

## PREFACE

It is intriguing to me that as we approach the end of this study, I discover that the most troublesome texts—those that have been the bane of my responsibilities as a teacher—are to be found *not*, as anticipated, in The Revelation, but in the prophecies of Ezekiel, a servant of God who was granted truly *disturbed* visions.

In the handout that is part of this session you will find the first of two changes of position. First, whereas I originally subscribed to the predominate dispensational position that the fulfillment of Ezekiel's temple ([Chapters 40-48](#)) will be in the Millennium, I have recently seen the error of my ways, and have now embraced a minority position that the temple as described has not and *will not* be built. The argument for that is found in the handout.

Second, back in Session 44 I outlined my reasons for placing the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38-39 ([Gog and Magog](#)) in Revelation 20:7-10, after Satan is released from the abyss. I have not done a *reversal* on this, but, instead, a *softening* of that position. There are indeed similarities between the two passages, as well as discrepancies. Ralph H. Alexander (*Ezekiel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary) holds to this position with a solid, hermeneutical argument for its placement *after* the Millennium, while MacArthur and Walvoord offer less-detailed arguments for placing it *before* the Millennium, associating it with the Armageddon narrative. I still *favor* its placement at the end of the Millennium, but have a little more respect today for the arguments against it.

## FINAL "BATTLE"

We closed the previous session by reading the first three verses of Chapter Twenty-one, a description of the beginning of the Eternal State in a new Jerusalem on a new earth, inaugurating an endless time of holiness and purity. Even though the Millennium has been under the rule of Christ Jesus, those thousand years in the Eschaton have *not* resulted in a time of purity and holiness. As I said at the end of our last session,

During this time of peace, with Messiah on His earthly throne, human flesh, as well as the earth itself will still be fallen, with inherent sin. It will still be necessary, after the thousand years, for the Godhead to create a new earth, new heavens, and supply them with a new earthly throne for not just the Son, but the Father as well.

When one steps back for a moment and looks at the broad view, one realizes that the whole of the Eschaton—from the Rapture, through the Tribulation and Millennium, and the Great White Throne judgment, to the consignment of even death itself to the lake of fire—all of this has been the Lord God’s systematic eradication of the wicked on earth and even evil. In God’s economy death itself is evil, for it was not part of His original Creation until sin elbowed its way into Eden through the villainy of Satan. Thus death, too, as if personified, must go into the place of eternal suffering. At the same time the Lord God is using these judgments, these weapons and earthly upheavals, to demonstrate His Lordship and profound glory.

All this climaxes (but does not end) with the destruction from heaven of Satan’s final army, and his being consigned to the lake of fire. The apostle Paul foretold this, as well as the Great White Throne judgment in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

...then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

But now let’s get back to our timeline. The Millennium is drawing to a close, and as it does, things will begin happening at an accelerated pace.

**By the Way:** Some have conjectured that those living and born during the Millennium will not die until the final judgment—if then. The Bible does not say that, however, only that natural life will be *extended*.

“No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,  
Or an old man who does not live out his days;  
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred  
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred  
Will be thought accursed.” (Isaiah 65:20)

Many are surprised that after one thousand years with Christ Jesus in charge on earth, Satan will be able to form a huge army against Him.

*William Hoste:* The golden age of the kingdom will last a thousand years, during which righteousness will reign, and peace, prosperity, and the knowledge of God be universally enjoyed. But this will not entail universal conversion, and all profession must be tested... Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his [Satan’s] temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptations, children of God and lovers of His will? Alas! It will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God.

**Read Revelation 20:7-10.**

It is fair to ask the question, Why does God release Satan? God Himself, through the prophet Ezekiel, gives us the answer in Ezekiel 38:14–16.

“Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it? You will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.””

In these final days, the Lord God has two priorities: to punish and eradicate evil, and to make clear to those who survive that He alone is calling all the shots so as to glorify Himself. And if there is anyone in this army who has not read Revelation 20, and so is confused by the Lord’s statement, he will be painfully surprised once the army has surrounded Jerusalem.

We are not told how long it will take Satan to gather his army, but we *are* told *how* he accomplishes it: “[he] will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war.” To the end Satan remains a gifted liar, and here, in one of his final acts, he puts that skill to good use.

The account is coldly matter-of-fact: the vast army surrounds Israel and “...and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.” Just like that. Everyone in that army, but one, is killed by fire from heaven. The sole survivor, spared from the consuming flames, will be Satan—whom, I am sure, has indeed read Revelation 20. Those destroyed will have to be raised from the dead so as to stand trial before the throne. For their commander Satan no trial is necessary; he will be perp-walked right into the lake of fire. And in the narrative there he dwells, being tormented for eternity, so let us not give the enemy of everything dear to us any more of our time.

In the battle of Armageddon God permits Antichrist to harm His chosen people before coming to their rescue in the person of the Messiah. This time He permits none of that, but consumes the enveloping army before it can fire its first shot.

### **Read Revelation 20:11-15.**

#### FINAL JUDGMENT

In the final-days narrative, this is a fascinating moment—not just from what we are told, but from what we are *not* told. One of the things we are not told is what happens to the still-living regenerate—and unregenerate—coming out of the Millennium.

As mentioned in our previous session, the Millennium begins with only believers populating the earth. Yet they remain in fallen flesh. As the generations of their descendants proceed, many of them will *not* be believers, which offers a rich source of rebels to join Satan in his final battle against Christ. We can probably assume safely that the living *unregenerate* will be judged before the great white throne—although they are not mentioned. At some point their bodies must be translated into bodies that will not be consumed in the eternal fire of hell. Likewise, the remaining believers in flesh must be translated into eternal, glorified bodies, much as “Enoch (Genesis 5:24), Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and the raptured church” (MacArthur).

Nonetheless, we are not told. But the real focus of this moment is on the throne itself, the One sitting on it, and its setting. Again, we are not told precisely who is doing the judging (the NASB and NKJV at least put the “Him” in v11 in uppercase). We can readily agree with most commentators that this is God in the person of the glorified Christ Jesus, this based on such passages as John 5:21-22—

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son...”

—and Acts 10:42, where Peter declares that Jesus is,

“...the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”

Think of *this* moment as a logical outflow of the last thousand years. Picture it; appreciate the flow of the scenes and events: For the last one thousand years Christ Jesus has been physically ruling from a throne established in Jerusalem. He has reigned as absolute sovereign over all the nations of the world. He releases Satan from the abyss, and some time thereafter Israel, and specifically Jerusalem, is surrounded by an immense army numbering in the millions. In Luke 9 brothers James and John had volunteered to “command fire to come down from heaven and consume” the inhospitable Samaritans. Jesus rebuked them, pointing out that He had “not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:51-56). But, as I have said repeatedly, this is a different dispensation; this is a Messiah with a different agenda.

How does Jesus deal with this army? Does He speak a word, as He had a thousand years earlier? No, He calls down fire from heaven to consume them. And this holocaust just may be the preliminary stroke against the old earth, for almost immediately John sees Christ on his glowing, pure-white throne sitting not in Jerusalem, but somewhere in space disengaged from all temporal or heavenly foundations: a throne and a king “from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”

Paul in Colossians tells us that Christ Jesus was that part of God who created the universe:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16)

Now He is the one who has just destroyed it. J. A. Seiss argues against total destruction of the old earth (favoring a “renewal”), since Christ made it originally perfect (“good”). But this passes too lightly over the depths to which this perfect world has been corrupted by sin and depravity—to such an extent that this physical earth literally groans because of what has become of it ([Romans 8:20-23](#)).

What we have before us in v11 is the precise moment after the universe has been destroyed—but before the new earth and new heaven have been created. Around the throne of Christ there is nothing—*nothing*. All has “fled away.”

**Remember:** The word translated “heaven” (*ouranos*) can refer to the immediate sky overhead (in which the birds fly), space, or the place where God dwells.

In this moment there is Christ upon His throne, surrounded by millions of resurrected dead—and absolutely nothing else. We have the apostle Peter’s startling description of this destruction in 2 Peter 3.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10–13)

Doesn’t sound like a “renewal” or cleansing does it. I especially like how John MacArthur describes this.

*MacArthur:* After describing the vision of the Judge on His throne, John noted the startling reality that from His presence earth and heaven fled away. That amazing, incredible statement describes the “uncreation” of the universe. The earth will have been reshaped by the devastating judgments of the Tribulation and [somewhat] restored during the millennial kingdom. Yet it will still be tainted with sin and subject to the effects of the Fall—decay and death; hence it must be destroyed, since nothing corrupted by sin will be permitted to exist in the eternal state (2 Pet. 3:13). God will in its place create “a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away” (21:1; cf. 21:5; Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13).

[MacArthur continues,] The present earth and heaven will not merely be moved or reshaped, since John saw in his vision that no place was found for them. They will be uncreated and go totally out of existence. This is nothing less than the sudden, violent termination of the universe (cf. Ps. 102:25-26; Isa. 51:6; Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Luke 16:17; 21:33; Heb. 1:10-12; 12:26-27). [Donald Grey] Barnhouse wrote “There is to be an end of the material heavens and earth which we know. It is not that they are to be purified and rehabilitated, but that the reverse of creation is to take place. They are to be uncreated. As they came from nothing at the word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by this same word of God” (*Revelation: An Expository Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971 ], 391).

And now the focus in this drama is the great white throne of judgment, from which Christ will dispense His final verdict on wickedness and sin. There will be no altar call, no last-chance invitation to repent. Many interpret various Scripture passages—such as the one before us—to suggest that there will be graduated *measures* of judgment—that though all will be sent to the lake of fire, once there some will experience less torment than others. The next verse seems to bear this out.

**v12:** And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

The Godhead keeps meticulous records on what humanity does on earth. And these volumes are opened to inform the verdicts to be handed down. Since almost all scholars interpret this final judgment as being for the wicked alone, this verse indicates two “gates” through which each must pass. The first “gate” is found in v15:

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

If one’s name is not recorded in the book of life—the book in which all the names of the regenerate are found—then consignment to the lake of fire is declared—i.e., the second death (v6). The second “gate,” however, is more detailed and nuanced. The books (or scrolls) are consulted as to the works of each person: “...and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” One might rightly ask, Why bother with this if all are punished the same? So there may indeed be *graduations* of torment in hell. Verse 13 tells us from whence all these individuals came.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

This is the second resurrection, the “resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). They are those who died without faith (OT), without Christ (NT) from all generations since Eden. They come from those who died (or were buried) at sea, and those who were buried in the earth (“death”), as well as those in Hades, the temporary abode of the wicked dead. (Note: The KJV “hell” is a poor translation, and should be “Hades.”) All these will be judged and delivered to hell—the lake of fire—which is the “second death.”

We cannot say for certain what the lake of fire will literally be like, for it exists, like God’s dwelling place, on a separate plane outside the laws of this universe. Hades (or Sheol), like the abyss, is indeed subterranean, inside the earth, but at this point that earth will have ceased to exist. But hell continues forever, as a place of unbearable heat, darkness, isolation, estrangement, and of unending sorrow. Verse 15 gives us the bottom line:

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

We, today, still live in the church age, a dispensation in which Satan is very much alive and active here on earth. He is a very good liar, and does his best every day to delude this world into believing his lies. The mark of his expertise as a liar is his remarkable level of success—indeed so successful that most of society (sadly, even many who call themselves Christians) actually *wants* to believe Satan’s lies instead of the simple, clear truth of Scripture.

Some believe, for example, that hell is just annihilation; when one dies, after a brief period of punishment one just ceases to exist, passing into nothingness. God’s word clearly speaks against this. When Satan is cast into hell, the beast and the false prophet will have been sent there one thousand years earlier. Yet,

the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet **are** also; and **they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.** (v10; emphasis added)

Even the way-station, Hades, is a miserable, place of flames and intolerable heat, as we read in Jesus’ story of Lazarus and the rich man.

“In Hades [the rich man] lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’” (Luke 16:23–24)



Even so, our culture today is so infected by the rot of unbelief that, as Wayne Grudem writes, “Among liberal theologians who do not accept the absolute truthfulness of the Bible, there is probably no one today who believes in the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.” Grudem also offers the text of a hymn, in which the following is the third stanza, by William B. Collyer:

*But sinners, filled with guilty fears, behold His wrath prevailing;  
For they shall rise, and find their tears and sighs are unavailing:  
The day of grace is past and gone; trembling they stand before the throne,  
All unprepared to meet Him.*

The bottom line is this: If prior to your first death or this second resurrection you are not found in the book of life, you go to the lake of fire—the second death. You, literally, go to hell, where you will live, in torment, for all of eternity. And any time we, as Christ’s witnesses on earth dilute or soften this truth when speaking to the unregenerate, we are serving the will of not our Lord and Savior, but Satan.



# EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

Ezekiel 40 to 48

The prophet Ezekiel was taken to Babylonia along with the rest of the exiles from Israel in 597 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. While there the Lord God, through Ezekiel, issued prophecies of both doom and hope for the Jews—prophecies unmatched in God's word for their bizarre, even grotesque imagery, and profound difficulty of interpretation.

In Chapters 40 to 48 of Ezekiel God dictates to the prophet the details, dimensions, and use for a huge Jerusalem temple. Referred to as “Ezekiel's Temple” this temple, as described, is famously difficult to place. It is obviously not historical, as its description fits none of the earlier or later known temples. The temple would be so large, it would not fit in the Jerusalem of today, nor would there even be sufficient level space for it.

I have, earlier in this study, stated that Ezekiel's temple will be the Millennial temple—i.e., the temple in place in Jerusalem while Christ is on earth ruling the nations; this is the typical dispensational position, and is the position held by both John MacArthur and John Walvoord. I would now, however, like to officially change my position on this. Scholars and interpreters have held several predominate positions for the time of this vision's fulfillment.

One view holds that Ezekiel's Chapters 40-48 offer God's blueprint for the temple He wants them to build once Israel returns from exile—but that they simply failed to follow His plan.

Another view holds that the temple description symbolically, or figuratively, represents the Christian church.

Since the Millennial (dispensational) view is probably the most common in evangelical circles, I would like to discuss it further. Let me begin by pointing out what is probably the most objectionable aspect of Ezekiel's temple if it is to be in place during a period when Jesus the Messiah will be reigning on earth. In fact, He will be *in residence* in the very place where this temple is to be built. Look at the following passages:

Four tables were on each side next to the gate; or, eight tables on which they slaughter sacrifices. For the burnt offering there were four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice.

*Ezekiel 40:41-42*

And He said to me, “Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings

on it and to sprinkle blood on it. You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘a young bull for a sin offering. You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it.’”

*Ezekiel 43:18-20*

“On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed it with the bull. When you have finished cleansing it, you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared. For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,” declares the Lord GOD.

*Ezekiel 43:22-27*

Steve Gregg, in an article written in 2012, does an excellent job of addressing this:

Dispensationalists argue for a literal, physical building to be established in fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. Since the temple erected after Ezekiel's time did not fit Ezekiel's description, they believe that there must be another temple in the future that will do so more admirably [i.e., during the Millennium].

It would be easier to accept this theory if we did not have the New Testament to guide our thinking. The most obvious problem presented here is that the book of Hebrews (e.g., 10:1-18) speaks of the death of Christ on the cross as a termination of the efficacy of bloody animal sacrifices, such as those Israel offered in the temple. If Ezekiel's vision applies to a future time, why do we again find the offering of animal sacrifices?

The dispensationalist answer is that the millennial sacrifices will not be intended to atone for sins. The blood of Christ precludes any need for that. Just as the Old Testament sacrifices anticipated the death of Christ as a future event, it is suggested the future millennial sacrifices will commemorate the death of Christ as a past event.



# EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

(continued)

The text of Ezekiel, however, seems to preclude this, since the various offerings in the temple are said to “make atonement for the house of Israel” (45:17). Thus, the sacrifices are presented as an atonement for sin, not as a memorial. Christ Himself recommended the use of wine and bread to commemorate His death (1 Cor. 11:24–26). Why would God replace this with animal sacrifices in which God never found any particular pleasure (Ps. 40:6; 51:16; Heb. 10:6)?

(from “Making sense of Ezekiel’s Temple Vision,” by Steve Gregg. This article first appeared in the Practical Hermeneutics column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 35, number 03 [2012]. For further information or to subscribe to the Christian Research Journal go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>.)

In addition to the seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Ezekiel’s vision temple being in place with the crucified, risen Savior—the Lamb slain for our sins once for all—there are the closing passages that describe

- water flowing from the temple, with ever-bearing trees on either side of the resulting river (47:1-12; cf., Revelation 22:1-2);
- the city of Jerusalem with twelve gates, one for each tribe (48:31; cf., Revelation 21:10-13).

In the book of Revelation these describe the new Jerusalem in the Eternal State—*not* the Millennium.

What then are we to do with Ezekiel’s temple? The best answer to this comes from Ezekiel’s text itself.

“And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger. Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever. As for you, son of man, **describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their**

**iniquities; and let them measure the plan. If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them.”**

*Ezekiel 43:8b–11 (emphasis added)*

“If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house...” Let the record show that Israel returning from exile was, sadly, *not* ashamed of what they had done. In fact many of their number elected to remain in Babylonia, rather than return to their homeland. And their enthusiasm for rebuilding a temple was tepid at best.

They were *not* ashamed of their iniquities, so the temple as designed by God for them was never built. Not then, nor will it be during the Millennium.

