

## The Problem of Ezekiel's Temple/City Vision Opening Argument

By Samuel M. Frost, M.A.R. 01-08-04

Copyright © Answers in Revelation

---

Briefly, the topic of this paper is found in *Ezekiel (Ez)* 40-48. I will assume the reader is either familiar with these grand chapters or will read them before entertaining the issues raised in this paper. If one is not familiar with these chapters, then this paper will not make that much sense. All of the Bible is to be read in light of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and interpreted in that fashion. Jesus said that the Scriptures 'spoke of me' and that he was the fulfillment of the 'law and the prophets.' Here, then, we are entertaining the prophet Ezekiel and what he has to say about Jesus, redemption and the 'end of the law' that Paul spoke about. Tim Warner's position, it will be seen, becomes an impossible one to hold in light of the Scriptures and plainly contradicts easily understood passages given by our holy Apostle, Paul.

First off, a few quotes from four notable scholars in this area are necessary. From the A-millennial side, O.T. Allis wrote, 'The crux of the whole question is undoubtedly the restoration of the Levitical ritual of sacrifice' (*Prophecy and the Church*, 1947, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, p.246). Allis went on to quote several passages from *Ez* 40-48 that clearly show that animal sacrifices will once again be literally offered for the blood atonement and sin-offering that purifies the nation of Israel. Scofield, as noted by Allis, resorted to make these offerings a mere symbolic 'memorial, looking back to the cross' (Scofield's words). The objection by Allis is that 'There is not the slightest hint in Ezekiel's description of these sacrifices that they will simply by memorial' (Ibid., 247). By quoting Paul that he considered the things of the Law to be 'rubbish' and considers them 'a loss' and 'weak and beggarly principles' of which the sacrifices are a 'shadow and a type' but the 'reality is Christ,' the objection becomes even clearer. 'The thought is abhorrent that after He comes, the memory of his atoning work will be kept alive in the hearts of believers by a return to the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic law' (Ibid., 248).

Post-Millennialist Loraine Boettner, author of *The Millennium* (P&R Publishing, 1957 – 1994 reprint) wrote along the same lines. He sets forth, however, the positive way in which these chapters should be interpreted: 'Old Testament thought forms are employed to teach New Testament spiritual truths, truths which in that day could be expressed intelligently only through those forms with which the people were familiar' (p. 79). That is, when the Bible foretold a time when 'priests' would be offering 'sacrifices' in the 'temple' of God as in *Ezekiel* Paul understood this *prophetic vision* to be Christians ('priesthood of believers') to be offering sacrifices ('living sacrifices' because of the efficacy of the 'once and for all time sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God') in the 'temple of God' which Paul explicitly called the 'household of God' and the 'assembly' (*ekklesia*). Thus, Ezekiel foresaw a time using 'thought forms' of Levitical imagery to convey spiritual realities in Christ. We can say it this way, *the reality of Christ is*

*conveyed through the symbolism of the type and shadow.* Ezekiel, then, was seeing ‘the reality in Christ,’ but his language was decidedly cast in ‘shadow and type’ language. This is not difficult to assess at all.

Finally, so that it may be documented, Charles Ryrie, a ‘moderate’ Dispensationalist (and I am aware that Warner does not entirely endorse Ryrie’s position), *does not even quote* from *Ezekiel* in his book, *Dispensationalism Today* (Moody Press, 1974 – 1965 reprint). Nonetheless, he wrote, that ‘Jews who will be living on the earth in earthly bodies when the millennium begins and to those who will be born with earthly bodies during the period will be fulfilled the earthly promise which have remained unfulfilled all these years’ (p.147). Ryrie spends a great deal of time defending the ‘spiritual nature’ of the Dispensational millennial kingdom (174-176), but, again, strangely omitted is *any* discussion of Ezekiel’s vision. Maybe Ryrie just does not want to bring up these chapters when he defines ‘Dispensationalism today’!

John F. Walvoord, another stalwart defender of Dispensationalism (and again, I realize that Warner does not agree on all points with Walvoord), is more honest. In his landmark defense of his views (*The Nations, Israel, and the Church in Prophecy*, Academic, Zondervan, 1988 - from the 1962 edition), he wrote, ‘A number of Scriptures also describe the temple worship which will characterize the millennial kingdom. According to Ezekiel, a magnificent temple will be built, and a system of priesthood and *memorial* sacrifices will be set up. Scholars have not all agreed on this interpretation of this *difficult portion* of Ezekiel. Some have felt it impossible to have a system of animal sacrifices subsequent to the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross in light of New Testament passages stating that the sacrifice of Christ makes other unnecessary. Though varied explanations have been given for Ezekiel 40-48 which unfolds these *details*, no satisfactory explanation has been made other than that it is a description of millennial worship. In any case, *it is clear* that the sacrifices are not expiatory, but *merely* memorials of the one complete sacrifice of Christ...*while problems remain*, it *seems clear* that Israel will have an ordered worship in Jerusalem once again’ (125,126 – all italics mine). As Ace Ventura would say, ‘Alllllrighty then!’

Notice the assumption of Walvoord right off the bat: ‘memorial.’ Problem: *Nowhere does Ezekiel hint of a memorial blood atoning sacrifice. The word is not used in the eight chapters cited. Secondly, why slaughter animals when it is at once REALIZED Who they are memorializing?* The ‘literal’ picture one can imagine is king Jesus, sitting on his throne in Jerusalem, seeing millions of lambs slaughtered in his memorial. If the daily sacrifice is offered alone it would require 360,000 lambs during the 1,000 year reign. That’s just the *daily* offering! Ezekiel mentions several other offerings as well. Third: note Walvoord then saying that these portions in *Ez* are ‘difficult portions.’ Then he turns around and says, ‘it is clear’ that these sacrifices are ‘mere memorials’! In words of Scooby-Doo, ‘huh?’ If it is ‘clear’ then why are ‘scholars disagreed’? Then he notes again that ‘it *seems clear*’ that Israel will ‘have an ordered worship.’ Seems clear? I thought it *was clear*!

My point in quoting these four authors, each highly respected by their various camps, is that there is a massive problem here. I have read how Mr. Warner attempts to tackle

what Walvoord called these 'difficult portions' of Scripture over the nature of these sacrifices (see his article under the subject The Millennium: Sacrifices in the Millennium), but I did not find any answer to the problems as they actually are. He will, then, have to be more specific. Let me quote from Warner, on his comment on *Zechariah 14*: 'The fact is, this passage clearly says that there will be a Temple AND sacrifices, as well as GENTILES coming to keep the Feast of Tabernacles AFTER the battle of Armageddon, when Christ returns to the Mount of Olives with "all His saints." That appears clear enough.

Let it be known that I will not accept a statement that they are 'memorial' without *full and scriptural warrant to that effect*. Second, I want to hear how Warner deals with why they *must* be 'memorial.' Obviously, *if these sacrifices are NOT memorials, then we have blood-atonement sacrifices being offered AFTER the one time sacrifice of Christ*. Hopefully, Warner realizes that this is a massive contradiction of Scripture. If the 'carnal ordinances imposed on them (Israel) until the time of the new reformation' (*Heb 9.10*) and the new reformation of *Hebrews* has come, and since they are 'shadows and types' and 'weak and beggarly elements' but the 'reality is Christ', then how can he justify an order that follows this: Time of shadows and types -> Christ, fulfillment of shadows and type, time of the new reformation, end of the old covenant -> reinstatement of shadows and types, once again imposing 'carnal ordinances', reinstatement of weak and beggarly elements? Finally, if the 'sin-offering' of Ezekiel is not a *literal* sin-offering, but a 'mere memorial', then is not Warner interpreting Ezekiel's prophecy *in light of NT Scriptures*, thus side-stepping the literalness of the words for a memorial/symbolic interpretation? This is the preteristic method! A 'memorial' is a *symbol*. Thus, the slicing of throats so that blood pours out is a memorial, a symbol, of the sacrifice of Christ. But if it is a symbol, a *type*, then are we to believe that God is going to set up 'types' AGAIN when the REALITY has already come? The reason why God brought an END to sacrifices and offerings was because the revelation of Jesus ENDED their function. They were NO LONGER needed. But, Dispensationalism says that they WILL once AGAIN be imposed on Israel!

As for Warner's anticipated response, he wrote, "As to the alleged problems created with passages such as Heb. 10, where Christ's atonement is "once for all," and there is no need of further sacrifice for sins, one must recognize that not all sacrifices were "atonement" sacrifices. This describes his position no doubt, but does not answer my question posed here. By merely saying that *Ez* word for 'atonement' in these chapters is not really an atonement (and he uses the common word for atonement) is begging the question.

Warner then writes, Isn't it great how all this fits together so nicely! In the Millennium, there will be no Priests restricted from entering the Temple except once a year! The Throne of the Lord will be in the Holy place, and the veil will be OPENED! People will have full access to the Lord on His Throne! They will come to Jerusalem to worship, and bring their offerings to the Lord. Well, *Ez 44.9* contradicts this: 'This is what the sovereign LORD says: *No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and flesh is to enter my sanctuary, not even the foreigners who live among the Israelites.*' If interpreted literally, Gentiles are EXCLUDED from having 'full access to the Lord on his throne'! It matters not if they are circumcised in HEART! (regenerated). ONLY the 'priests of Zadok' can enter (44.15). Gentile Christians have to look forward to YET AGAIN an institution that shuts us out from the sanctuary of the Lord!

Finally, in Tim's paper, he writes, The sacrifices offered will NOT be atonement for sin. Interesting. In light of *Ez* 43.19 says, 'you are to give AS A SIN OFFERING to the priests...you are to take some of its BLOOD...and PURIFY they altar and MAKE ATONEMENT FOR IT.' If a priest touches a dead body, then he must 'OFFER A SIN OFFERING' because he has 'defiled himself' (sinned) (44.25-27). Tim's statement, then, is a direct contradiction of Ezekiel's. Ezekiel says 'atonement', Tim says, 'no atonement.' He wrote, 'Those who argue that such things are blasphemous on the grounds that Christ died once for all should apply the same principle to the Lord's Supper! Does not celebrating using wine and bread do the same thing? Yes it does! It is symbolism pointing to Christ! This is an amazing leap. He clearly notes that the sacrifices are 'symbolic'! Thus, what is being reinstated is WEAK AND BEGGERLY symbols! He then compares this to the Lord's Table! Was Ezekiel talking about the Lord's Table? But, once a symbol of KILLING ANIMALS by the thousands is realized for what it is, then why the NEED to continue KILLING thousands of animals? This analysis given by Tim, who clearly feels the weight of these passages, simply will not do. Preterist advocates side with the A-millennial and Post-millennial scholars on this point, saying basically the same thing: Ezekeil saw a grand vision of the Temple of God, the Church, functioning in all of its priestly duties within God's holy mount Zion, Jerusalem above, serving Him and having full access to him through his atoning blood which purified the heavens (making a new heavens wherein we have access) and drinking from the waters of life (*Ez* 48) and sharing in the 'spiritual blessings' of the 'inheritance' in Christ Jesus. This is a far more uplifting comfort to the hurting souls of the world. They have access NOW to God the Father.....they don't have to WAIT to have access...only then to be EXCLUDED when they get there because they are 'foreigners' and not literal 'sons of Zadok.' Sons of Zadok means 'sons of RIGHTEOUSNESS' and that's exactly what John sees each Christian believer gowned in: WHITE ROBES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. In Tim's mind, that's still 'yonder, yonder over there.' In the biblical scheme, however, 'ALL the promises are YES and AMEN in Christ Jesus' right now.

By those thoughtfully considering these debates, the issues involved with Ezekiel's visions are huge. For the literalist, they are quite problematic when dealing with the NT statements. I am charging that Warner cannot maintain consistency here without somehow finding a loophole that damages his entire Dispensational paradigm and hermeneutic.