



Sermon Series Weekly Devotionals

Week of March 18

READ ch. 41, The New Temple (cont.)

REVIEW. The year is 572 B.C. (40:1), and the Lord has brought Ezekiel in a vision from Babylon to Jerusalem--to the top of Mount Scopus, just north of the Mt. of Olives (40:2)--to show him the future temple. The Lord had departed the old temple that he had called home, for his people had “pushed him out” by filling it with their favorite idols (ch. 10-11). He had abandoned it, and the “city of his Name,” to the Babylonians, and they had burned it. But for his Name’s sake, he would not—he could not—abandon it forever. He would return, set his sanctuary in the midst of his people, and enter it again in glory (43:1-9).

In ch. 40 Ezekiel was shown the temple wall, gates, and some of the chambers. Now in ch. 41, he is shown the holy place and most holy place, and given their dimensions (1-4); the side rooms, outbuilding, and interior furnishings. What detail is given! Such detail leads us to believe this is to be a real temple, the millennial temple. If it were simply conveying a spiritual lesson, why do we need to know that exactly eight steps lead up to the vestibule of the inner court (40:31)?

MEDITATE. In much modern religion, including Christianity, only one side of God is emphasized: his love (no requirements), kindness (no anger), and forgiveness (no judgment). God is a smiling grandpa who’s okay with you “sort of” obeying him. But doesn’t all this detail point to a God who has high standards, not low ones? who demands “precise” obedience, not sloppy half-hearted attempts? What do you believe? Do you believe it’s possible to follow the Bible precisely in today’s world?

PRAY. Ask the Lord to help you see Him as high and lifted up, who expects precise obedience from you. “Help me, Lord, be a fully-devoted follower of You.”

READ ch. 42, The New Temple (cont.)

REVIEW. Ezekiel's tour of the inner court and its buildings is over. His guide takes him through the north gate into the outer court, where he shows him two buildings which the priests used as eating and dressing rooms (1-14). The temple tour ends with the measurement of the temple complex (15-20). The enclosed area is huge—about 18 acres, larger than 13 of our football fields! The Jewish Christian scholar Feinberg wrote: "The entire area was much too large for Mount Moriah where Solomon's and Zerubbabel's temples stood. The scheme requires a great change in the topography of the land which will occur as indicated in Zechariah 14:9-11, the very time which Ezekiel had in view."

Bible students who take this temple less literally say instead that these detailed measurements are "a metaphor for God's new work of liberation and restoration for his people" (Allen), a description of the "establishment of permanent, healthy deity-nation-land relationships" (Block).

MEDITATE. Do you believe in "sacred space"? Some Christian groups (Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, "high church" denominations) are big on the idea that some spaces can be more sacred than others. The "low-churchers" (Baptist, Assembly of God, non-denominationals) emphasize the truth that God is everywhere, and heart worship can be done anywhere. These "temple" chapters, and talk of a "holy place" and "most holy place," suggests both are true. Do you have a "sacred space" in your home--a "closet" or corner where you meet with God? Pick a place, a sacred place.

PRAY: "Lord, thank you for meeting with me this morning. It's so amazing that You, the Creator of the universe and Savior of the world, would want time with me each day. Spirit of God, please remind me daily what a gift it is to sit with You here, in this holy place. Amen."

READ ch. 43, The Lord Returns

REVIEW. In this happy chapter, the Lord's glory returns to the temple. Ezekiel's guide leads him to the east gate of the temple. Years before, Ezekiel with horror had watched that Shekinah Glory leave Solomon's temple (ch. 10-11), abandoning it to Babylonian destruction. The Lord had never returned—not in Ezra's day when the "second temple" was built by the exiles, nor in Jesus' day when that temple was renovated and beautified by King Herod, and the Glory had been absent when Rome burned the temple in 70 A.D. But now, finally, it returns. The Lord himself is coming to take residence in his millennial temple.

This Glory reminds Ezekiel of the Throne Chariot he had seen by the river Chebar (1:3), and as back then, he prostrates himself before the Glory, which enters the east gate and fills the temple (4-5). The Lord tells Ezekiel that he has come home, and here he will stay with the people he has chosen and loves (7-8). Of course, this requires that Israel forever give up their worship of any other (9).

In a command that makes it very difficult to believe this is "a spiritual temple only," not a real temple, the Lord instructs Ezekiel to tell Israel to pay attention to the plans, so that they can build the temple according to these precise specifications (11). On the other hand, why need there be sacrifices (13-27) in the future, since Christ's death makes sacrifice for sin unnecessary (Heb. 10:18)? A perplexing question, with several possible answers (see <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/ezekiel.pdf>, 245-6).

MEDITATE. You are the temple of God. Where are you in relation to his glory? Do you sense the glory of his presence in you? Maybe you, like Israel, have clutched onto Something Else that you adore, and the glory of his presence is on the threshold of your heart, about to depart, but hoping you'll turn back to him. Or perhaps his glory has already left, because of coddled sin, unconfessed, and the joy and glory are gone from your heart. God wants to return, and restore his glory upon your life.

PRAY. *Dear Lord, come back to my heart. I want your presence, your glory, your holiness, your joy, more than anything else. Return and restore my heart, Lord Jesus.*

READ ch. 44, The Eastern Gate

REVIEW. Ezekiel's guide next took him back to the east outer gate (cf. 40:6-16). The gate itself, on the east side of the gate complex, was shut and was to remain shut. The Lord told the prophet that this gate was shut because He had entered the temple complex through it (43:1-3). Its sealed condition guaranteed God's promise that He would never depart from the temple again (37:24-28).

Today, Old Jerusalem is surrounded by a wall with eight major gates. The Eastern Gate (also called the Golden Gate), facing the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley, is unique for three reasons: it is the oldest gate, dating from about 600 A.D.; gives the most direct access to the temple mount; and is completely sealed shut.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday, he used the open Eastern Gate, part of which can be seen directly below the present gate.

The Eastern Gate was sealed shut in AD 1541 by Suleiman the Magnificent, leader of the Ottoman Turks who defeated the Crusaders. Why? Probably to prevent the Jewish Messiah from gaining entrance to Jerusalem, since the Jews have always believed that Ezekiel 44:1-3 (and Zech. 14:4-5) promises that the Messiah will pass through the Eastern Gate when He comes to rule. The Muslim Suleiman was attempting to thwart the Messiah's plans with sixteen feet of cement. The Eastern Gate has remained walled up ever since. Perhaps this is another biblical example of a "pre-fulfillment" (like Antiochus Epiphanes prefiguring the Antichrist, and the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem prefiguring its Great Tribulation destruction): the sealing of the gate now, but at the end it will be opened for the Messiah's return in a replay of Palm Sunday; and then sealed again to show that he will never leave again.

MEDITATE. What kind of a book do you hold in your hand—a book containing vivid, specific prophecies of the future? Surely this is the supernatural word of God! What kind of a Savior and Lord do you hold in your heart—a king who rode into Jerusalem on a colt in 30 A.D., and one day will return to ride in on a white horse? Surely this is the King of kings and Lord of lords!

PRAY. *Even so come, Lord Jesus.*