

Prophecy Spiritually Understood - Pt 6 'No Third Temple'

by Charles Alexander

The sermon argues that Ezekiel's temple vision represents the spiritual realities of Christ's mediatorial work, and not an actual temple to be constructed in Jerusalem.

Scripture: Haggai 2:6, Malachi 3:1, Acts 2:19, Hebrews 12:26

Topics: "Temple Prophecy", "Christ's Priesthood"

Description

The preacher delves into Ezekiel's vision of the new temple, emphasizing that the promise of another temple after the destruction of Jerusalem's temple was not fulfilled in Ezra's temple or any subsequent temple. The vision of Ezekiel provides a spiritual understanding, symbolizing Christ's eternal priesthood and sacrifice, abolishing the need for a physical temple. The prophecy of Haggai points to the fulfillment of God's purposes in Christ through the second temple. The preacher refutes the idea of a third temple in Jerusalem, highlighting that Christ's first advent fulfilled prophecies and established the gospel kingdom. The sermon challenges literal interpretations of Ezekiel's temple, advocating for a spiritual understanding that aligns with the New Covenant and the gospel message.

Transcript

Ezekiel's ministry closes with his vision of the new temple, occupying the last nine chapters of the book. Fourteen years after the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and in the 25th year of his own exile, Ezekiel is given this assurance that in the course of time there would be another temple in which the purposes of God would be perfectly fulfilled.

It is agreed by all that this promise was not fulfilled in the temple built of Ezra in the days of the return of the captive Jews under the decree of Cyrus, King of Persia.

It was Ezra's temple which was destroyed by the Romans 40 years after the crucifixion of Christ and for the last 2,000 years there has been no temple at Jerusalem. The site has been occupied for the last 1,000 years by a Moslem mosque and to that extent Jerusalem is still, with its very large Arab population, dominated by the great Mosque of El Aksah, still "trodden down of the gentiles" despite the present Jewish occupation.

At the time of Ezekiel's closing vision there was neither temple, priesthood, nor monarchy in Israel, nor do these vital elements of Jewish national life exist there today.

The vision of Ezekiel supplies all three and if ever we were in the realm of the spirit and not of the flesh it is here, for the coming of Christ 2,000 years ago abolished temple, priesthood, and earthly monarchy. He was Himself the promised "King of the Jews" as Pilate, under divine compulsion, insisted on inscribing upon His cross, but His kingdom being not of this world, He reigns in resurrection glory at the right hand of the Father - and will continue to reign till His foes are made His footstool.

There can never be a THIRD TEMPLE at Jerusalem for several good reasons:

1. A temple requires a sacrifice (around which the temple is built), and a priesthood. By his death Christ has abolished both. He is Himself the temple, the alter, the sacrifices, and the Priest. His priesthood, like His sacrifice of Himself for our sins, is eternal and unchangeable. Only by the abolition of the New Covenant, which He established by His death and resurrection, can there be any alteration of the divine arrangements or any room for a THIRD TEMPLE.

2. The prophecy of Haggai proves that it was the SECOND TEMPLE which was to see the establishment of all God's purposes in Christ.

Here are the words from Haggai 2:6-9:

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; And I will shake all nations and the desires of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of Hosts, and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

Haggai was prophesying at the dedication of the SECOND TEMPLE built by Ezra and his companions who returned from the great captivity. He was declaring that despite the poor appearance of that temple in comparison with the magnificence of the first, or Solomon's temple, this SECOND TEMPLE would be more glorious than the first because to it the Lord Himself would come. During the existence of the SECOND TEMPLE God would do that work which would shake all nations, the earth and the heavens, the sea and the dry land - figures always used in prophecy to denote the passing of an old order and the beginning of a new.

We are to recognize that this event must long since have taken place since that house ceased to exist 2,000 years ago and has no successor.

Therefore, Haggai's prophecy could only have been fulfilled in Christ's first advent when the Lord "suddenly came to his temple" (Malachi 3:1).

The shaking of heaven and earth denotes the passing of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New.

On the day of Pentecost Peter quoted a similar prophecy from Joel to prove the same thing:

"I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and notable day of the

Lord com; and it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:19-21)

The first advent of Christ, therefore, with all the consequences which ensued - His atoning death and glorious exaltation, with the outcome in the redemption of His people and the calling of the gentile - fulfilled the prophecies of Haggai and Joel.

Paul in Hebrews employs Haggai's prophecy also to show that it relates to the setting up of the gospel kingdom on the ruins of the Old Covenant.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (See Hebrews 12:26-29)

The Old Covenant from Sinai is referred to in that Hebrews passage in the words:

"Whose voice then shook the earth".

The word of the New Covenant, says Paul, shakes heaven as well as earth - "but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not earth only but also heaven" (that is the Haggai quotation proving that Haggai's prophecy has to do with the gospel as contrasted with the law).

All Fulfilled in Second Temple

The Second Temple therefore was to see God's purposes fully realized in Christ. This took place historically at the Incarnation and the Crucifixion. Thereafter, following a divine probation of 40 years during which God permitted the second temple to remain standing while the gospel was being preached "to the Jew first", the judgment of God in the Roman war abolished temple, priesthood and sacrifice, monarchy and covenant, nation and privilege, in one awful overthrow.

The Epistle to the Hebrews settles for ever the question whether there ever can be a setting up again of what God has cast down. The temple is shown in that epistle to be the apparatus of the Old Covenant.

There never can be another temple, therefore, without abolishing the New Covenant in Christ, destroying the gospel and reversing all history.

Paul clearly perceived that the second temple, still standing at the time of writing, was about to pass away along with the Covenant to which it was attached:

"Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13)

Those who perceive these things along with us may think that no Christian would dare to advocate or attempt the setting up again of the old to the confounding of the new had better be warned. An investigation of contemporary evangelical writings and theories shows very disturbing (and sometimes very fraudulent) tendencies. Our friends will find that not only is a THIRD TEMPLE confidently expected, but there are those who believe our Lord's Second Advent is held up till that temple is built. They use Malachi's prophecy (quoted above) as relating not to Christ's first coming but to His Second Coming, as though Christ cannot return till there is a temple in which He may appear.

The appalling lengths to which this error may be carried are illustrated in the writings of that excellent man, Mr. William Kelly, a leading figure among the earthly "Brethren". Mr. Kelly, who believed in the literal

construction of a THIRD TEMPLE according to Ezekiel's specification, taught that the temple veil would be re-erected in more permanent form (wood instead of the tapestry rent by the death of Christ). His words are:

"For Israel, though surely redeemed, the barrier will be set up again".

Admirers of the Scofield Reference Bible will find the doctrine of a THIRD TEMPLE, complete with sacrificing priests, is standardized in the comments on Ezekiel's vision.

THIRD TEMPLE FRAUD

The error is enforced from time to time by deliberate and fraudulent invention as the following reveals:

Following the Six Day War of 1967, there appeared in the now defunct Billy Graham newspaper, "The Christian", published in London, a report, presented in full banner headlines, purporting to show that enormous quantities of finest prepared stone from quarries in Bedford (USA) was being dispatched from a New York pier (Pier 26, it was categorically stated) to Israel for the construction of the THIRD TEMPLE.

The headlines were:

"ERECTION OF JERUSALEM TEMPLE IMMINENT"

"Israeli Government representatives have ordered 60,000 tons of finest Bedford stone from Bedford, Indiana to be used in the erection of Jerusalem temple".

These headlines were followed by a report as follows:

Five hundred railcar loads of stone from Bedford, considered to be among the finest building stone in the world, is being freighted pre-cut to exact specifications, and one consignment has already been dispatched to Israel. Shipments are being handled by Pier 26 in New York.

This report, received from authoritative sources in Sellersburg, Indiana, said cornerstones for the third Jerusalem Temple are already in Israel. Materials for this Temple have been secretly in preparation for seven years, the report went on, and it is believed American Jews are mainly responsible for financially undergirding the whole project.

Strong rumors from other usually reliable circles say the two freestanding pillars for the new Temple have already been cast in bronze. If the pattern of Solomon's Temple is followed, the twin hollow columns may be named Jachin and Boaz. The meaning of these names, 'Jehovah will establish,' and 'In Him is strength', symbolizing the continuity and power of the Davidic dynasty founded upon God's great Covenant with David. (1 Samuel 7:8-17).

The article enthusiastically went on to say:

"This THIRD TEMPLE must be built to fulfill Biblical prophecy: thus is passed out of the realm of political probability into the sphere of divine appointment..."

"The Church, as God's spiritual temple during the present time, must give way to a material temple in the next movement of God's plan for Israel and the nations".

There was even more dramatic sequel to this tragically fraudulent report, but unfortunately the editor of the now deceased "Christian" did not see fit to give it equal publicity, the truth never being so attractive as the lie.

Under the insignificant heading "Jerusalem Temple" there appeared in "The Christian" some six weeks later the following letter from the Jewish Ambassador in London:

"Allow me to refer to a story appearing in a recent issue of your publication, concerning the shipping of stones from the U.S.A. for the alleged purpose of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. I would like to point out that this story is an absolute and complete fabrication, in all its aspects. There are no plans for the re-building of the Temple, no shipments for such a purpose have been made from the U.S.A. or elsewhere, and the matter has not been considered either in secrecy (as the report alleges) or openly.

In view of the fact that the Temple area is now occupied by shrines of other faiths, both Christian and Moslem, and we would never touch these, the entire story must be considered an invention."

M. H. Sharon

Counselor (Press)

Embassy of Israel London, W.8.

There is another angle to this story which possibly the editor knew nothing about at the time, and it is that a well-known British evangelist and pastor, now in New York (a man favorable to the THIRD TEMPLE theory) was asked by friends in Great Britain to investigate. He did. He found on inquiry at New York harbor that there was no such pier as that named, no such embarkation of stone, not a word of truth in the whole wicked fabrication.

Yet if we doubt not, the story is still going round the earth for in this sinful world, one can never overtake a lie once it has been let loose.

We ask no pardon for mentioning these things. We would be sinning against God and truth if we maintained silence or failed to register our sense of outrage at news so blasphemous and subversive of the gospel and lying reports so wickedly conceived and enthusiastically welcomed.

The recent fire at the Moslem Mosque on the temple site at Jerusalem is another instance of evangelical superstition, for the poor man who did the deed was a member of a "fringe" evangelical sect who believed he was hastening the coming of the Lord by destroying the Mosque so as to make way for Ezekiel's temple.

THE "THIRD TEMPLE" IS CHRIST

We now give our clear reasons for believing that the temple vision in Ezekiel is not of an earthly sanctuary of stone and lime, but represents the spiritual realities of Christ's mediatorial work in the gospel in accord with His own statement:

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up: but he spoke of the temple of his body".

(John 2:19-22)

If we prove our point we have reached the end of the road in this controversy over the alleged Restoration of Israel, because if Ezekiel's temple is the gospel temple of Christ's body, the Church, then the city where it is built is the Mount Zion of the gospel (Hebrews 12:22) located in heavenly places not in Palestine, and the land too is spiritual country. Therefore, there is not other temple to be built, no future for the earthly Mount Zion, nor is the land to be divided among the twelve tribes, and we now know the meaning of the very last word of Ezekiel's prophecy:

"The name of the city from that day shall be, the Lord is there (Jehovah Shammah)" (Ezekiel 48:35)

PROVING THE SPIRITUAL VIEW

Here are our reasons for the spiritual understanding of Ezekiel's temple: -

1. Ezekiel 40:2-4 requires an idealistic interpretation. The vision speaks of a "very high mountain" and "as the frame of a city on the south." These words are in the language of prophetic vision, denoting a meaning beyond the natural. The instruction to the prophet to behold - hear - set thine heart upon all that I shall shew thee" indicates there is a meaning which will be misinterpreted unless special care is exercised. Most of the prophetic writings of our friends do not bear these marks of careful and painstaking examination.

2. Ezekiel 43 requires a spiritual interpretation because the visionary temple, by the time this stage of the vision is reached, has been "measured" and the prophet sees the glory of the Lord entering the building, and from it Jehovah speaks to Ezekiel telling him that the object of the vision was to show the perfect holiness of the Lord, by which the people of Israel might measure the extent of their iniquities

(verses 10-12).

3. The offering of "sin-offerings" upon the altar as well as other offerings indicates that this cannot be an actual temple to be constructed in Jerusalem. If it were so, then farewell to the gospel, tear out the Epistle to the Hebrews, roll up the New Covenant - it has decayed and waxed old and is ready to vanish away. Take down that Cross of Christ. Re-hang the veil that was rent. The agony of the Son of God and his atoning death were all in vain, for His mediatorial work, is only a temporary expedient till this temple arrives. Invalidate Christ's eternal priesthood for the sons of Zadok have the last word over Melchizedek and Aaron's priesthood will prevail at last over Christ's (43:18-27).

Dr. Scofield, and those who side with him, defend themselves against this blasphemy by alleging that these blood sacrifices are "memorial" offerings pointing back to the death of Christ.

But this is sheer invention - a doctrine of convenience, to save its advocates from the serious charge of destroying the one true sacrifice of Christ. There is not a line in Ezekiel's prophecy to suggest that the sacrifices are "memorial rites". Three times in this passage the sin offering is mentioned without qualifications.

Those friends who like to tell us that their "rule of interpretation" is the ambiguous formula: "The Bible means what it says", had better look to themselves, for unless they spiritualize the sacrifices of Ezekiel they have no alternative but to bring back the Law and circumcision, and priest craft and ritual diet - the essential elements of Judaism.

CIRCUMCISION RE-ESTABLISHED

If Ezekiel's temple is to be interpreted literally, we must accept from Ezekiel 44:9 that circumcision must be re-established as a requirement of access to God. And away goes grace, by which the gentiles are saved under the gospel. Away goes Paul and the Epistle to the Galatians. Away goes the Epistle to the Ephesians with its vision of the New Testament temple and the holy sacrifice of Christ by which Jew and gentile are made one and the middle wall of partition between them broken down.

For (and mark this well, dear reader) there can be no nonsense about Ezekiel's words in chapters 44-49 - no playing about with his reference to the rite of circumcision - no confining it to the "circumcision of the heart", for he mentions specifically

"No stranger (i.e. gentile) uncircumcised in heart nor uncircumcised in flesh shall enter into my sanctuary".

Now our readers will see what we mean when we assert that modern evangelical prophetism is a noxious growth springing from the schools of the rabbis, and must be destroyed at all costs, if true Biblicism is to be preserved.

If Ezekiel's temple is not in its entirety to be spiritually understood of the Church of the New Testament, then the glory of Christ fades and gentile hope is darkened.

If Paul found it necessary to withstand Peter to the face on this very subject of the return of circumcision and its imposition upon the Church, we must not be considered disturbers of the peace when we likewise withstand to the bitter end this modern conspiracy to destroy evangelical theology by making it an interim scheme to be abolished as soon as the Jew and Judaism and circumcision are ready to take over. We refuse to be silenced though all men should rise up against us.

4. The opening verses of chapter 43 require a spiritual interpretation. They describe the majesty of the Lord's presence coming "from the East", lightening the earth with His glory, and entering into the temple to take up residence there. Brethren, the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands. God does not, cannot, and never will live in a house in Jerusalem. Yet this preposterous thing is required by our friends if they insist on literalizing Ezekiel's temple.

PRIESTS WHO MUST NOT SWEAT

5. Chapter 44 requires a spiritual interpretation, because the New Testament forbids us to consider the re-establishment of a Levitical priesthood which Paul in Hebrews tells us has been abolished for ever. We do not, cannot, and will not believe that the Lord is telling us there are to be priests in a future temple at Jerusalem who will be required to avoid woolen undergarments in case they sweat (verse 18), or that their hair-trim should conform to a certain specification (v.20) or that their worship will be invalidated by contact with dead bodies, or that they should get "the first of the dough" so that they might bestow a sacerdotal blessing (v.30).

And if this is a description of what takes place in a future millennium (as our friends contend) how do they reconcile the continuance of death (vs.25) with that golden time?

Is it true indeed that sin, suffering and death still flourish in that millennial time when Jehovah reigns personally in glory and power from a house in Jerusalem?

Alas, yes! Deathbed scenes, anguish and sorrow, funeral corteges, sighs, mourning and tears are all there to mock at the theory of our friends that "this is the first resurrection".

Will someone, somewhere, not arise and tell us where they are wrong? We have correspondents who denounce us, indignantly tell us to send them no more of our writings, ignorant of the fact that we are fighting FOR them, not against them. Will any of our opponents please tell us if they still believe in an earthly millennium, with temple, sacrifices, priests, circumcision, the law, death and the grave?

6. The 45th and 46th chapters continue the details of temple worship, even to the batteries of meat boilers, chapter 46:19-24.

FISH OR THE SOULS OF MEN?

7. The climax of the temple vision is in chapter 47 - the vision of the living waters rising inside the temple and issuing from the threshold. This vision surely requires a spiritual interpretation.

The river flows down from the temple, getting ever deeper and wider in its course, sweeping across the country till it empties itself into the Dead Sea where it heals the waters, everything springing to life where it flows. Fishermen stand upon its banks and fill their baskets and spread their nets, trees of paradise flourish on either bank yielding a continuous harvest of fruit and yielding their leaves as healing medicine - and we find ourselves truly in the paradise of Revelation 22.

Who cannot see that this is a description of the gospel river of grace? A more perfect poetic metaphor of the evangelical faith could not possibly be imagined and the entire picture is so taken by John in the Book of Revelation, and exalted there to describe the eternal state of the people of God.

To do our opponents justice, they are adept at spiritualizing this chapter themselves, with glorious inconsistency. Our only quarrel with them in their spiritualizing is that even in that region they show a strange ineptitude, for their spiritualizing of Ezekiel's river invariably becomes a device for advancing their peculiar views on personal holiness. Convention speakers are very prone to this doctrine of convenience, showing that the dispensationalist is not to be trusted anywhere in the vital field of exposition.

Ezekiel's river is a picture of the progress of the gospel in the world, from its first rise in Christ who is the true temple of God (John 2:21) to its rapid and spreading course throughout the world, ever deepening and widening in its life giving flow to the end of time. The fishermen are the preachers of the gospel and fish are the souls of men delivered from sin and curse and death by the grace of Christ in accord with the Savior's own words: "I will make you fishers of men."

Our readers may compare this with the only alternative - a literal river, magically appearing in the interior of a literal temple and serving no spiritual purpose whatever, but just to irrigate the land and provide full baskets for Jewish anglers.

Our readers must make their choice between the two - and may the Lord have mercy on our souls.

The last chapter of Ezekiel describes the apportionment of the land among the twelve tribes in symmetrical pattern related to the central feature of the whole - the temple and city of Jerusalem.

The figure is taken over by John in the 21st chapter of Revelation and given a spiritual - even a paradisiacal - meaning.

That the interpretation is a spiritual one, is clear from the last sentence of the Book - "The name of the city from that day shall be Jehovah Shammah (the Lord is there)".

The literal view requires that personal presence of Christ come down from the throne of the majesty in the heavens to occupy a visible couch in a visible house in a visible city on earth, presiding over a scene of continued sin and death, tears and graves and to give the approval of His own Presence (and even participate) to a bloody altar, boiler houses, priest craft and Judaistic rites, which He died once and for all to abolish.

WE RETURN THE CHALLENGE

We are challenged to prove our spiritual interpretation by showing how we related all the detailed measurements and arrangements of Ezekiel's temple to a gospel and spiritual picture.

Those who think they are prescribing for us an impossible task must have very feeble memories. The thing is done for us very competently by Dr. Scofield himself in the Book of Exodus. See there his typology of the tabernacle, fully related to gospel and spiritual meaning. Our friends of the Brethren have earned for themselves an unchallenged reputation for their ability and ingenuity in giving gospel meaning to every rope, pin, stake, thread and ornament of that O.T. tabernacle which is the forerunner and pattern of Solomon's temple, Ezra's temple and Ezekiel's temple. They even transport from town and town elaborate models of the tabernacle and explain in marvelous detail how all is a picture of the gospel.

After performing this feat in relation to the Tabernacle, they would find it child's play to do the same with Ezekiel's temple.

That the typology of the tabernacle (and therefore of the temple which is only the tabernacle in more permanent form) is a divine exercise fully authorized by the New Testament, is proved from the Epistle to the Hebrews, notably in chapter 9.

To this chapter we refer our readers and beg of them particularly to note the words which tell us that the tabernacle (and of necessity, therefore, the temple) is only a pattern of heavenly things and "figures of the true."

If the tabernacle and its successor, the first and second temples were only patterns, types and figures of spiritual realities, by what rule do our literalists make out Ezekiel's temple to be an exception? By what rule do they make it a literal and terminal reality of the purposes of God even to the setting aside of the gospel, the reversal of the entire divine order, and the transfer of the spiritual realities of heaven itself to stone and plaster, blood and bones, anti-sweat garments and ecclesiastical tonsures?

The problem in theirs, not ours, and in all charity and concern for the welfare of Christ's flock we fix upon them the solemn responsibility of vindicating their interpretation, or acknowledging their error.

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THE CHERUBIM CONSIDERED

EZEKIEL SEES THE DIVINE MAJESTY

The vision of the glory of the Lord seen by Ezekiel and described fully in his first and subsequent chapters is seldom considered in its true significance. To most Bible readers the living creatures, the wheels, the headlong flight, the burning throne - are all so mysterious that they either hurriedly pass over these parts of Holy Scripture, or clutch at guesses and fantasies.

But the vision is not so difficult of understanding as at first appears. What Ezekiel sees is the glory of the Lord departing from the temple at Jerusalem and sweeping down from the north (the traditional route between Palestine and Chaldea) to where he (born to be a priest of the temple but bereft of his destiny through exile) sits in melancholy mood on the banks of the Chebar river in the Euphrates valley.

God forsakes His holy temple because of the sins of the people and within a few years the temple, city and monarchy of Israel are destroyed.

But it is given to Ezekiel to see in this vision two things:

First, that the judgments of the Lord are right;

Second, that the glory of God is independent of earthly temple or priesthood, and the Lord travels on down the ages, regardless of change, and performs His sovereign will.

The "living creatures" are the cherubim, symbolic figures which symbolize the power and majesty of God, appearing first at the gateway of Eden to defend the holiness of God and forbid access to His presence (Genesis 3).

Their four-fold number and four-faced appearance (man, lion, ox and eagle) represent creation, of which the number four is the signature in the Bible ("the four corners of the earth", "the four winds of heaven", etc.).

The "Wheels" are the immense energies of the divine omnipresence, upholding His eternal throne, upon which He sits who bears "the appearance of a man above, upon it" - that is, the Only Begotten Son who deigned to take upon Himself the form and nature of man.

Covering all, the rainbow arch of the Covenant of Grace, the Eternal Covenant which spans the life of the Godhead and by which all God's actions are determined in time and eternity.

We make thereupon the following observations:

CREATION A LIVING THING

The four living creatures or cherubim are the living chariot on which God drives down the ages, fulfilling His purpose. They uphold the throne of His glory, and illustrate the fact that Creation is not some accidental and mechanical contrivance operating on laws of its own blind development, but a living thing, formed and continuing in all obedience to the holy laws of God who made all things as a means to His own glory and to the fulfillment of His own great destiny.

The wheels, or motive forces of the universe, are adorned with the eyes of the Creating Spirit, and ceaselessly pursue their revolutions in obedience to the divine wisdom which is reflected in all their operations. If the cherubim more properly represent the sentient part of creation, the wheels must represent those powers, laws and impulses, those fundamental energies, which are stored in every atom of inanimate nature.

The wheels in the midst of the wheels appear to be transverse wheels providing for the motion of the great Creator's chariot in whatsoever direction He may determine in His will. Precise mechanical principle is not to be looked for in the figure - it is the idea behind the figure that matters.

The spirit of life (verse 20, margin) is in the wheels, and creation cannot be understood apart from the ceaseless operation of the Spirit of Him who made all things for Himself and upholds all things by the word of His power.

The cherubim and the wheels go straight forward, and turn not to right or left in their going, and they perform their missions with a readiness and velocity which resemble the lighting flash - irresistible.

The firmament above the cherubim is the vault of heaven, associated in the Bible with the abode of God. He is the God of heaven, which means He is above and beyond the powers and the understanding of men, uncreated, eternal, omnipotent, and only wise, asking counsel of none, and giving no account of His matters.

The noise of great water, the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host - this is Creation, and this is Redemption. The Creation is the product of Mind and of intelligence. Sounding and resounding throughout the great universe of being, visible, and invisible, is the voice of understanding, of praise, of judgment, of admiration, of unspeakable joy. Above all, there is the voice which speaks from the firmament which is above the throne.

If Creation speaks for God, if the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork; if day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge, so that there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard - what shall be said about THIS voice, which sounds from above the throne? This is the voice of the Word of God. This is Christ, and this is also that voice which speaks in the Written Word, for none of God's words must be lost. What He says must be preserved, loved, and received.

What will the voice of God speak about? It is about redemption and judgment. Here is the holy Law, perfect from the beginning - as changeless and as unalterable as that Law which binds the physical universe together. Take away that Law, and the fabric of creation would be unhinged and vast chaos would descend upon all things visible. Take away the moral Law; acquit sin on the score of a general benevolence, without providing for recompense and a guarantee for the holiness of the intelligent creation and there would be a moral chaos so complete that heaven itself would be turned into a hell, and the Throne of God would lose for ever its Tenant.

Here now is that Throne and its glorious Tenant, in the last phase of Ezekiel's vision - as though his prophetic eye had reverently traveled upwards from the lowest to the highest, comprehending first the more obvious symbols of Creation and the government thereof, before dwelling upon the actual Being of the Creator Himself.

AN EXAMPLE OF TRUE INSPIRATION

And here is true inspiration. What imagery would a man use wherewith to describe God, living as he did in such a period of universal idolatry as that which reign when Ezekiel saw and brooded on the banks of the river Chebar? What childishness, what superstition may we not expect from such a time and such a situation? But behold! As his awestruck and reverent eye travels upward through the symbolism of God's rule in a living Creation permeated throughout by the Eternal Spirit, he sees first of all, not a throne, but "the likeness" of a throne. His inspiration carefully guards against any materialization of what is essentially inwards and spiritual. This throne is erected above and beyond all Creation. It is above the heads of the cherubim, above the symbolic vault of heaven itself, and its appearance is that of the dazzling whiteness

of the sapphire. This reference to the sapphire is not arbitrary - not invented in the brain of the prophet, but is in accord with the earlier inspiration of the Divine Word, in Exodus 24:10 where the throne of God is seen as a pavement of sapphire "as the body of heaven in its clearness". Those who, as Ezekiel, feed upon the Divine Word, see clearly in its terms. The Spirit is consistent with Himself in the slow, age long development of that body of inspiration which was finally to be spoken and completed in the New Testament revelation of Christ. The throne of the Universe is of the fiery and dazzling whiteness of God's holiness, purity, and unchallengeable wisdom and truth.

MAN, THE HIGHEST POINT

The prophet dares, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, to lift his awestruck eyes higher yet, and there he sees upon the throne, "the likeness" of a man. Let it be observed that it is but the appearance, the shimmering suggestion, of a human form which he sees, and not the actuality, anymore than Moses and the elders of Israel saw the actual form of Him whom inspiration leads us to believe is without body, parts or passions. But consistent with the inspired account of creation wherein we are taught that man was made in the holy image of God, so here God appears in the form of man. And what other imagery could inspiration have used?

Is not man the highest point of creative wisdom? Is there not concentrated in man the grandest, greatest, and most complete effort of divine wisdom, showing forth the character and the glory of God? And is it not in the understanding of this that we can arrive at a true valuation of what sin is - that debauching, defiling and fatal offence which, by denying the image of God, brings upon our race its present depravity, ruin, vanity, guilt, and condemnation? See from what heights we have fallen - and to what heights we are beckoned to return - and what provision God has made to carry out this total work of restoration.

From the dazzling splendor of the eternal throne, man, the Son of God by creation, falls into the lowest trough of shame and condemnation, deprived of his rights and his dignity and his destiny, and seeking to fill up the vanity of his few and fleeting days with that which can never satisfy a nature made originally for heaven and for rule and for holiness. Without God and without hope!

He devises in his brain gods of his own making - gods who are suspiciously like himself, only worse, fickle, capricious, arbitrary, inconsistent, and immoral. Wearying of them at length he becomes an atheist and a materialist, trying to persuade himself that man has no intelligent origin, embodies no wise purpose or meaning and has no future but the mouldering rottenness of the grave. Only an animal himself, without soul, origin, or destiny, he seeks his origin in the brute, and his destiny in the same decay and forgetfulness of the grave, and so ceases to be, and nothing matters now but to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow he must die. So he lives consistent with his creed, except for the sharp reminders of conscience, that inward monitor which, however overclouded by ignorance, continues to witness against his atheism by raising within him a recognition of standards of good and evil, and rousing him with those intimations of immorality which cause him to dread death and its consequence.

Thank God for and Inspired Word. Thank God for those men who in the darkness of human sin and ignorance were raised up as the mouthpiece of God to restore hope and light and truth, and prepare the way for that gospel word by which man can be born again, redeemed, and delivered.

Here is the significance of Ezekiel's vision of the eternal throne and its glorious Occupant. "The likeness of a man upon it". Oh, glorious light and glorious hope! He whose delights were always with the sons of men, determines to be the Son of Man, and gives prior intimation of this to Ezekiel by immediately, and for the

first time in the long history of man, addressing Himself to man under this title: "And he said unto me, 'Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak upon thee'". (Ezekiel 2:1).

MERCY AND SEVERITY

Ezekiel notices something further about the figure on the throne; the form shone with the brightness of fire. The upper part of the figure was bright as burnished brass, and the lower part as the blinding flame of the furnace. Perhaps the twofold presentation of God in mercy and in severity is intended, as Paul in Romans 11: Verse 22. Of all the word pictures which have ever been given of God none has ever been so effective as that which conceives Him to be a Being of Light and Power, blinding and brilliant light, and burning and devouring flame. God is Light and in Him is not darkness at all, says John. Our God is a consuming fire, declares Paul.

The vision is completed by a halo of light surrounding the whole, and this halo is the appearance of the bow in the cloud in the day of rain. We all know what this rainbow portends. God has girt Himself about with Covenant obligations. He has bound Himself in an Eternal Covenant with the Son, and to His people in Christ, for their redemption, preservations, and final deliverance.

The entire vision was no light or puny representation. It filled the entire horizon of inspiration. Greatness is in every detail thereof. Majesty and omnipotent power are projected in every aspect. The vision comes with the roar of whirlwind. A divine tornado of wrath breaks upon the placid scene. A great cloud darkens the light of day. Lightnings play around the blackness, and thunders roll. All the terrifying might of nature is let loose. At the height of this vast physical disturbance, the internal powers of nature disclose themselves. Traveling headlong in undeviating flight come the cherubim whom no power can turn aside as they fulfill their mission of bearing up the glory of God. The noise of their wings is like the tumult of a primeval ocean rushing down upon the plains to inundate all by irresistible force. Vast wheels appear, brilliant and terrible with encircling and all-seeing eyes - the wheels of divine providence and foreknowledge, traveling on their predestined course, high and terrible. Their axle is as the hub of some great solar system, and their rim revolves in the very limits of space. A Spirit of resistless might and fathomless wisdom and splendor animates this vehicle of God's purposes. The vault of heaven is above: and above that again, the godlike form of humanity, fiery, majestic, pure, holy, omnipotent, just, on the everlasting throne, riding down the ages; the purpose is the declaration of God's perfection, and the destruction of all that evil which sin has brought into His Creation.

SPECIAL NOTICES

RABBINICAL LITERATURE, THE LATTER-DAY GLORY, AND THE FUTURE MILLENIUM

The Augsburg Confession (1530) condemns those 'who scatter Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead (and Last Judgment), the godly shall occupy the kingdom of the world'; the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) says 'we condemn that Jewish dreams that before the Day of Judgment there will be golden age of earth and the godly shall posses the kingdom of the world'. Yet from about 1560 onwards there was in the Reformed Churches a growing interest in the future of Jews in God's purposes. From this developed firstly, the doctrine of the latter-day glory of the Church, and secondly, the doctrine of the reign of Christ and saints. Both these doctrine included the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. Perhaps the most important factor causing this change of opinion was the study of rabbinical literature (Targums, etc) which were increasingly available from the printing presses. From this source for example came the hermeneutical principle that a day in prophecy equals a year in real terms (Ezekiel 4:6),

the doctrine of the restoration of the Jews in Palestine (Isaiah 60:12-22, Ezekiel 40-48) and the belief that the 'Day of Jehovah' was in fact 'a long day' of 1,000 years.

The following was left in for your interest.

Remember that this article was issued over 30 years ago.

For details on this development see Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel (Jas. Clarke, 27/-) written by Peter Toon and available from him for 21/6 post free. For John Owen's eschatology see John Owen (Jas. Clark, 30/-) by P. Toon and available from him for 25/- post free. His address is Edge Hill College, Ormskirk, and Lancs.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-alexander/prophecy-spiritually-understood-pt-6-no-third-temple/>

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