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EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE SACRIFICES AND THE NEW COVENANT

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Introduction

One of the hotly debated topics in the eschatological conundrum is to find the exact nature of Ezekiel's temple sacrifices in the light of the New Covenant. Scripture must be read in its normal, plain sense unless the text demands some kind of symbolism. But those with allegorical hermeneutics reject the plain and literal view of the temple and hence find it utterly impossible to consider future sacrifices to be literal in the light of Christ and His finished work.¹ We meet with the dilemma, how to exactly interpret Ezekiel's temple and sacrifices.

Those who apply allegorical sense, approach the meaning through the lens of the New Testament and try to read the New Testament into the Old Testament.² We will first analyze the New Testament Priority hermeneutics. This paper will argue that the New testament priority hermeneutics disregards the basic details of the text for the Ezekiel's temple sacrifices and misreads the authorial intent, though the later revelation is important, as far as the New Covenant is concerned the exegetical answer is found in the Old Testament itself without contradiction.

Hermeneutical Presuppositions and the authorial intent

The subject of interpretation requires that, one must begin with the basic presuppositions before coming to the text. As Howe rightly argues, "no interpreter approaches a text ... with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate."³ Even the very framework we have regarding context informs,

¹ See, Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 386.

² See, Gregory K. Beale, Eden, "The Temple, And The Church's Mission In The New Creation," *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 22–23. Beal prioritizes the whole section of Ezekiel by rhetorical question, "Should not those with a high view of Scripture begin with the presupposition that the NT interprets the OT?"

³ Thomas A. Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (United States: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), 237. [Emphasis in original]

“our presuppositions about authorial intent.”⁴

Hermeneutics mainly deals with the “set of principles,” that shape the interpretation of any text.⁵ And hermeneutic is the theory that comes before interpretation. Hence if that is the case, hermeneutic is about our presupposition that shapes our interpretation.⁶ We will look at two different views that interpreters choose to interpret Ezekiel 40–48.

Who decides the meaning of the Ezekiel in the Old Testament?

Before we analyze two views, we must notice the meaning of Ezekiel 40–48 likewise the rest of the scripture, should be derived from plain and normal reading of the scripture, without any outside allegory unsupported by the text. However, the first view prefers to spiritualize the meaning of Ezekiel 40–48. And the second view which this paper will argue for is grammatical-historical view, and this view argues for literal meaning of Ezekiel 40–48. Those who spiritualize the meaning argue, “New Testament as a whole interpret everything, including the Old Testament.”⁷ With that presupposition Ezekiel’s temple and sacrifices are seen as “symbolical,”⁸ fulfilled in Christ and the Church. Likewise, Beal makes similar presupposition that the NT interprets the OT.⁹ McKenzie after denying that Covenant theology primarily seeks to allegorize the text, makes absolute conclusion that, passages in Ezekiel and Daniel “should be interpreted

⁴ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Fourth edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 200.

⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 27.

⁶ See, Thomas A. Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation*, 206.

⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Biblical-Theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Appollos, 2006), 171.

⁸ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on Ezekiel* (1960; Repr., Grand Rapid: Kregel, 1989), 447.

⁹ See, Beal, *JETS*, 22.

allegorically.”¹⁰ He bases his approach primarily from the presupposition made from New Testament. That makes the New Testament a priority in Hermeneutics, by “reading New Testament meanings back into the Old Testament.”¹¹

The New Testament priority is major error in interpretation as Kaiser argues, “why would a rule be imposed on the revelation of God that demands that the Old testament passages may not become basis for giving primary direction on any doctrines or truths that have relevancy for the New Testament times? This is to only argue in the end for a canon within a canon.”¹² Most important question remains; how do we know true hermeneutic that links to authorial intent? Did the Prophet intend spiritual meaning or literal meaning? Firstly, we must decide based on literary context. Consider aspects that forms prophet’s meaning like genre, context, grammar and history of the text it is necessary to note, “*Literary meaning* refers to the meaning the authors have placed in the text ... literary meaning does not preempt or replace spiritual meaning.”¹³ Also, literary meaning is sufficient to take into consideration the genre.

Secondly, we can decide the authorial intent of the prophet by taking into consideration not the priority of the New Testament but what earlier prophets have said, which would turn into prophetic hermeneutic. If we spiritualize the text, it should be consistent with literary context and

¹⁰ Robert McKenzie, *Identifying the Seed: An Examination and Evaluation of the Differences between Dispensational and Covenant Theology* (Place of publication not identified: Robert McKenzie, 2018), 2.

¹¹ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 150. Thomas says, double meaning “is the bases for covenant theology when it allegorizes.”

¹² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12), in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 222.

¹³ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Fourth edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 211. Emphasis in the original. Authorial intent is formed by Gramatical-Historical meaning. (see, Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New versus the Old*, 206.)

previous revelation, that is exegetically provable to the prophet's time. This is the most obvious connection prophet could have in mind, since New Testament was not written by that time. As, Dr. Chou argues, "prophetic hermeneutic is the overarching answer resulting from the response to *how OT later revelation uses previous revelation*."¹⁴ Kaiser concludes talking about, "Antecedent Scripture, where earlier citations ... 'inform' and provide the background against which new Word from God is heard."¹⁵ Chronologically Ezekiel's ministry came, roughly after two decades of Prophetic call of Jeremiah.¹⁶ Jeremiah is very specific in his revelation, however other prophets who came before Jeremiah, also prophesied similar details about the New Covenant.

We will further analyze that Prophet Jeremiah, and others gave the same revelation about the New Covenant, that affirms the literal message of Ezekiel. Therefore, from the principle of the antecedent revelation and prophetic hermeneutic, it will be established that we can reach to authorial intent of Ezekiel, Jeremiah and others. Moreover, we will establish that the New Testament does not abrogate Ezekiel's vision, rather fulfills the unity of the scripture if we truly understand prophet's words and the nature of the sacrifices in the millennium. But, before analyzing Jeremiah and others, we will briefly discuss, did Prophets really understand the true interpretation of what they spoke about? Because if they did not get it, the connection between intertextuality doesn't make sense. Therefore, we will first analyze the argument, if there was a gap between the divine intent, and the authorial intent.

¹⁴ Abner Chou, "The Prophetic Hermeneutic: Hermeneutically Defined, Theologically Displayed," (ThM Thesis, The Master's Seminary, March 2007), 14. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Hermeneutics And The Theological Task," *Trinity Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 3-14.

¹⁶ See, Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary 17 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 55.

Authorial intent of the Prophet vs Divine interpretation

Those who argue for the spiritualization of Ezekiel argue that divine intent was not the same as prophet's literal words and prophet really didn't grasp the meaning, therefore according to them deeper meaning must be explained through the lens of the New Testament. However, the scripture must be coherent with the intent of the author, and Divine intent cannot be separated from Author's intent. On the contrary, Duguid says, "Prophets didn't fully grasp the vision that they were shown."¹⁷ What he means by the word "grasp" is not larger significance but simply, "interpretation." He continues, "It was not obvious ahead of time that these prophecies should be interpreted in that way. However, with the benefit of hindsight, the New Testament authors rightly identified these texts."¹⁸ For such radical view, it is as if, one commentator suggests, "not even the prophet can easily believe his utopian visions!"¹⁹ Beal argues the same, "later interpretations may formulate *meanings* of which earlier authors may not have been conscious."²⁰ (Emphasis added) So, it is believed, God understood the meaning of the words fully, but human author was not fully aware of what he wrote.

The notion of dual intent divides, divine intent and author's intent. This dual intent hermeneutic brings confusion in significance of, Verbal plenary Inspiration of the original text. As Beal and others suggest, we must ask the question; Is it accurate to believe the dual intent in which divine intent can later change the meaning, or add the different meaning which was not

¹⁷ Iain Duguid, "Old Testament Hermeneutics," in *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture: Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. Peter A. Lillback (Philadelphia, PN: Westminster Seminary Press, 2016), 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹ A. R. Pete Diamond, "Jeremiah," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2003), 591.

²⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 381.

originally inspired to the prophet's mind? The notion that later revelation can add clarity into harmony with the original meaning is not questionable, but whether that additional meaning changes the original meaning is questionable.²¹ If later addition changes the original meaning, it makes verbal inspiration questionable. Warfield's remark is helpful that, verbal inspiration was given "not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them."²² As Klassen notes, inspiration is not just in word choice but, "it involves the full, rational participation and understanding of the human writer."²³

This establishes the fact that, miraculous nature of inspiration must be in harmony with the human author's intention, and the prophet exactly understood the divine intention of the text. If this is the case, we will now critically analyze what is the meaning of Ezekiel's temple, and then we will analyze the meaning of Temple's sacrifices in the light of the New Covenant.

Debated Meaning of Ezekiel's Temple and the Sacrifices

The reason for the debate is not just the temple description which is at the forefront but the sacrifices. The disputed significance has to do with, necessity of the sacrifices discussed in chapters 40 and 44. Because, the New Testament talks about Christ's sacrifice as once and for all, in Hebrews 10: 10–18. And, if Ezekiel still talks about the future temple and sacrifices, that

²¹ See, Christopher Ash, *The Psalms, Introduction: A Christ-Centered Commentary* 1, 1st. ed (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 112. Ash confuses "literal meaning" by first claiming that fuller meaning "does not contradict the original, conscious authorial intent," but then says, "figurative or typological readings are ... literal reading" as a part of the entire canon. This is false understanding of literal meaning, because by spiritualizing it brings additional meaning not in the harmony to the literary meaning but different than that of the literary meaning. It does not consider Historical-Grammatical meaning but brings additional meaning of allegory into the meaning, thus presents double-meaning. (Also see, Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old*, 150.)

²² Benjamin Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield, Volume 1*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1970), 547.

²³ Brad Klassen, "The Doctrine Of Inspiration And Its Implications For Hermeneutics," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 343–49.

seems a contradiction. Some say that future temple sacrifices violate Christ's sacrifice.²⁴

Therefore, we will analyze major two views of those who interpret Ezekiel 40–48 differently.

Symbolical Meaning of the Temple and the Sacrifices

The first view is the symbolical meaning. As we discussed above, one must begin with literary context to find divine meaning in harmony with authorial intent of Ezekiel. Interpreter should not presuppose priority of the New Testament bypassing antecedent prophetic revelation and come up with symbolical explanation. Conversely, Beal likewise many in his book, defines Ezekiel's temple as a non-structural symbol of an end-times new heaven.²⁵ Beal then appeals, extra biblical near eastern Jewish tradition, Midrash and many Jewish authors. Beal devotes 35 pages as a presupposition and justification for symbolism that, "the Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality."²⁶ Beal quotes Philo, an early Jewish philosopher for this symbolism of "temple as a small model of entire cosmos," which is the key to understand historical development behind Jewish tradition.²⁷ Also for this, "heavenly temple" view, Beal then has to connect and justify with other texts of Old Testament using symbolism, outside of the literary context.²⁸

However, historically there has been development that led to allegorical interpretation. Beal's appeal to near eastern tradition, is development by Philo into Jewish Midrash, and due to that, "In the early Church, the debate over the use of allegorical interpretation played itself out in

²⁴ See, Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 613.

²⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 335.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48 ft. 42. Beal quotes Philo and others for viewing "temple as a small model of entire cosmos."

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

two different schools.”²⁹ It is also noteworthy that, Jewish rabbi and evangelical Jewish scholars disagree with allegorical method, they disagree with Jewish tradition that interprets the text otherwise.³⁰ Duguid argues the same with Beal, that Ezekiel 40–48 is, “nothing less than the visionary reordering of an entire new world.”³¹ Both Beal and Duguid basically mean that, Ezekiel’s temple is symbolism of new heaven and new earth.³² Derek Thomas states the same, “Ezekiel’s vision is a type of the Christian believer ... collectively, i.e. the Church.”³³ The altar of 43:13 is assumed to be a “heavenly sanctuary,” and the temple sacrifices as, Jesus’s “sacrifice on the cross.”³⁴

However, the difficulty they all face is with exegeting the details and measurements of the temple building in 40:1–43:17. Those who spiritualize the text like Fairbairn, approves this difficulty that, “how the pillars of sixty cubits are to be understood ... these, and several other points, are involved in hopeless obscurity.”³⁵ Hence there is no other alternative in their

²⁹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine: A Companion to Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 163 ft. 3. Allison discusses that “influence of Philo of Alexandria was immense” in early Church, Philo applied Plato’s philosophy to the interpretation of Old Testament, Philo’s spiritual meaning made it necessary for allegorical method. And this is the reason, later development of School of Alexandria began allegorizing. This was the reason, Midrash were allegorical.

³⁰ See, Rabbi Dr S Fisch, *Ezekiel, Hebrew Text & English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: Soncino Press, 1960) 253; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 443; Charles Lee Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel: the glory of the Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 233-236.

³¹ Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 479.

³² Beal, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 31; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 479.

³³ Derek Thomas, *God Strengthens: Ezekiel Simply Explained* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1993), 264.

³⁴ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 494; Also see, Beal, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 306. Beal symbolizes sacrifices of temple as, new testament priestly believers “offering up sacrifice of praise to God.”

³⁵ Patrick Fairbairn, *The Visions of Ezekiel* (London: Wakeman Trust, 2002), 454.

allegorizing than to call that entire bulk of section as, “abstract and exaggerated details.”³⁶ As the result, the interpretation theory which leaves guardrails of language of the text, “lays the writer open to the charge of arbitrariness,”³⁷ and , “leaves the interpreter free to follow his or her own personal whims.”³⁸ The question remains, what is the real meaning? As we move forward to the next section, we will analyze two different approaches to interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48 and, understand the relationship of the New Covenant with Ezekiel’s temple sacrifices.

Literary contextual meaning of the temple and the sacrifices

The second view is literary meaning. The only possible way to get to the authorial intent and real meaning is to go back to the literary context. Block initially agrees that, the very beginning of the section in 40:1–2, “the characterization of the structure by, ‘city,’ is intentional ... designation applies not to the city Jerusalem as a whole, but to the temple complex, conceived as ‘a walled enclosure.’”³⁹ Therefore the natural meaning should be the real structural temple and walls that Ezekiel had in mind when he saw the vision. Also, the measurements all throughout the whole section are the typical measuring Hebrew normal units, “cubit is about eighteen inches long (see Deut. 3:11).”⁴⁰ This also adds the legitimacy of literal temple structure meant in Ezekiel. Far from being meaningless details, the dimensions for inner sanctuary (41:1–4), chambers (41:5–11), outer wall (42:15–20), altar (43:13–17), all are methodical real

³⁶ Thomas, *God Strengthens*, 264.

³⁷ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel: the glory of the Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 233.

³⁸ Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 150.

³⁹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 514.

⁴⁰ Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel*, 242.

measurements compatible with “architectural convention” and the symmetry of the structure.⁴¹ Since, the details of the temple mentioned in chapters 40–44 does not match with any other temple built including Solomon’s temple, for “details are quite different,” thus the vision of Ezekiel is about the new literal temple, that will be built in the millennium.⁴²

Now, the sacrifices in the temple (44:27–30) and the Levitical priests (44:15–18) who perform those sacrifices are the heart of the debate. If the temple is literal, the sacrifices cannot be non-literal, because scripture must be coherent. Literal view of the sacrifices doesn’t minimize redemptive work of Christ, which is addressed later. However, Duguid likewise many, incorrectly suggests that Ezekiel is symbolically referring the fact that, Christ and his “atoning sacrifice paid for our redemption.”⁴³ This interpretive style of symbolism is affected from the reformation tradition since, “Calvin was influenced by Plato through the fathers, notably Augustin.”⁴⁴ Others see it incorrectly as a recapitulation theory, to believe the priests and the sacrifices are describing the previous chapters of Ezekiel, and describe Levites as “guards” who did not pay their duty in chapters 6–14.⁴⁵ Block initially interprets whole section literally with face value of the language but ends briefly with symbolical remarks that, believers are priests and sacrifices are fulfilled in Christ, without dealing with exegetical arguments.⁴⁶ Thus they

⁴¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 519.

⁴² Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel*, 233.

⁴³ Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 525.

⁴⁴ Charles Partee, “The Soul in Plato, Platonism, and Calvin,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (September 1969): 278–95.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Kilchör, “The Meaning of Ezekiel 44,6-14 in Light of Ezekiel 1-39,” *Biblica*, no. 2 (2017): 191–207.

⁴⁶ Block, *The book of Ezekiel*, 647–658.

allegorize the whole section of Ezekiel 40–48 as something being fulfilled in Christ and the Church or in eternity.

However, that kind of reasoning which emphasizes symbolism only further begs the question, why would God give such plethora of details, “it would be a small step to allegorizing.”⁴⁷ Also, those who allegorize, “interpret Ezekiel’s earlier, now-fulfilled prophecies literally, yet interpret his yet unfulfilled prophecies symbolically.”⁴⁸ That is inconsistent way to interpret whole section of Ezekiel. Similarly, proponents who think that Ezekiel is talking about heavenly Jerusalem, cannot explain dissimilarities between Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 21. Apostle John specifically notes, there is no temple in Revelation 21:22, whereas Ezekiel spends four chapters on temple details.⁴⁹ That is not only an inconsistent arbitrary genre decision, but rather than dealing with the exegetical foundation from the immediate text as connection for symbolism, thus they quickly presuppose the symbolism from New Testament parallelism.

The only solution is to consider the text at its face value, as we do with other scriptures. As we apply details of tabernacle in Exodus 25–40 to be literal, it is not unusual to apply details of Ezekiel 40–48 to be literal future temple.⁵⁰ Also, in the same literary section, we find names of locations in 47:15–20, those names favor the literal view since, “the geographical locations are so exact that they cannot mean other than literal places.”⁵¹ Therefore, true interpretation is literal

⁴⁷ Jerry M. Hullinger, “The Problem Of Animal Sacrifices In Ezekiel 40-48,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, no. 152 (July 1995): 279–89.

⁴⁸ Charles Dyre, “Ezekiel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* 1, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 1304.

⁴⁹ See, Hullinger, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 25.

⁵⁰ See Dyre, Ezekiel, 1304. Dyre notes, ““Since God gave detailed instructions for building the tabernacle to accompany His inauguration of Mosaic Covenant (cf. Ex. 25–40), it is not unusual that He would also supply detailed plans for his new center of worship, to accompany the implementation of the New Covenant.”

⁵¹ Fineberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, 274.

one which looks Ezekiel 40–48 as real temple going to be built in the millennium Kingdom. Thus, if the temple is literal, it is obvious that, sacrifices mentioned in Ezekiel 40:41,42; 44:11; 46:24 are also literal “sacrifices of the millennial” temple.⁵² Since the whole section of Ezekiel 40–48 is one literary section, we cannot arbitrarily choose few passages to be symbolical.

Literal view and the prophetic revelation about the New Covenant

Literary contextual meaning of sacrifices in the revelation of Ezekiel does not necessitate the violation of the New Covenant, and Christ’s finished work on the cross mentioned in Hebrew 10:11–18. Because, all scripture is inspired by God, there cannot be a contradiction between two revelations of the scripture. However, those who deny literal meaning of Ezekiel’s temple sacrifices say, “in the new covenant, the Levitical priesthood serving at a physical building is obsolete.”⁵³ According to some, reinstatement of literal sacrifice in future temple is, “contrary to the biblical explanation that Christ abolished the sacrificial system once for all.”⁵⁴

McKenzie rightly argues, “Covenant Theology teaches that according to the New Testament the New Covenant has already begun ... will be completed when He returns and brings about New Heavens and the New Earth.”⁵⁵ The only problem with covenant theology is, they allegorize large part of scripture that talks about different realities of the New Covenant. The literal view consistently demands all the aspects of the New Covenant to be taken into

⁵² Ibid., 243.

⁵³ Duane A. Garrett and Calvin F. Pearson, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, Kerux Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Kregge, 2022), 310.

⁵⁴ F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, The New American Commentary 16, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 302.

⁵⁵ McKenzie, *Identifying the Seed*, 73.

consideration. In transition, this paper will first analyze Jeremiah's New Covenant message and then will further analyze other prophets' view on the New Covenant. After that, this paper will conclude, the literal view is in the harmony with Christ's sacrifice in the New Testament.

Jeremiah's Vision of the New Covenant

The New Covenant is specifically mentioned in Jeremiah 31:27–34. That of course talks about Spiritual blessings, but linked with it is the next section of Jeremiah 31:38–40 that talks about, “physical rebuilding of Jerusalem.”⁵⁶ God talks about physical reality and the certainty of Israel as a restored nation in His New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:36. The same language of the New Covenant continues in Jeremiah 33:14–20, “The permanence of the New Covenant is again expressed in creation language. The immovability order of the day and the night.”⁵⁷ Even opponents of literal view agree that, “Yahweh has not forgotten his ancient covenant with Levi.”⁵⁸ Jeremiah 33:18 says that Levitical priest shall offer sacrifices, continually in the New Covenant. Not only, “these promises are part of the New Covenant,”⁵⁹ but the promise of Jeremiah 33:18 is consistent with Ezekiel 40–48, since “Levitical priests are also given a future role in Ezek. 40:46; 43:9; 44:15; 48:11.”⁶⁰ Long before Ezekiel, Jeremiah proclaimed that Levites would have, “revival of priesthood.”⁶¹ This cannot be confused with the New Testament

⁵⁶ Tiberius Rata, “The Covenant Motif in Jeremiah's Book of Comfort: Textual and Intertextual Studies of Jeremiah 30-33,” *Studies in Biblical Literature*, no. 105 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁸ Block, *Ezekiel*, 629.

⁵⁹ Rata, *The Covenant Motif in Jeremiah's Book of Comfort*, 81.

⁶⁰ Walter C. Kaiser and Tiberius Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 397.

⁶¹ John A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, Nachdr., *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2007), 602.

believers, because “the text here refers to the priests, the Levites.”⁶² In the future millennium when physical manifestation of Christ and His rule will be evident, this promise of “legitimate priest ... of the Levitical priesthood, fit well with the legitimate King, who will reign.”⁶³ Moreover, the language to Israel is so specific and combined with the rules of cosmos that, to spiritualize it with the Church, “would be tantamount to God’s saying to America, ‘I will always bless you as a nation and will never forsake you,’ only to say several generations later, ‘but I have now designated France as America.”⁶⁴ Remarkably, Jeremiah came before Ezekiel, this also proves the earlier principle discussed in this paper that, antecedent revelation informs and confirms later revelation.

Other Prophetic revelations about the New Covenant Sacrifices

Not only Jeremiah is particular about the sacrifices in the later times, but other prophets also give validity to the literal view of the future sacrifices and temple. Isaiah before Jeremiah saw burnt offerings on the coming future altar (Isa. 56:7), Isaiah saw offerings in Isa. 66:20, “just as the sons of Israel bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. I will also take some of them for priests *and* for Levites, says the Lord.” This was done by the Levites as priests and, this is being done before new heaven and new earth in Isa. 66:22. Hosea 3:4, sees returning of sacrifices after, “many days.” Zechariah saw coming physical geographical reign of Messiah as future reality in Zech. 14:9, still saw in verse 21, “Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them

⁶² Ibid., 602

⁶³ Hetty Lalleman and H. Lalleman-De Winkel, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 21 (IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 243.

⁶⁴ Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 425.

and boil in them.” Notice future tense of the verse, makes it possible that Zechariah is not mentioning spiritual reign of God which was present all the time but future reality of sacrifices. Lastly, Malachi 3:3-4 clearly declares, “He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.” As Verhoef notes, Hebrew term is general term for “sacrificial animals ... Hebrew construction *haya* with the participle *maggise* denotes a continuous action.”⁶⁵ These fits perfectly well with Jeremiah’s vision in Jer. 33:18, when the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before God to offer burnt offerings. If Malachi was the last prophet before the Christ, it makes complete sense, that the prophets saw these sacrifices as the coming reality. So, we can see that, not just the antecedent of Ezekiel presents same vision but even the later generation of prophets preach the same future vision. The last prophet Malachi just few centuries before Christ declares the same vision.

Do future temple sacrifices contradict the New Covenant?

Some have argued that future millennium temple sacrifices are contradictory to the New Covenant.⁶⁶ Huey first concedes the fact that, grammatical interpretation would require literal sacrifice in the future, but then he argues, “This interpretation is contrary to the Biblical interpretation that Christ abolished sacrificed once and for all (cf. Gal 3:1–3; Heb 10:1–16).”⁶⁷ This dilemma is removed once we understand the function of the future sacrifices.

⁶⁵ Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 292.

⁶⁶ See, Garrett and Pearson, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 310; Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations (ESV Edition): From Sorrow to Hope*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) 522–23.

⁶⁷ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 302.

Firstly, we look at the function of OT sacrifices. The sacrifices of the OT were never efficacious to take away sins. Since the New Testament is crystal clear, “for it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). We might ask, what was the purpose of OT sacrifices? Briley notes the function of OT sacrifices was for different purpose since, “the object of atonement is the sanctuary. Atonement also makes forgiveness possible, but the initial purpose of atonement is to purify the sanctuary (which has been inevitably defiled by the people's sins) so that God can continue to dwell in the midst of his people.”⁶⁸ This was necessary because of the divine presence in the temple.

Secondly, now we evaluate the OT sacrifices with the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ. As we saw, animal sacrifices were never efficacious to forgive the sin in the first place. But “animal sacrifices were efficacious in removing ceremonial uncleanness ... the author of Hebrews is admittedly demonstrating the superiority of Christ over this.”⁶⁹ The phrase in Hebrews 10:10, “*once for all*”, is not contrasted with animal sacrifices in redemptive sense. The efficacious value of animal sacrifices was ceremonial, but Christ’s sacrifice is redemptive and exclusively one-time, self-efficacious event. Thus, Hebrews talks about once for all sacrifice of Christ, in redemptive sense, while OT sacrifices never served that purpose. The sin offering of Ezek. 43:22 was for cleansing of the altar (cf. 43:20, 26). It should not be compared with Hebrew 10:10, which is efficacious for redemption. There is no contradiction with Christ’s sacrifice and Ezekiel’s temple, since OT sacrifices were never made for that purpose to begin with.

⁶⁸ Terry Briley, “The Old Testament Sin Offering and Christ’s Atonement,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 (Spring 2000): 97–99.

⁶⁹ Hullinger, 197.

So, how do we understand the exact purpose of future millennium sacrifices? Some say, Ezekiel's sacrifices in future millennium, represents "memorial" aspect of Christ's death, just like Lord's supper today represents memorial of Christ's death.⁷⁰ But, the memorial view is lacking full exegetical support since, the word "atonement" is used in Ezel 43:20, 26. The Hebrew word כפר does not carry memorial aspect, but it can have multiple senses. One sense in which it definitely "covers sin so as to avert punishment," but another sense of the word can mean, "to cleanse ritually."⁷¹ The same sense of ritual cleansing which cleanses not just the altar but the person's outward defilements while coming to the sanctuary can be seen in the OT. For example, cleansing the altar in Ex. 29:36; Lev. 8:15; 16:18 and for ceremonial cleansing or the priest's outward defilement in Leviticus 4:35; 14:19; 19:22. Thus, these sacrifices took away outward uncleanness from the altar and the person.

The same function in future will be required because in the millennium there will be physical presence of the sinful humans with divine presence. Hence, "it will be necessary to reinstitute sacrifices so that judgement against impurity will not break out on earth."⁷² The same sense of the atonement is used by Ezekiel 43:20, 26. Because it explicitly says in Ez. 43:26, "For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it." This will not be the case in eternity, since there is no presence of sin in eternal state. The whole act will remind us of God's holiness, in that sense it could be memorial, just like it reminded in the OT (Heb. 10:3). Thus, "Future animal sacrifices will be efficacious and expiatory only in terms of strict provision for

⁷⁰ Dyre, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1305.

⁷¹ "כפר," Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 494.

⁷² Hullinger, 153.

ceremonial” cleansing.⁷³ Therefore, these future sacrifices will serve something more than primarily memorial aspect, but in no sense, they contradict the finished work of Christ or the New Covenant.

Conclusion

This paper has clarified that New Testament priority hermeneutics does not regard the exegetical honesty or grammatical language of Ezekiel, nor do that take into consideration several prophetic hermeneutics who prophesied the same thing. Therefore, to understand the authorial intent we do not infuse foreign NT text into Ezekiel’s vision, but we found the answer for the conundrum in Ezekiel itself and the antecedent revelation of the Old Testament. This paper has argued not to interpret Ezekiel’s temple symbolically because, with presuppositions it opens the flood of subjectivism about authorial intent. Allegory must be described by the text.

Regarding the future millennium sacrifices, we concluded that Ezekiel’s vision of the temple sacrifices will serve totally different purpose than that of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, this view is consistent with the OT details about sacrifices. Apart from that purpose the sacrifices will also serve, “visible reminder of Israel’s relationship to God through His New Covenant.”⁷⁴ The literal view of future sacrifices do not supplant the perfect sacrifice of Christ and the New Covenant, but “it is rather to celebrate the redemptive work of the Messiah.”⁷⁵ Thus, Far from

⁷³ John Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2, (1985): 208–11. Whitcomb notes, “Other prophets who spoke of the future temple were Joel (3:18), Micah (4:1–5), Daniel (9:24), and Haggai (2:7,9). Zechariah foresaw the strict enforcement of the Feast of Tabernacles among all Gentile nations (14:16–19; cf. Ezek 45:25). Zechariah also anticipated, in connection with the fulfillment of the New Covenant (9:11; 13:1), that “all who sacrifice will come and take [every cooking pot in Jerusalem] and boil in them” (14:21).” This makes consistent with prophetic hermeneutic as a whole and unity of the scripture.

⁷⁴ Dyre, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1304.

⁷⁵ Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 402.

being, “Jewish-carnal” hope,⁷⁶ a rhetoric of Origen,⁷⁷ Ezekiel re-affirms the glorious coming, “Kingdom of Christ,”⁷⁸ and the hope of physical manifestation of the rule from Zion by the righteous branch of David. Certainly, there is “much more than the vision of a future temple,” but never less than future temple.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Fairbairn, *The Visions of Ezekiel*, 433.

⁷⁷ Origen being influenced by Philo and Plato thought literal view of scripture is, “to gather with the Jews rather than with Christians.” See, Origen, “Homilies on Genesis and Exodus,” in *The Fathers of the Church* 71, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Baltimore: Catholic University Press, 1982), Homily VI, 121-22.

⁷⁸ Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel*, 247.

⁷⁹ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel; an Analytical Exposition*, 2nd ed. (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Bros, 1972), 273

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