the Levitical ministers to have cities to dwell in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem (Ezek. 45:5 Septuagint), so under Nehemiah “the singers builded themselves villages round about Jerusalem” (Neh. 12:29). Yet “the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded” (7:4). Indeed, the few who were now dwelling in the city did so “that in the night they may be a guard unto us, and may labor in the day” (4:22).

If Ezekiel’s prophecy be not the explanation of this remarkable state of affairs, then what is?

In harmony with all this is the record of the consecration of the wall of Jerusalem when it was completed. This was done (Neh. 12: 27-43) as a great religious celebration. The degree of holy joy implied in this part of the narrative suggests that the people saw this not just as the renewal of the walls of their ancient city, the pride of all their history, but the first stage towards accomplishing that which Ezekiel had foretold - a frame of a city a mile square which was to be all temple.

But the people of Israel were unable to carry the project through to its culmination. Their own efforts were halfhearted. They were hindered and discouraged by enemies without and the beginnings of a renewed apostasy within. Thus, bit by bit, they lost their early idealism, and though the temple was built — probably, so far as one can tell, on the pattern of that planned by Ezekiel — it never achieved that which was intended for it. The Glory of the God of Israel did not return unto it, and Ezekiel's great ideal still goes unrealized until the day when the new Jerusalem descends from God out of heaven; and then it will find expression, not in reeds of wall and cubits of altar but in the spiritual realities which those solid facts were intended to teach.

Ezekiel's Temple intended for the Return from Babylon, not for the Millennium

1. 13 years between ch. 39 and ch. 40 (see 32:1)
2. The land smaller than Genesis 15:18 (47:20).
3. In Ezekiel, Jerusalem not to be built except as an enormous temple. Instead, a completely new city on the site of Bethlehem. Contrast Zech. 8: 4,5, etc.
4. The Prince is not a High Priest: 45:8,9,16,22; 46:18. He has wife and family: 46:16,17. He might die: 46:17,18. Warning against oppression: 45:8; 46:18. Goes no further than the court of the priests: 46:2. Offers sacrifice for sin: 45:22; 46:10-12.
5. No uncircumcised person: 44:9. What of Gentile saints?
6. Temple for Jews only: 43:10,11.
7. Levites (priests?) degraded because of sins of their fathers: 44:10,11; contrast 18:2.
8. East gate shut six days in seven: 46:1. Contrast Isa. 60:1.
9. Warnings against fraud: 45:9-12.
10. Dan (48:1,32) omitted in Rev. 7.
11. Israel back from Babylon needed a new code. They had no ark, no mercy seat (therefore no Day of Atonement), no holy fire (therefore no sacrifice). Lam. 2:6-9. This is a new revelation for them (emphasized by 40:4; 44:5; 43:10,11).
12. Back from Babylon, they followed Ezekiel very largely. Ezra 6:3 is dimensions of 41: 2-4. Ezra 6:14 — what commandment of God, if not Ezekiel? Ezra 7: 23 — temple erected, but no town buildings. Other cities built but no dwelling in Jerusalem. Singers not in Jerusalem; compare Neh. 12:29; 11:38 with Ezek. 45:5; 48:13. The only reason for dwelling in Jerusalem, to be a guard: Neh. 4:22; contrast 7:4. The wall consecrated with sacrifices: Neh. 12: 27-43. Zechariah 8:4 probably implies no civilian dwelling in Jerusalem in his day. All 12 tribes returned: Ezek. 47:13, etc. Cp. Neh. 7:73; Ezra 8:24,25; 2:70.
13. What about 47:1-12? This must be symbolic.
14. Gentiles already in the land given “equal” inheritance.

Typist's note: This work is, on the internal evidence, not complete. But it is all that is available. (This will probably also explain the outline form of the final section.)