

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“A Tour de Future”

40:1-5

Everyone who reads the last nine chapters of Ezekiel asks and therefore must answer this question: Will there be animal sacrifices in the Temple during the future Millennial Kingdom on the earth?

You have to ask because not too far into reading about the Millennial Temple you encounter 40:38-43.

Ezekiel 40:38 There was a chamber and its entrance by the gateposts of the gateway, where they washed **the burnt offering**.

Ezekiel 40:39 In the vestibule of the gateway were two tables on this side and two tables on that side, on which to **slay the burnt offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering**.

Ezekiel 40:40 At the outer side of the vestibule, as one goes up to the entrance of the northern gateway, were two tables; and on the other side of the vestibule of the gateway were two tables.

Ezekiel 40:41 Four tables were on this side and four tables on that side, by the side of the gateway, eight tables **on which they slaughtered the sacrifices**.

Ezekiel 40:42 There were also four tables of hewn stone for **the burnt offering**, one cubit and a half long, one cubit and a half wide, and one cubit high; on these they laid the instruments with which they **slaughtered the burnt offering and the sacrifice**.

Ezekiel 40:43 Inside were hooks, a handbreadth wide, fastened all around; **and the flesh of the sacrifices was on the tables**.

The answer to the question, “Will there be animal sacrifices in the Temple at Jerusalem during the future Millennial Kingdom on Earth?” is “**Yes!**”

Ezekiel is not the only book that says animals will be sacrificed in the future kingdom.

Isaiah 56:6 "Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants - Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant -

Isaiah 56:7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Isaiah 56:8 The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, "Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to him."

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

(The Feast of Tabernacles involves lots of animals being slaughtered and sacrificed).

Jeremiah 33:15 'In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David A Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

Jeremiah 33:16 In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'

Jeremiah 33:17 "For thus says the Lord: 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel;

Jeremiah 33:18 nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually.'"

- "But," critics say, "I thought Jesus' death on the Cross abolished animal sacrifices once and for all?"
- "But," critics say, "I thought conditions on earth during the Millennial Kingdom would be near perfect, with lions lying down with lambs?"

Let's talk about the place of sacrifices in relation to the Cross of Jesus Christ. The sacrifices in the Old Testament **never saved anyone!** A person was saved when they believed God and were justified by His grace.

The once-for-all sacrifice for sin by Jesus Christ was portrayed, it was illustrated, by the animal sacrifices. One author put it like this: "The sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant pictorialized the work of Jesus Christ in order that the Israelite might understand what the Messiah would accomplish on behalf of mankind."

So, by themselves, sacrifices do not in any way diminish Christ's once-for-all sacrifice on the Cross. In the Old Testament they pointed forward to it. In the Millennial Kingdom they will point back to it. The Cross remains the focal point and salvation will be as it always has been, by grace alone through faith alone.

Thinking about folks looking back on the Cross brings us to the second criticism, that conditions on the Millennial earth will dictate against the slaughter of animals. What you need to understand about those thousand years is that the inhabitants of the earth will still be in their natural human bodies. They will still be sinners. In fact, we read in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ that at the end of the thousand years Satan is let loose from the Abyss to lead a rebellion of human beings against Jesus.

During that future time righteousness and holiness will prevail, but those with earthly bodies will still have a sin nature and there will be a need to teach about how offensive sin is to a holy and righteous God. Animal sacrifices will serve that purpose. "In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year" (Hebrews 10:3) said the writer to the Hebrews regarding the Mosaic sacrifices. The same need for a "reminder of sins year by year" will be needed in the future.

The conditions that will prevail during Christ's reign over the earth might even make animal sacrifices more necessary. I mean, those born in say year 500, are they really going to understand what it was like that Jesus was crucified on a Cross at Calvary? They will as they participate in the Temple feasts and sacrifices.

Millions of children will be born who will still need to be born-again. It's hard enough in today's fallen world to convince your kids there is real physical danger. How hard will it be in a near perfect environment to convince them of a very real spiritual danger - that of perishing eternally separated from God? Believe me, parents will need their kids to see animals sacrificed.

Scholars have compared the description of the feasts and sacrifices Ezekiel presents with those under the Law of Moses. There are important

differences. Not all the feasts and articles of furniture described by Moses are included by Ezekiel.

- There is no mention of the veil. Why not? Because with Jesus on the earth there will be no barrier between man and God.
- There is no mention of the table of shewbread. Why not? Because Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, will be present.
- There is no mention of lampstands. Why not? Because Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, is on earth.
- There is no mention of the ark of the covenant. It will be unnecessary because the glory of God will fill the earth.

The system of feasts and sacrifices Ezekiel describes is similar to the one in the Mosaic Law but different and specific to the Millennium. That is to say, what Ezekiel is talking about is a real future system of worship that will be in effect in the Millennial Kingdom.

Here are two other random but interesting observations about Ezekiel's description of things to come:

- The land of Israel will be redistributed among the twelve tribes. It will be divided into three areas. Seven tribes will occupy the northern area and five the southern. Between these areas there seems to be a section called "the holy oblation." It is a section set apart for the Lord. Merrill Unger says, "The holy oblation [is] a spacious square, 34 miles each way, containing about 1160 square miles. The Temple itself [is] located in the middle of this square, and not in the city of Jerusalem... upon a very high mountain, which will be miraculously made ready for that purpose when the Temple is to be erected."
- Four times in these chapters we're told that the sons of Zadok will be assigned the priestly duties in the Temple. Zadok was a priest in King David's time. Because of his unwavering loyalty he was promised that his offspring would have this glorious posting.

Looking over these nine chapters they outline as follows:

- 40:1 - 43:2 describe the Millennial Temple.

- 43:3 - 46:24 describe the Millennial worship.
- 47:1 - 48:35 describe the new apportioning of land to the tribes of Israel.

Let's get started by looking at verses one through five of chapter forty.

Ezekiel 40:1 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the Lord was upon me; and He took me there.

The date was sometime in 573BC. The phrase "the beginning of the year" isn't easy to pin down.

- The Israelite religious new year began in Nisan (April-May) and was established at the time of the Exodus.
- However, in Israel's later history the seventh month, Tishri (October-November), became established as the first month of Israel's civil year.

So the date could be either April 28, 573BC or October 22, 573BC. The October date was also the Day of Atonement.

God "took" Ezekiel to Jerusalem. He transported him to the future by means of waking visions.

What a crazy ministry Ezekiel had!

Ezekiel 40:2 In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a city.

Ezekiel is going to go on a tour of the future Temple which he records in painstaking detail.

Ezekiel 40:3 He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.

Since this "man" is later called "Lord," we believe it is a Christophany - an Old Testament appearance in bodily form by Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel 40:4 And the man said to me, "Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see."

Ezekiel is told to give the tour his full and undivided attention. That strikes me as odd. Here he was, transported by a waking vision to the future and in the presence of the Lord. Does he really need to be told to pay attention? Apparently he did.

How much more, then, do we need to be reminded to pay attention to the things the Lord is showing us, telling us, teaching us.

Ezekiel 40:5 Now there was a wall all around the outside of the temple. In the man's hand was a measuring rod six cubits long, each being a cubit and a handbreadth; and he measured the width of the wall structure, one rod; and the height, one rod.

A "cubit" is somewhere around 18 inches and a "handbreadth" about three and one-half inches. It may not sound like much of a tool but, man, will He show Ezekiel an awful lot using it!

It's not so much the tool as it is the Craftsman using it. When it's the Lord, He can accomplish all His heart desires.

If this is the Lord in a Christophany, we see that He loves to plan and to build. We know that Jesus created the universe:

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

When the Lord was on the earth He said He would build His church:

Matthew 16:18 ... on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

In Heaven, while we are awaiting His return, He said He'd be building our mansions:

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.
John 14:2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
John 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

You are His work, too. Individually we are each called His temple on the earth today.

He's building into your life those things that will endure for eternity. He can use anything, really, to accomplish His project in you. Things fall usually into two categories: They are either blessings or buffetings, or you might say times of abounding and times of being abased.

The thing that will strike you and, I daresay bore you, about these nine chapters is the attention to detail. Much as we want to care about every last thread, we're not Israel.

But you are His project and He who began this good work in you has promised to complete it. Jesus puts the same attention to detail into your life - and that is something we each ought to get excited about!