

The Problem of Ezekiel's Temple/City Vision Rebuttal

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Before I begin my refutation of Frost's paper, the reader should note that Frost's entire argument is against premillennialism, not futurism. This debate is about preterism vs. futurism. There are many futurists (amillennialists) who would agree with nearly everything Frost wrote in his paper. His first mistake was in choosing his subject. The whole argument is a straw man. Even IF Frost's arguments were correct, the result is not that preterism stands vindicated and futurism is cast into doubt. Rather, premillennialism would be cast into doubt, but no harm is done to futurism if one is amillennial.

Secondly, some understand Ezekiel's prophecy to be conditional on Israel's repentance. That is, since Ezekiel's vision was given during the Babylonian captivity, when the Temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the vision could have been meant as an encouragement for Israel, promising them a grander Temple and worship under the condition that they repent (something they failed to do). All potentially could have been fulfilled long before Christ's first coming. I do not subscribe to this interpretation, so I will not spend any time offering the arguments of its adherents. Suffice it to say that Frost's attack on the usual dispensational approach to Ezekiel's vision leaves other alternatives besides preterism, even if he could prove his case, which he has not done. Frost's argument largely targets the opinion of Traditional Dispensationalists. But it does no harm to futurism, nor does it in any way support preterism. Even though I believe this subject is distracting from the real issues dividing futurists and preterists, I am obligated to answer Frost's arguments.

Sam Frost began his comments by pointing out that the redemptive work of Christ is the core of the biblical message. *"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.'"* As a Progressive Dispensationalist, I agree completely. The problem is Frost has taken such statements of Jesus to imply that the Bible does not mean what it says. He thinks this is a license to discard the plain sense meaning of language in favor of a hidden meaning which he attempts to supply in extremely vague terms (never really giving a serious "interpretation" of the details of the prophecies). That is a far cry from what Jesus actually said in the above quotes. Frost has based his arguments on a faulty methodology which denies the Bible outright in many passages. Also, his arguments in this paper are meant to show that a premillennial interpretation cannot be maintained using a consistent methodology. He is wrong on all counts, because his opinions are based on faulty presuppositions that lead him to wrong conclusions.

Wrong Presupposition #1 – Animal Sacrifices Atoned for Sin

The crux of Frost's argument (and nearly all Reformed theologians') is that after Christ died, any further animal sacrifices would be blasphemous and unthinkable. Frost acknowledges that premillennialists have always claimed that future sacrifices are merely memorial in nature, and do not themselves atone for sins. His opposition to future sacrifices being "memorial" is based solely on the fact that Ezekiel did not say they would be "memorial." Frost writes, *"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."* We shall demonstrate that there is no contradiction whatever in our interpretation. The "massive contradiction" is between Frost's presupposition that such are "*blood-atonement sacrifices*" when in fact Paul wrote that such was "impossible." The apparent contradiction Frost raises is based on his wrong presupposition regarding the nature of animal sacrifices in general.

Paul stated plainly that the actual (literal) animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant were themselves symbolic, and had absolutely no atoning quality. *"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. **For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.**"* (Heb 10:1-4 NKJ). The purpose of the animal sacrifices was a reminder of the seriousness of the worshipper's past sins and consequently his need for atonement. This need is supplied in Christ alone, as Paul so eloquently proclaims in Hebrews. Therefore, the Old Covenant sacrifices were prophetic of Christ. Yet, when we read the Torah, the animal sacrifices were commonly called "atonement" sacrifices, and "sin offerings" (Lev. 9:7 &c.). Is there a contradiction between Moses and Paul? Paul stated plainly that they had no such power! Therefore, the language of the Old Testament in calling them "sin offerings" and "atonement sacrifices," was itself symbolic language. These terms did not point to some inherent quality of animal blood. It pointed to their prophetic symbolism toward Christ's future atonement. This is a part of the "mystery" of Old Testament prophecy. It is therefore wrong for Frost to insist that such terminology in Ezekiel's prophecy must point to a literal cleansing from sin of the worshippers, when that was not even the case when the Jews offered the animal sacrifices under the Law!

It should surprise no one that Ezekiel's vision used similar terminology for the future sacrifices, particularly since the "mystery" of the Gospel had not yet been revealed, and the symbolic nature of all animal sacrifices was not yet clearly understood (1 Pet. 1:10-12). If we are to be consistent, and allow the New Testament to interpret the Old, then all of the sacrifices in the Old Testament, whether found in historical narrative or prophecy, should be seen as **symbolic in significance but literally carried out by the worshippers**. Paul's argument in Hebrews is that animal sacrifices simply have no power to cleanse from sin. If that was true in OT times and in Paul's day, it is true now

and will always be true. Therefore, any future sacrifices must be understood in light of the fact that all such sacrifices are signs (symbolic) even though they are literally offered by spilling real blood. The only difference in Scripture between animal sacrifices in *historical* narrative (which were prophetic in nature) and *prophetic* narrative (which are historical {‘memorial’} in nature), is merely their timing – past or future. The former looked forward prophetically to Christ, while the latter look back historically to Christ. Our breaking and eating the bread and drinking the wine look back to Christ as a “memorial” in the same manner. Communion is a “memorial” sacrifice, offered using literal elements. The breaking of the loaf symbolically memorializes Christ’s body being broken for us. The drinking of the wine is a symbolic memorial of His shedding His blood for our sins. The sacrifices to be offered at the new Temple are no different, but merely employ the use of more graphic elements. Let’s be consistent please! If the historical narratives really indicate that real people offered real animals, then the same language in the prophetic passages indicates the same thing to be done in the future. Frost is the one using a double standard here.

Is Frost willing to admit that the Apostles themselves practiced a “massive contradiction” in their leadership of the early Church? If offering animal sacrifices after Christ’s death is so abhorrent to Christians and blasphemous to God, why did the early Jewish Church in Jerusalem under the leadership of the Apostles continue to offer sacrifices at the Temple right up until its destruction in AD70? Paul himself participated in such sacrifices when in Jerusalem (Acts 21:20-27 & 1 Cor. 9:20). Apparently the Apostles themselves were ignorant of the spiritual gnosis that Frost apparently has obtained!

Wrong Presupposition #2 – Future Sacrifices Means a Return to the Mosaic Law

None of the Old Testament prophecies of the future Kingdom of God indicate a return to the Mosaic Covenant. The Bible is clear that the coming of the New Covenant has made the Old Covenant obsolete (Heb. 8). The Law of Moses prescribed certain feasts and ordinances that must be carried out to the letter. But, Ezekiel’s prophecy, while having some things in common with the Law of Moses, also indicates radical departures from the Law of Moses. The Kingdom Law is therefore not a reinstatement of the Law of Moses. It is merely a new dispensation, having some things in common with the former dispensations (just as this dispensation has many things in common with the previous one). One notable difference is the Throne of the Lord will occupy the place where the “ark of the covenant” used to be.

Ezek 43:1-7

1 Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east.

2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

3 It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw-- like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face.

4 And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east.

5 The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

6 Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me.

7 And He said to me, "Son of man, **this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.** No more shall the house of Israel defile My holy name, they nor their kings, by their harlotry or with the carcasses of their kings on their high places.
(NKJ)

Jer 3:16-17

16 "Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, **'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.'** It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, **nor shall they visit it,** nor shall it be made anymore.

17 "At that time **Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD,** and **all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem.** No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.
(NKJ)

In the above verses, Jeremiah stated plainly that the "ark of the covenant" will not be employed in worship anymore. Rather, the *Throne of the Lord* will replace it. That is, He will be present in person, which is what the Greek word "parousia" means. Also, rather than Israel alone coming to worship the Lord at the Temple, all the Gentile nations will come to worship. Interestingly, when Ezekiel listed the feasts that will be celebrated in the Kingdom, only the Passover and feast of Tabernacles are mentioned. The "Day of Atonement," which is the only feast of Israel where the "ark of the covenant" was used, is not included by Ezekiel (Ezek. 45:21-25). It is specifically excluded by Jeremiah. This is important in two ways.

Firstly, it shows perfect agreement with the book of Hebrews, when both are interpreted literally. There, Paul referred to the ceasing of the rituals offered on the "Day of Atonement." This was the only sacrifice where the priest took the blood into the Most Holy Place yearly.

Heb 9:6-9

6 Now when these things had been thus prepared [the original Tabernacle was built by Moses according to the pattern], **the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle** [the "Holy Place"], performing the services.

7 **But into the second part** [the "Most Holy Place" which housed the "ark of the covenant"] **the high priest went alone once a year,** not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;

8 **the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest** while the first tabernacle was still standing.

9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-
(NKJ)

The regular priests offered their offerings and sacrifices in the “Holy Place” daily. Yet, Paul pointed out that the high priest went **only once per year** into the “Most Holy Place” to sprinkle the “ark of the covenant.” The significance of this yearly event was to show that the object of the symbolic sacrifices (Christ) had not yet come. It follows then, that after Christ has come, this uncommon (yearly) part of the symbolism must be discontinued. This agrees perfectly with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which preclude the “Day of Atonement” from the festivities that will be celebrated after Christ’s return. There is no conflict, only perfect harmony.

Secondly, if Frost is correct that Ezekiel’s and others’ OT Kingdom prophecies point only to a mystical reality of the present age, it seems odd that the very thing Paul held up as uniquely referring directly of Christ (the Day of Atonement) is excluded from the prophetic passages that Frost seeks to apply to our day! Why would Ezekiel and Jeremiah exclude the one thing that Paul says points most plainly to Christ’s atonement? The fact is, there is no need to explain away the plain sense of Ezekiel’s prophecy when it is understood in light of the revelation of the Mystery, which we now understand, but Ezekiel’s original readers did not.

There is no reinstatement of the Mosaic Law in the prophecies of Scripture. The Law of Moses permitted absolutely no deviation from the rituals established by God. Yet these prophecies show enormous differences with the Law of Moses as well as many similarities. Zechariah indicates that Gentiles will be the main worshippers, coming to the Temple to keep the Feast of Tabernacles after the Lord defeats the armies that attack Jerusalem (Zech. 14). Finally, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled. *“Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. **Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.** The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, ‘Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him’”* (Isa 56:7-8 NKJ). Jesus quoted this passage, interpreting the “House of Prayer” as the Temple in Jerusalem, not some mystical “Temple,” as Frost would have you think. *“So they came to **Jerusalem**. And Jesus went into **the temple** and began to drive out those who bought and sold in **the temple**, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He would not allow anyone to carry wares through **the temple**. Then He taught, saying to them, ‘Is it not written, **My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations**’? But you have made **it** [that very “house of prayer for all nations”] a *‘den of thieves.’*”* (Mark 11:15-17 NKJ). Obviously, Jesus’ anger at the Jews for defiling the Temple with their merchandizing was based on the prophecy of Isaiah, that this “House” would one day be a *“House of prayer for all nations.”* Here, Jesus used the Greek word usually translated “gentiles” or “nations.” At no time in its history has the Temple been a *“House of prayer for all nations.”* Any Gentiles who wished to come to the Temple at Jerusalem to worship must first become proselytes through circumcision, becoming a part of Israel. That is not what this prophecy has in view. Rather, the Gentile nations themselves will come one day to worship the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem, as stated plainly here and in Zech. 14:16-21, &c. The only way to interpret Isaiah’s prophecy is to accept Jesus’ own interpretation. But, notice what will go on in this “House of prayer for all nations” when the Gentile nations come to worship there. *“Their burnt offerings and their*

sacrifices will be accepted on My altar.” Frost is in a real pickle here. If he denies this prophecy refers to literal sacrifices and a literal temple in Jerusalem, he is directly contradicting Jesus’ own interpretation! Jesus’ interpretation of this passage links the literal historical Temple with the future fulfillment of the prophecies, when all nations will worship at Jerusalem. It simply cannot be a mystical Temple. Therefore, both the Temple and the sacrifices offered on God’s altar are as literal as the Temple Jesus cleansed of the moneychangers.

The Law of Moses did not permit Gentile acceptance in the Temple of God. Nor did it prescribe world-wide observance of its laws. But, the prophecies of the Kingdom greatly expand the scope of influence, to include all nations.

Wrong Presupposition #3 – The Reality Forever Precludes the Symbol

It is true that Paul commonly exhorted Gentile Christians not to take up the rituals of the Law. But, it was not because doing so would be some kind of abomination. The passages where Paul takes up this theme (like Galatians) were meant to counter the Judaizers who insisted that Gentiles must keep the Law of Moses to be saved. It was necessary for Paul to counter their arguments, because to the Judaizers, the “weak and beggarly” elements possessed some kind of inherent quality to make one righteous. The Judaizers made the same mistake that Frost and other Reformed teachers make, that observance of sacrifices had the ability to make one righteous. The difference between the Judaizers and Frost is merely whether this alleged property of Torah observance ended with Christ’s atonement or not. Progressive Dispensationalists point to the fact that such ritual observance NEVER had any such quality in the first place. Therefore, whether this ended with Christ is a moot point. Granted, the animal sacrifices did indeed stop being offered because the Temple was destroyed. But, it is clear from Acts that the Jewish believers did NOT stop immediately after Christ’s sacrifice, but continued to offer sacrifices and keep the festivals for decades. And this was done with the full blessing of the Apostles in Jerusalem, who pointed out to Paul that there were thousands of Jewish believers who were all “zealous for the Law.” Was this because the Apostles in Jerusalem allowed the Church there to run amuck? Or was it because there was no inherent conflict between outward observance of sacrifices and the Christian Faith? All one need do to answer this question is read Acts 21. Paul himself joined with the Jewish brethren in the Temple rituals, including the offering of sacrifices, not because he needed to. Rather, it was to prove to the other Jewish believers that the rumor they had heard about him was false. What was that rumor? It was that Paul had gone around to the Jews of the Diaspora (Jews living in Jewish communities in Gentile cities) teaching them to stop observing the rituals of the Law and stop circumcising their sons. Paul had NOT done this, and so he agreed to participate himself in the ritual sacrifices in order to prove that this was not his message to the Jews of the Diaspora who believed the Gospel. Paul did not participate in a plot to deceive His Jewish brethren at the request of the other Apostles. That is an absurd supposition! Rather, Paul and the other Apostles were perfectly honest and forthright! Paul never commanded Jewish believers to stop offering sacrifices or observing the Law. Rather, he came to the aide of the Gentile converts who were being harassed by the Judaizers, telling them that there was no need for them to become “Jews” and keep the Law in order to be saved. Why? Salvation and the true worship of God did not REQUIRE such

observances. This, however, does not make such voluntary observances, when done with the full knowledge of their real symbolic meanings, wrong or in any sense blasphemous. If Frost is correct, then Paul and the other Apostles were hypocrites, doing precisely the opposite of the message they were supposed to be proclaiming! All of Paul's teaching regarding the Law and its rituals can be explained by this tension between the Judaizers and other Jewish believers. Paul had to publicly refute and rebuke the Judaizers for the sake of the Gentile converts. But the Jewish believers and Apostles in Jerusalem, whose observance of the Law was voluntary, Paul never rebuked. Rather, when with them, he was observant of the Law along with them. The Judaizers did not understand the "Mystery" of the Gospel, and that the sacrifices and rituals were merely symbols, tools of learning. The Apostles and other Jewish believers understood the "Mystery" of the Gospel. This is why Paul had no problem with living like a Gentile when among Gentiles, and like a Jew when among Jews. But he strenuously opposed the Judaizers.

1 Cor 9:19-23

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law;

21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;

22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

(NKJ)

If Paul could live as Jew under the Law, no doubt using these very symbols to preach Christ to His Jewish brethren, what is wrong with the same symbols being used on a world-wide scale for the rest of the nations? Why do you suppose that God had the Jewish people go through all those rituals for so many years, if "*the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins*"? It was to teach them the spiritual principles of the seriousness of sin, judgment, and atonement. When Christ came, those who had understood the lessons of the "shadows" embraced the reality – Christ. The rituals of the Law were used as object lessons for one nation, Israel, to lead them to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Frost wrote, "*Paul ... considered the things of the Law to be 'rubbish' and considers them 'a loss'...*" This statement is simply not true. It completely misrepresents Paul's opinion of the Law. Frost was referring to the following passage. "*Yet indeed **I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith***" (Phil 3:8-9 NKJ). Paul's point was NOT that God's commandments through Moses were all "rubbish." What Paul counted as "rubbish" was his own past attempt at self-righteousness through keeping the Law by human self-effort, apart from reliance on the grace of God and having the faith of Abraham. Paul told Timothy that "*the law is good, if a man use it lawfully*" (1 Tim. 1:8 NKJ). And to the Romans Paul

wrote, *“Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good”* (Rom. 7:12 NKJ). To claim that Paul’s view of the Law was that it was “rubbish” is to say that the Word of God is “rubbish.”

Paul never taught that the reality found in Christ forever precludes the use of symbols. Rather, he taught that all such symbols pale in comparison to the reality found in Christ. It was necessary for him to stress this point because of the Judaizers fascination with the symbols, and their insistence that salvation was found in the symbols rather than the reality.

Wrong Presupposition #4 – Future Sacrifices are Designed for Our Future Worship

As we observed above, the main difference between the historical Temple observances and the future prophetic Temple observances is the participation of all the Gentile nations, not Israel exclusively. Under the former dispensation, only **one nation** was taught these things through symbolic observances. In this dispensation, a select remnant of Israel and remnant from all nations, who understand the Mystery of the Gospel, are being “called out” and prepared to reign with Christ over the whole earth. In the future dispensation, those found faithful today will govern all the nations with Christ. The Gentile nations under the rule of resurrected believers (not necessarily the resurrected believers themselves) will observe the sacrifices in Jerusalem for the same reason the Jews did, as a *“schoolmaster to bring them to Christ”* (Gal. 3:24).

God is in the process of progressively restoring the whole creation to Himself (Col. 1:20). This is being accomplished through a series of dispensations. God started His redemptive process with one man, Abraham, from among the whole fallen human race. From this man God established a “seed,” a holy nation. This nation was taught the things of God through the symbolism of the sacrificial system, from direct teaching, and from a long history of interaction with Jehovah. When Jesus came, He called out of Israel His elect remnant. What about the rest of the nations? God used His Apostles to begin the process of calling remnants from among the Gentile nations as well. Once there is a remnant from EVERY nation and ethnic group capable or reigning with and for Christ over their respective peoples (Rev. 5:9-10), He will return to establish His political Kingdom on earth (Matt. 24:14). Then, the remainder of Israel and the nations will be taught *“the knowledge of the Lord”* using the same kind of teaching aids of the *“schoolmaster”* to bring the rest of the nations to God.

Frost concludes by saying; *“I am charging that Warner cannot maintain consistency here without somehow finding a loophole that damages his entire Dispensational paradigm and hermeneutic.”* I believe I have been totally consistent with the Progressive Dispensational paradigm, as well as my professed hermeneutic. The problem with Frost’s presentation is he is arguing against the wrong paradigm — traditional dispensationalism — and he is using the faulty presuppositions articulated above.