

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Disregarders of the Lost Ark”
41:1-26

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan prompted President Jimmy Carter to issue an ultimatum that the United States would boycott the Moscow Olympics if Soviet troops did not withdraw from the country by 12:01am Eastern Standard Time on February 20, 1980.

The United States was joined in the boycott by a few other countries - including Japan, West Germany, China, the Philippines and Canada. The United Kingdom and France supported the boycott but allowed their athletes to participate if they wished.

Regardless your opinion on the effectiveness of the boycott, and regarding patriotism in general, many athletes missed the only opportunity they'd ever have to compete for something they'd trained for all their lives.

Ezekiel had missed an opportunity. At the start of our studies we noted that although Ezekiel was a priest, he was exiled to Babylon before he was of age to actually serve in the Temple at Jerusalem.

To say it was a disappointment would be an understatement. But now, as his visions are concluding and his book is nearing its end, Ezekiel is getting a glimpse of the future Temple, the Millennial Temple. He saw it before any other Israelite, priest or otherwise. Not only that, he was guided on his tour by the Lord Himself.

I think it more than made up for his missed opportunity in the sixth century!

What is it you and I may ‘miss’ as we are called upon to serve the Lord? Seriously, there are sacrifices to be made if you are going to live for Jesus.

But rather than stew over them, get depressed by them, determine to look ahead to what the Lord has promised you.

As we follow Ezekiel on his tour I can’t help but think of the day I will be led by the Lord to the door of the mansion He’s been away preparing for me in a city He’s building for us, made of all the finest and most precious materials in all creation.

It’s a thought that has motivated saints for centuries. In the famous Hall of Faith chapter (Hebrews 11), Abraham is described as going “out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance... And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (v8-10).

Later in the chapter saints are described who “wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth” (v37-38).

If you’re slightly discouraged about your situation, think of Ezekiel’s sneak-peak as an example of what is waiting for you.

In verses one through four Ezekiel was shown the holy of holies and the Most Holy Place.

Ezekiel 41:1 Then he brought me into the sanctuary and measured the doorposts, six cubits wide on one side and six cubits wide on the other side - the width of the tabernacle.

Ezekiel 41:2 The width of the entryway was ten cubits, and the side walls of the entrance were five cubits on this side and five cubits on the other side; and he measured its length, forty cubits, and its width, twenty cubits.

Ezekiel 41:3 Also he went inside and measured the doorposts, two cubits; and the entrance, six cubits high; and the width of the entrance, seven cubits.

Ezekiel 41:4 He measured the length, twenty cubits; and the width, twenty cubits, beyond the sanctuary; and he said to me, "This is the Most Holy Place."

In the Old Testament Tabernacle and, later, Temple, the Most Holy Place was God's special dwelling place in the midst of His people. The Most Holy Place was a perfect cube — its length, width and height were all equal to 15 feet. During the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness, God appeared as a pillar of cloud or fire in and above this chamber.

A thick curtain separated the holy of holies from the Most Holy Place. This curtain, known as the "veil," was made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn. There were figures of cherubim (angels) embroidered onto it. These cherubim were also on the innermost layer of covering of the tent. If one looked upward, they would see the cherubim figures.

The word "veil" in Hebrew means a screen, divider or separator that hides. What was this curtain hiding? It was shielding a holy God from sinful man. Whoever entered into the Holy of Holies was entering the very presence of God. In fact, anyone except the high priest who entered the Holy of Holies would die. Even the high priest, God's chosen mediator with His people, could only pass through the veil and enter this sacred dwelling once a year, on a prescribed day called the Day of Atonement.

When Jesus died the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. It signified that the way into the presence of God was open to all through the mediation of Jesus.

The Lord takes Ezekiel into the holy place, the outer room, but not into the "Most Holy Place." He alone enters that chamber.

There's no veil, signifying that access to the Lord is always available. But there remains a separation to communicate to nonbelievers that God is holy.

The fact this Person guiding Ezekiel's tour freely enters the Most Holy Place is perhaps the strongest evidence it is Jesus and not an angel.

Next Ezekiel was shown the rooms surrounding the Tabernacle rooms.

Ezekiel 41:5 Next, he measured the wall of the temple, six cubits. The width of each side chamber all around the temple was four cubits on every side.

Ezekiel 41:6 The side chambers were in three stories, one above the other, thirty chambers in each story; they rested on ledges which were for the side chambers all around, that they might be supported, but not fastened to the wall of the temple.

Ezekiel 41:7 As one went up from story to story, the side chambers became wider all around, because their supporting ledges in the wall of the temple ascended like steps; therefore the width of the structure increased as one went up from the lowest story to the highest by way of the middle one.

Ezekiel 41:8 I also saw an elevation all around the temple; it was the foundation of the side chambers, a full rod, that is, six cubits high.

Ezekiel 41:9 The thickness of the outer wall of the side chambers was five cubits, and so also the remaining terrace by the place of the side chambers of the temple.

Ezekiel 41:10 And between it and the wall chambers was a width of twenty cubits all around the temple on every side.

Ezekiel 41:11 The doors of the side chambers opened on the terrace, one door toward the north and another toward the south; and the width of the terrace was five cubits all around.

Surrounding the temple will be three levels, three stories, of side rooms, one above another, thirty on each level. In Solomon's Temple these rooms were storerooms for the temple equipment and storage chambers for the people's tithes and offerings.

Will there be tithes and offerings in the Millennium? Apparently there will.

What does that suggest to you? Mind you, it's the Millennium and the Lord is on the earth and streams are breaking out in the desert. God really doesn't need anything. He's not broke.

It suggests that giving is important from the perspective of the giver. It's good for you and I to give to God.

For one thing, giving is good because it causes you to get alone with God and take a look at how He's blessed you, how He is caring for you.

Gratitude toward God will develop into generosity towards His people as you are encouraged to give to His work on earth.

Ezekiel next sees a building whose purpose and use remains undisclosed.

Ezekiel 41:12 The building that faced the separating courtyard at its western end was seventy cubits wide; the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length ninety cubits.

Ezekiel 41:13 So he measured the temple, one hundred cubits long; and the separating courtyard with the building and its walls was one hundred cubits long;

Ezekiel 41:14 also the width of the eastern face of the temple, including the separating courtyard, was one hundred cubits.

There is conjecture that this building will be where animal parts that are not part of the sacrifices will be taken in order to be disposed of. They get that from the use of the word “separating.” But really we’re not told exactly what it’s purpose will be.

Jesus did not feel the need to make a full disclosure of this building to Ezekiel. It reminds me that I will not always be privileged to everything the Lord is doing as He builds in my life. Some things will remain a mystery to me.

At many points I’m going to have to walk by faith, trusting that the Lord knows best for me. Indeed, if He explained some things ahead of time, I’d probably refuse them! Then I’d miss the lessons, the opportunities, the maturing that He deems needful along my journey home to Heaven.

Ezekiel next saw some “galleries.”

Ezekiel 41:15 He measured the length of the building behind it, facing the separating courtyard, with its galleries on the one side and on the other side, one hundred cubits, as well as the inner temple and the porches of the court,

Ezekiel 41:16 their doorposts and the beveled window frames. And the galleries all around their three stories opposite the threshold were paneled with wood from the ground to the windows - the windows were covered -

Ezekiel 41:17 from the space above the door, even to the inner room, as well as outside, and on every wall all around, inside and outside, by measure.

Ezekiel 41:18 And it was made with cherubim and palm trees, a palm tree between cherub and cherub. Each cherub had two faces,

Ezekiel 41:19 so that the face of a man was toward a palm tree on one side, and the face of a young lion toward a palm tree on the other side; thus it was made throughout the temple all around.

Ezekiel 41:20 From the floor to the space above the door, and on the wall of the sanctuary, cherubim and palm trees were carved.

These “galleries” are something like terraced lofts. I admit I’m having a hard time visualizing all this. I’m not good at understanding things from a description.

What I would note in this section is the carvings. We talked about this in our last study in Ezekiel but it bears repeating. God is concerned with both function and form. He likes beautiful things and He likes making things beautiful.

It is not automatically more spiritual to be a minimalist, or to do the very least in order to get by, or to be as plain as possible. If you don’t have much to work with, you can still do your best, make it as nice as it can be. If nothing else it can be clean, neat, picked-up.

Some people who assume less is better are really just lazy.

Your mansion, and the New Jerusalem, are going to be top-drawer, first rate. No detail will be overlooked. Until we get there we should be no less interested in details.

Finally, at least with regard to chapter forty-one, Ezekiel saw an altar.

Ezekiel 41:21 The doorposts of the temple were square, as was the front of the sanctuary; their appearance was similar.

Ezekiel 41:22 The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits. Its corners, its length, and its sides were of wood; and he said to me, "This is the table that is before the Lord."

Ezekiel 41:23 The temple and the sanctuary had two doors.

Ezekiel 41:24 The doors had two panels apiece, two folding panels: two panels for one door and two panels for the other door.

Ezekiel 41:25 Cherubim and palm trees were carved on the doors of the temple just as they were carved on the walls. A wooden canopy was on the front of the vestibule outside.

Ezekiel 41:26 There were beveled window frames and palm trees on one side and on the other, on the sides of the vestibule - also on the side chambers of the temple and on the canopies.

This altar corresponds to the altar of incense in the Old Testament Temple.

We need to be careful to make arguments from silence, but it is interesting to note that a lot of familiar items of Temple furniture are not listed.

Most notably you don't see the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant is first mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 25. Following Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God instructs Moses to build the Tabernacle (or tent) in which the Israelites will worship God. Placed in the Most Holy Place the Ark of the Covenant was the most sacred object in the Tabernacle.

Detailed instructions were given by God to construct the Ark. It was to be made with acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Dimensionally, the Ark was to be 2.5 cubits long and 1.5 cubits wide and high. Atop the Ark were two gold cherubs that stood with their wings covering an area of the Ark known as the "Mercy Seat."

The Ark of the Covenant contained three items of extreme significance to the Israelites.

1. The first was two stone tablets bearing the divine inscription of the Ten Commandments.
2. The second item in the Ark was the rod of Aaron. God miraculously caused Aaron's rod to bud with blossoms to show the rest of the tribes of Israel that it was God's will for Aaron to be in charge of the Priesthood (Numbers 17).
3. The last item was a golden pot of manna. Manna was the food God miraculously provided for the Israelites during their 40 years of desert wanderings (Exodus 16).

The Ark of the Covenant disappeared from the Jewish Temple somewhere before or during the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 586BC.

There are lots of theories as to where the Ark might be. The Ethiopians claim that they have it. In Israel the Temple Institute is the group replicating

articles for the restoration of Temple sacrifice. Here is what they say about the Ark.

Tradition records that even as King Solomon built the First Temple, he already knew, through Divine inspiration, that eventually it would be destroyed. Thus Solomon, the wisest of all men, oversaw the construction of a vast system of labyrinths, mazes, chambers and corridors underneath the Temple Mount complex. He commanded that a special place be built in the bowels of the earth, where the sacred vessels of the Temple could be hidden in case of approaching danger... tradition teaches that King Josiah of Israel, who lived about forty years before the destruction of the First Temple, commanded the Levites to hide the Ark, together with the original menorah and several other items, in this secret hiding place which Solomon had prepared.

This location is recorded in our sources, and today, there are those who know exactly where this chamber is. And we know that the ark is still there, undisturbed, and waiting for the day when it will be revealed.

An attempt was made some few years ago to excavate towards the direction of this chamber. This resulted in widespread Moslem unrest and rioting. They stand a great deal to lose if the Ark is revealed - for it will prove to the whole world that there really was a Holy Temple, and thus, that the Jews really do have a claim to the Temple Mount.

Quite honestly, I don't think the Ark exists on earth anymore. The Ark was probably lost or destroyed when the Babylonians sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. If Jews had hidden it, the Ark would surely have been used in the Second Temple, which the historian Josephus says it wasn't.

Furthermore, there is this passage from Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 3:16 "Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the Lord, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.

This verse comes as quite a shock to some Christians who have assumed that the Ark must be found before the Tribulation Temple can be built and animal sacrifice reinstated. Others have simply assumed that the Ark would be replaced in the Holy of Holies when the Lord's Millennial Temple is built.

I don't expect the Ark to be found. At any rate, it won't be in the final Temple that is on the future earth because Jesus, the mediator of the new and better covenant, will be there.

Conceivably, the Ark could be discovered. The context of this Jeremiah passage is the Millennial reign of Jesus so it does not rule out the possibility of a discovery prior to that time. The important point to keep in mind here is that the rediscovery of the Ark is not essential to the rebuilding of the Temple. After all, the Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel following the Babylonian captivity and the Ark had already been lost by that time. There was no Ark in the Holy of Holies during the time when Jesus worshiped in the Temple.

In the detailed descriptions and measurements of Ezekiel's vision we can be reminded of the glories to come for all who belong to God - a temple not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, which we shall not merely visit in a vision, but shall dwell in forever.

