

Dispensationalism — Ezekiel (Literal Temple)

“But here are ten evidences that Ezekiel meant us to understand him as referring to a literal temple building complex that will be erected in future Israel.

1. Ezekiel calls it a temple over and over. E.g. In Ezekiel 40:5, 45 – where the priestly function is mentioned; in 41:6-10 – where its chambers are described in pedantic detail; in 42:8 – where the length of the chambers depends on their position relative to the sanctuary; in 43:11 – where God declares: “make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes, and do them.” How can any reader take these details seriously and find their fulfillment in the NT church? Moving forward in the passage, in Ezekiel 43:21 a bull is to be offered as a sin-offering outside the house; in 45:20 – an atonement is made for the simple on the seventh day of the month; in 46:24 – sacrifices are boiled at designated places; and in 48:21 – the huge allotment for the sanctuary is measured (it is very different to New Jerusalem in Rev. 21!).
2. There are laws to perform in the temple (Ezek. 43:11-12). Quite how one can perform these commands in the church is a mystery beyond the mystery of the church itself.
3. Ezekiel stipulates two divisions of priests, only one of whom (Zadokites) can approach the Lord (44:15). These Zadokites are given land separate from other Levites (48:11).
4. Ezekiel refers to New Moons and sacrifices (46:1, 6). New Jerusalem has no need of moonlight (Rev. 21:23).
5. The tribes of Israel are given specific allotments of land all around the temple (Ezek. 48)
6. The two temples at the beginning and the end of the Book of Ezekiel form a structural arc. The first temple is literal. Nothing is said about the more detailed temple at the end of Ezekiel being a mere symbol. In fact, in Ezekiel 8:3ff. “the visions of God” recorded what really did occur (cf. 40:2), not what would symbolically happen.
7. In Ezekiel 10 the Shekinah leaves the actual temple in Jerusalem by the East Gate. In chapter 43 it returns via the East Gate and remains.
8. A sanctuary is mentioned in the new covenant chapters (Ezekiel 36 & 37). For example, after Israel has been cleansed, God declares: “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.” (Ezek. 37:26. Cf. 43:7). This indicates something about the timing of the fulfillment of the temple prophecy. This agrees with the timing indicated in the last verse of Ezekiel: “the name of the city from that day shall be, ‘The LORD is there’” (Ezek. 48:35)
9. At least three times Ezekiel is commanded to pay close attention to specifics: 40:4; 43:10-11; 44:5. The symbolic interpretation ignores these details when seeking to explain the meaning of the vision. If an interpretation passes over what God has told us to pay close attention to, that interpretation must be suspect.
10. A future temple is necessary in light of God’s everlasting covenant with the Zadokites’ ancestor Phinehas (Num. 25:10-13; Psa. 106:30-31. Cf. Jer. 33:14f, Mal. 3:1-4). Zechariah 6:12-13; 14:8-9, 16f, describes temple conditions in Israel which have never yet existed, but which match Ezekiel 36-48.”

— Paul Henebry, Ten Lines of Evidence for Interpreting Ezekiel 40-48 as Depicting a Literal Temple.

“Along with certain other key passages of the Old Testament, like Isaiah 7:14 and 52:13-53:12 and portions of Daniel, the concluding chapters of Ezekiel form a kind of continental divide in the area of Biblical interpretation. It is one of the areas where the literal interpretation of the Bible and the spiritualizing or allegorizing method diverge widely. Here amillennialists and premillennialists are poles apart. When thirty-nine chapters of Ezekiel can be treated detailedly and seriously as well as literally, there is no valid reason *a priori* for treating this large division of the book in an entirely different manner.”

— Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 233.

"Was it not true that the many details of the tabernacle of Moses embodied comprehensive spiritual and prophetic principles? Was the tabernacle actually built in Moses' day or was it not? Was it purely idealistic or ideational?"

— Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 236.

"Ezekiel continued to set forth detail after detail, making it increasingly difficult to interpret the whole in a figurative manner, in which case the abundance of minute details is worthless and meaningless."

— Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 244.

"Without chapters 40-48 there is no answer to the outcome of Israel, no resolution to their history of sacred scandal, and no grand finale to the divine drama centered from Sinai on the chosen Nation."

— Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy*, 517.

"Perhaps the best illustration of the rule of "no superfluous details" is found in Ezekiel's prophecy of the Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40-48). Non-literal interpreters maintain that this prophecy is a symbol of the Christian church. However, this major prophecy in the Book of Ezekiel contains descriptions, specifications, and measurements of the millennial temple which are so exhaustive that one may actually make a sketch of it, just as one might of Solomon's historic temple."

— Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, (Rockville, Md., Assurance, 1984), 161.

"The temple vision of Ezekiel is simply too extensive and contains too many details for the entire prophecy to be set aside as a symbol. If the entire vision were intended by God as a symbol of the church, what a strange and roundabout way for God to so express Himself!"

— Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, (Rockville, Md., Assurance, 1984), 161.