

LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF EZEKIEL 40–48

Dispensational premillennialism's explanation of Revelation 20 as a prophecy of the restoration of the Old Testament nation of Israel in Palestine as the earthly kingdom of God for a thousand years, in literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, necessarily involves premillennialism in an interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48. In keeping with its law of the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, as opposed to the prophecy's being typical and symbolical, premillennialism is compelled to forecast approvingly a worshiping of God by the sacrificing of animals during the millennium in a material temple, as opposed to a spiritual temple.

This is heresy—the grossest of all heresies: the denial of the one sacrifice for sins by the crucified Jesus Christ, the lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. And this heresy ought to open the eyes of premillennial theologians to the error of their interpretation of Revelation 20.

Ezekiel 40–48 prophesies the rebuilding of the Old Testament temple, with the altar of burnt offering and all the other paraphernalia of that temple, including officiating priests and Levites. The passage also prophesies bloody, animal sacrifices of bullocks, goats, and rams on the altar as sin offerings. Therefore, in accordance with premillennialism's avowed literal interpretation of prophecy, during the millennium there will be the construction of a material temple in Jerusalem for the right, indeed demanded, worship of God and a resumption of the worship of the old covenant, including animal sacrifices for sin.

According to premillennialist Erich Sauer, in the coming millennium “God will resume the history of the earthly visible temple.”¹⁵ In that physical, earthly temple “there will then be a service of sacrifices *after* the completed work on Golgotha; and...this will include burnt offerings, meal offerings, thank offerings, and sin offerings, a priesthood, and a holding of special feasts (Passover, Tabernacles...).”¹⁶ “At the Passover there shall be offered daily exactly seven bullocks and seven rams as a sin-offering, and likewise exactly seven bullocks and seven rams as a burnt-offering.”¹⁷

Knowing full well the carnal, indeed antichristian, implications of the doctrine of a restoration of Old Testament, bloody sacrifices for sin in a Jewish millennium (*over which the Lamb of God, who was slain for sin, once and for all, presides—the Lamb of God who was sacrificed offers up animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins*), premillennial notable John F. Walvoord approves and

¹⁵ Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity*, 38.

¹⁶ Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity*, 39. The emphasis is that of Sauer.

defends this abomination—this denial of the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin—at length.¹⁸

Thus not only is premillennialism's vaunted, literal interpretation of prophecy conclusively exposed as fallacious, but also premillennialism denies the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and falls away to damnable, Judaistic antichristianity. Nothing less severe than this is the Reformed faith's judgment upon premillennialism. Dispensational premillennialism is a denial of the cross of Jesus Christ. "By one offering he [Jesus] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (v. 26). "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (v. 4). "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou [God] hast had no pleasure" (v. 6).

To premillennialism's literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40–48, especially its approval of bloody, animal sacrifices as accepted, indeed divinely commanded, worship of God in the millennium and, thus, to the theology of premillennialism in its entirety, Reformed amillennialism responds, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

Indicating that they recognize full well the dreadful doctrine into which their literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy presses them, especially the self-styled moderate premillennialists defend their teaching of a resumption of Old Testament, bloody, animal sacrifices by earthly priests—usurping the office of the great high priest Jesus Christ as much as any Roman Catholic priest, indeed more grossly (Rome's priests do not practice bloody, animal sacrifices)—by explaining the sacrifices in a temple during the millennium as merely symbolic, intending to remind believers of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

This pathetic and desperate defense of their horrendous doctrine of a resumption of animal sacrifices in the millennium fails in every respect. First, Ezekiel 40–48 does not teach animal sacrifices in a restored temple as merely symbolic and for the purpose of remembering the death of Christ. Ezekiel teaches animal sacrifices *as sin offerings*, in keeping with the nature of such sacrifices in the time of the old covenant.

Second, the New Testament sign and seal of the sacrifice for sin of the Lamb of God, appointed by Christ, is not an animal sacrifice but the

¹⁸ Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, 309–15. Walvoord inculcates in this gross wickedness the whole of premillennialism and all premillennialists when he indicates the reason for affirming animal sacrifice for sin in the millennium: "Most thoroughgoing students of premillennialism who evince understanding of the relation of literal interpretation to premillennial doctrine usually embrace the concept of a literal temple and literal sacrifices" (315).

sacrament of the Lord's supper. And this sacrament does not include the shedding of blood. After the bloody death of the Lamb of God for sin, there may never again be the shedding of blood for the taking away of sin in any sense whatever. This is one reason that in the time of the new covenant, circumcision is replaced by baptism.

Third, although such bloody, animal sacrifices could serve, and *did* serve, to represent the cross of Christ to Israel in the time of the old covenant—the childish church (Gal. 4:1–3)—no such sacrifice may represent the cross to the church after Christ has come and died the accursed death of the cross. After the death of Christ, a bloody sacrifice *competes* with the cross, *obscures* the cross, and necessarily by virtue of the shedding of blood, *denies* the cross. God's way of setting the cross before the eyes of the New Testament church and believer is the preaching of the truth of the gospel of the cross.

What is of the utmost significance for revealing the gross heresy of premillennialism in all its forms and presentations is that all premillennialists, the moderate and the extreme, are agreed that there will, in fact, be bloody, animal sacrifices for sin in the millennial kingdom. Although they clearly see the implications of this cross-denying doctrine, they will not renounce it. They cannot, for they are committed to a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. Giving up on a literal interpretation of prophecy would be the abandonment of dispensational premillennialism as false doctrine.

The book *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* is recognized as a deliberate attempt by moderate premillennialists to soften the sharp edges of the original premillennialists, to mitigate the more offensive teachings of the fathers of premillennialism, and to find some common ground with Reformed and Presbyterian covenantal theologians. Although the subject does not receive nearly the attention it requires, the “issue [of]...the abolition of sacrifices in Hebrews” is brought up by editors Blaising and Bock at the very end of the book as part of their “assessment” of the content of the book. The editors, who are representatives of the moderate, progressive wing of premillennial dispensationalism, *deny* that “any retention of [bloody, animal] sacrifices [by a restored Levitical priesthood in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem] is a return to ‘weak and beggarly’ shadows of the Old Testament.” They argue *on behalf of* the resumption of such sacrifices in the millennium: “The only sacrifices that Hebrews prohibits are those related to sin” (as though the sacrifices taught in Ezekiel 40–48 are not there related to sin). These purportedly moderate premillennialists conclude by asserting that “the possibility of national cultic activities [bloody, animal sacrifices for sin, offered to God on a material altar in Jerusalem by human priests] [is not] automatically excluded...It is possible...that some

of these features [specifically, bloody, animal sacrifices] are included in 'the restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21)."¹⁹ Which, being interpreted, means that all dispensational premillennialists teach that in the most glorious of all the earthly dispensations—the coming millennium—the cross of Jesus Christ will be obliterated by the shadow of bloody, animal sacrifices for sin.

The cautious language of the editors describing future animal sacrifices in the millennial kingdom of God as mere possibilities is deception, serving the ecumenical purpose of the book. In fact, the premillennialists, moderates as well as extremists, are committed to the *reality* of such sacrifices. Literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy demands these sacrifices. So also does the Jewish nature of the theory itself of the millennium demand the resumption of sacrifices in an earthly temple.

To the premillennialists thus advocating or allowing bloody sacrifices by a revived order of earthly priests in an earthly temple in the Jerusalem that is below (Gal. 4:25–26), the Reformed faith witnesses and admonishes the word of the apostle in Hebrews 8:1–4, 6:

1. We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens;
2. A minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.
3. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.
4. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:...
6. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises [realized in the one bloody sacrifice of himself, once and for all].

DESPISING GOD'S (REAL) TEMPLE

Although the preceding concentrated on premillennialism's monstrously wicked, and well-nigh incredible, teaching of the resumption of bloody, animal sacrifices during the millennium, equally reprehensible is premillennialism's teaching of a restored earthly temple as the locus of the public worship of God by Jews and

¹⁹ Blaising and Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 390–91.

Gentiles. That earthly temple of the Old Testament was fulfilled in Jesus Christ according to Jesus himself: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...he spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:19, 21).

By virtue of their union with Christ, as “lively stones,” the New Testament believers are “built up [by God] a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). That is, by virtue of being united to Christ by faith, the New Testament church is the reality of the temple of the Old Testament.

The premillennial doctrine that some earthly building in the future will be a restored Old Testament temple is, as such, the denial of Jesus Christ and the reality of his saving work. Inasmuch as the church is the reality—the *glorious, splendid, spiritual* reality—of the temple, premillennialism’s hope and prediction of a restored, grand, rebuilt, Old Testament temple of Israel are, as is true of premillennialism in general, contempt for the church. And contempt for the church is at the same time contempt for the church’s king, head, and high priest, Jesus the Christ (*Christ*, meaning the church’s anointed prophet, priest, and king).

This is gross sin, gross doctrinal sin.

It is also the height of folly. Face-to-face in the gospel with glorious, spiritual reality—the New Testament church—premillennialism opts for a return to types and shadows. It is with premillennialism as though a wife would turn from the solid, physical presence of her husband, just returned from a long absence, perhaps in the military, ardently to embrace his shadow or to concentrate lovingly on the pictures of himself he sent her during his absence.

Premillennialism’s turning from New Testament spiritual realities of the kingdom and salvation to the earthly types to which Judaism clings is the apostasy from the gospel of Jesus Christ condemned by the epistle of Hebrews.

The best witness that a Reformed believer can give to a premillennial acquaintance is, “Read the book of Hebrews!”

REDUCING ISRAEL TO A “HERD OF SWINE”