

Will Israel Build a Temple in Jerusalem?

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One of the important results of the six-day war of June, 1967, when Israel conquered Jerusalem, was the revival of the question whether Israel would rebuild a temple on the traditional temple site in Jerusalem. Orthodox Jews for many years have been praying daily for the rebuilding of the temple. In this expectation, they have had the support of premillenarians who interpret Scriptural prophecies as meaning what they say when they refer to a future temple in Jerusalem. The world as a whole, as well as the majority of the church, have tended to ignore this expectation as being too literal an interpretation of prophecy. Often this disinterest was based on the fact that Israel was not in position to accomplish such an objective, and disbelief about rebuilding the temple stemmed from disbelief concerning any future for Israel as a nation.

The majority of the church for the last several generations has followed amillennial interpretation, which either spiritualizes promises concerning the nation Israel and its possession of their land and city or has considered these promises forfeited by unbelief. According to amillenarians, Israel would never return to their ancient land, never restore the kingdom of Israel, and never rebuild the temple.

The stirring events of the twentieth century have caused many of them to rethink this question, for the facts of history have supported the orthodox Jewish hope as well as the expectation of premillennial Christians. Now the fact that Israel has greatly extended the territory under its control and has for the first time in many centuries possessed the ancient city of Jerusalem has renewed the question concerning the rebuilding of the temple.

Rumors are rife that plans are already well advanced for rebuilding such a temple. An article appearing in *The Christian and Christianity Today* reports news “received from authoritative sources in Sellersburg, Indiana” to the effect that 500 railroad carloads of stone from Bedford, Indiana, are already en route to Israel and that a portion of it has arrived in Israel. Included in the report is the information that the two bronze pillars for the new temple have already been cast. Although the Israeli government flatly denies the entire story and the authority for it is vague, the rumor highlights current interest in the question concerning the rebuilding of the temple. The Limestone Institute of America has been unable to find any confirmation of such an order, and Israel’s ambassador states that if a temple is built native stone would be used.

Two radically different groups in Israel are in favor of building the temple. The one consists of extreme nationalists who regard it as a symbol of Israeli victory and the center of religious culture. The other is the relatively small group of orthodox Jews who are motivated principally by religious concepts. The main body of Jews throughout the world have not committed themselves definitely to the project. It would seem, however, a natural result of the revival of Israel both as a nation and as a religious entity that ultimately such a temple should be built. This is supported by the long history of the temple as the heart of Israel both as a nation and as a religious group.

History of Previous Temples

The first Temple which served the people of Israel was that built by Solomon, the details of which are given in 1 Kings 5:1—6:38 ; 7:13—51 ; 2 Chronicles 2:1—4:22 . The plans for the

Temple were revealed by God in detail, and construction included lavish use of precious metals, making it one of the most costly structures in the ancient world. The dedication of the Temple was likewise an elaborate procedure (1 Kings 8:1–66; 2 Chron 5:1—7:11). The Temple served as the center of Israel’s religious life for four hundred years, until it was finally destroyed in 586 B.C.

For seventy years the Temple lay desolate. The pilgrims returning under Zerubbabel beginning in 541 B.C. began the process of the restoration of Israel in the land. Soon after arrival they laid the foundation for a new Temple. This early attempt to build the Temple was stopped approximately 535 B.C. Construction was not renewed until 520 B.C. when Darius gave authority for resumption of the building (Ezra 6:1–12). Finally in 516 B.C., the Temple of Zerubbabel was completed with mingled joy and sorrow, joy for the restoration of the Temple, but sorrow because the new Temple fell far short of the grandeur of Solomon’s Temple which had been destroyed. According to the dimensions given in Ezra 6:3–4, the new Temple was about one-third larger than Solomon’s Temple, but lacking its magnificence. The Talmud mentions five things lacking in Zerubbabel’s Temple that were found in Solomon’s, that is, the ark, the sacred fire, the shekinah glory, the Holy Spirit, and the Urim and Thummim. Instead of the ark a stone was placed in the holy of holies.

This Temple served Israel also for about four hundred years when its rebuilding was undertaken by Herod in 20 B.C., not long before the birth of Christ. Its building progressed during Christ’s lifetime on earth, and was brought to completion in A.D. 64, only a few years before its destruction in A.D. 70. From that day until this, there have been no Jewish sacrifices and no Jewish temple.

The Larger Question of the Form of Jewish Revival

The answer to the question of whether Israel will rebuild their temple is integral to the larger question of whether the Bible teaches Israel’s restoration as a nation. As previously pointed out, amillenarians tend to deny any restoration to Israel at all and claim that the present activity in the Middle East on the part of the nation Israel has no prophetic or religious significance. Albertus Pieters, for instance, writes: “In conclusion, some will ask what we think of Zionism and of the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine.... No doubt God has His plans for this new development, as for the whole course of affairs in the world, but as students of prophecy it is our task to determine what He has revealed concerning such plans; and whether this new state becomes permanent or not, we are still sure that no such thing is to be found in the scriptures.”

Postmillenarians like Charles Hodge, in answer to the question, “Are the Jews to be restored to their own land?” state: “The idea that the Jews are to be restored to their own land and there constituted a distinct nation in the Christian Church, is inconsistent not only with the distinct assertions of the Scriptures, but also with its plainest and most important doctrines.... The restoration of the Jews to their own land and their continued national individuality, is generally associated with the idea that they are to continue a sort of peerage in the Church of the future, exalted in prerogative and dignity above their fellow believers; and this again is more or less intimately connected with the doctrine that what the Church of the present is to look forward to is the establishment of a kingdom on earth of great worldly splendour and prosperity. For neither of these is there any authority in the didactic portions of the New Testament.”

In contrast to the amillennial and postmillennial denial of a future restoration of Israel to their ancient land, premillenarians have long taught that Israel will be finally regathered in their ancient land to enjoy the kingdom of Christ on earth for a thousand years. This is based on interpreting Scripture in its normal sense in its reference to Israel in the land and to another temple in Jerusalem.

Scriptural Evidence for a Future Temple

The fact that Israel is now in their ancient land organized as a nation, and the impressive recent events which have put the city of Jerusalem itself into the hands of Israel, have to a large extent revealed the premises and conclusions of both

the amillenarians and postmillenarians to be in error. To claim that this supports the entire premillennial interpretation may be presumptive, but it certainly gives added force to the normal interpretation of Scripture in predicting such a situation. A number of important Scriptures may be cited in support of the concept of a future rebuilding of the temple.

Matthew 24:1–2, 15. One of the most important prophecies relative to a future temple is found in the Olivet Discourse. In the introduction to Christ's prophecy concerning the end of the age, He predicted concerning the great Temple being built by Herod: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." This prophecy was strikingly fulfilled in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. The Temple indeed was left with not one stone standing upon another. The wailing wall still standing in Jerusalem may have been part of the extreme western outer wall which was not a part of the Temple itself. Later in the seventh century, the Mosque of Omar was built by Caliph Omar supposedly on the precise site of the Temple which presumes its complete destruction.

In Matthew 24:15, however, as an immediate sign of the second advent of Christ, the prediction is made that those living in that generation will "see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)." This prediction obviously could not refer to A.D. 70 as it is an event immediately preceding the second advent of Christ described, in Matthew 24:27–31. The prediction, however, gives us the clue concerning the future Temple.

The abomination of desolation has reference to a future event paralleling to some extent "the abomination that maketh desolate" of Daniel 11:31 fulfilled in the desolation of the Temple in the second century B.C. by Antiochus Epiphanes which sparked the Maccabean revolt.

The future abomination of desolation is mentioned in Daniel 9:27 where, according to premillennial interpretation, "the prince that shall come" (Dan 9:26) will break his covenant of seven years in the middle and "he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate." The act of desolation is confirmed in Daniel 12:11 where it is stated: "And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days." If the usual premillennial interpretation is correct, this act of desecration of the sacrifice will take place approximately three and one-half years before the second advent.

This interpretation obviously presents some difficult problems including the question as to whether orthodox Jews will renew the Mosaic sacrificial system. Judging by Scriptures, this is precisely what they will do as it would be impossible to cause sacrifices to cease if they were not already in operation. The usual method of dismissing this as something which occurred in A.D.

70 does not provide a reasonable explanation of the text nor account for the fact that the second coming of Christ occurs immediately thereafter.

The question of renewal of sacrifices in this period prior to the second advent should not be confused with another eschatological problem, that of sacrifices in the millennium which are related to prophecies of Ezekiel's temple (cf. Ezek 40—48). The Jews who offer the sacrifices which are forcibly stopped are orthodox Jews, not Christians, and there is no real relationship between the problem of Ezekiel's temple and the sacrificial system predicted with that of the temple and its desecration described by Christ. The implication is clearly in favor of a temple prior to the second advent which is different in structure and function than Ezekiel's temple.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–4. Additional confirmation of this concept of a temple in the period preceding the second advent is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4. In this passage prediction is made that the future man of sin “who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped” assumes the role of deity, “so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4). Using this passage as an interpretation of the prediction of Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15, it may be concluded that following the desecration of the Jewish temple and its sacrifices the future man of sin identified by many as “the prince that shall

come” (Dan 9:26) will become an object of worship. A later phase of this is that he is replaced by an idol or image of himself, according to Revelation 13:14–15. The passage does not say precisely, however, that the image is in the temple, but this would be a reasonable location.

Problems of Fulfillment

Problems incident to rebuilding the temple are considered in an illuminating essay by Daniel Fuchs. The contemporary difficulties in the way of rebuilding such a temple are tremendous. The Mosque of Omar now occupies the site which many believe was the location of the holy of holies of Solomon's temple. This magnificent mosque recently completely rebuilt at an expense of many millions of dollars could not be razed without precipitating a major war. This is commonly recognized by most Jews, and only extreme nationalists have dared to suggest that the Temple should be built upon this site. When Col. Chlomo Goren held a religious service in the present mosque area in August, 1967, he was almost universally condemned by the Israeli press. Orthodox Jews considered this area off limits as desecrated by Gentiles and fear lest they should walk upon the holy ground unwittingly.

In addition to political problems, real difficulties face any attempt to restore a Mosaic system of sacrifices in a temple. In addition to the Scriptures themselves, the Jewish Mishna contains many laws and specifications which orthodox Jews would consider necessary. Orthodox Jews tend to believe that the temple will not be built until the Messiah returns and hence oppose a temple being rebuilt now. Such a temple would also involve animal sacrifices to which the majority of Israel are now opposed.

In attempting to solve these problems, one is reminded of all the insuperable difficulties which lay in the way of Israel's return to their ancient land. History has recorded that Israel did return in spite of the difficulties. It is safe to conclude that future history will also record a rebuilding of the temple. Such a rebuilding could take place before the rapture of the church but not necessarily. The temple could be built anytime in the period after the rapture but prior to the desecration

of the temple, which will occur three and one-half years before the second coming of Christ to the earth.

Summary of Predictions

On the basis of Matthew 24:15 with supporting Scriptures from Daniel, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 13, it may be concluded that Scriptures anticipate a future temple with a sacrificial system which will be under way at the time “the prince that shall come” exercises his authority, desecrates the temple, and establishes himself as the object of worship.

If such a temple is to be built, it is reasonable to assume that it will be built in Jerusalem as no other site would be acceptable for a temple built in fulfillment of the Mosaic system. One of the remarkable features of the recent history of Israel is that the stage is set precisely for such a move, and if so, the end of the age may be very near.