

How Many Temples Are Too Many?

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Dispensational premillennialists need a future “tribulation temple” so their idea of antichrist can take his seat (2 Thessalonians 2:4), place a statue for people to worship (Revelation 13:14-15), and proclaim himself to be god (2 Thessalonians 2:4). But what the dispensationalists really need is a verse that states that there will be another rebuilt temple since there’s already been one.

Rebuilt-temple advocates Tommy Ice and Randall Price admit that *“There are no Bible verses that say, ‘There is going to be a third temple.’”* [1] Having made this revealing concession, they go on to claim *“that there will be a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem at least by the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation period.”* [2] As we will see, the Bible says no such thing.

How We Interpret Prophecy

Does the Bible predict that a third temple will be built, one following Solomon’s temple and the post-exile temple that was still standing in Jesus’ day? Don Stewart and Chuck Missler insist that the *“The crucial issue boils down to how we interpret prophecy. There are two basic ways to interpret Bible prophecy. Either you understand it literally or you do not. If a person rejects the literal interpretation then they [sic] are left to their own imagination as to what the Scripture means. . . We believe it makes sense to understand the Scriptures as literally requiring the eventual construction and desecration of a Third Temple.”* [3] The authors are careful to say only that another rebuilt temple is required. A third temple is required only if you’re a dispensationalist.

Jesus’ completed redemptive work makes the need for a rebuilt temple unnecessary. His ministry begins with the declaration that *He is our tabernacle (John 1:14), “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29), “the temple” (John 2:19-21), and the “chief cornerstone” (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20).*

By extension, believers are *“as living stones...being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:5). Those “in Christ” are the true temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21; Revelation 21:22). Jesus and the people of God are the focus of the only temple that has any redemptive significance. To be “in Christ” is to be in the temple and all it stood for, *“the renewed center and focus for the people of God”* [4] (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Galatians 3:14, 28; 5:6).

The New Testament references to the temple of stone only refer to its destruction (Matthew 24:1-2) never its reconstruction. It is highly significant that *“Jesus never gives any hint that there will be a physical replacement for this Temple. There is no suggestion, either in the Apocalyptic Discourse or else Revelation where, that this destruction will be but a preliminary stage in some glorious ‘restoration’ of the Temple.”* [5]

A Shadow of Things to Come

The original temple was a shadow of things to come. It was designed to be a temporary edifice looking forward to the completed work of Jesus Christ. For dispensationalists to insist that another temple is needed to complete some type of covenantal obligation with the Jews goes against the

entire New Testament and makes the *"first covenant . . . faultless,"* with *"no occasion sought for a second"* (Hebrews 8:7). Let the Bible settle the issue:

Now the main point in what has been said is this we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises (Hebrews 8:1-6).

The writer of Hebrews declares that Jesus entered *"through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation"* (9:11). Since Jesus completed His redemptive work, any new temple "made with hands" is not much different from a pagan temple that has no inherent life or redemptive value (cf. Acts 17:24; 19:26; 2 Corinthians 5:1).

"The description of the Jerusalem Temple as 'made with hands' . . . is a strong means of playing down its significance. This had been a way of belittling the pagan idols (e.g. Psalm 115:4; cf. Isaiah 46:6); to describe the Temple in such a fashion was potentially incendiary." [6] This is because *"the author of Hebrews believed the Jerusalem Temple was but a 'shadow' of the reality now found in Christ (8:5)."* [7] The "new covenant" had made the "old covenant" obsolete (8:13).

No Third Temple Mentioned

Stewart and Missler have made it very simple for us to determine whether the Bible addresses the issue of a rebuilt temple. If the Bible is interpreted literally, the need for a third temple should be explicitly stated. What biblical evidence do they offer to support their claim that *"the Bible, in both testaments, speaks of a Temple that has yet to appear"?* [8] From the Old Testament they use Daniel 9:27; 11:31, and 12:11 for support. Ice and Price can only find only one verse for support - Daniel 9:27.

Since Daniel was written after Solomon's temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-9; Daniel 1:1-2) and before the second temple had been built by the returning exiles (Ezra 6:13-15), it stands to reason that the *"sanctuary"* whose *"end will come with a flood"* (Daniel 9:26) must refer to the second temple that had not been built at the time the prophecy was given. It was this post-exile rebuilt temple that was desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes around 170 B.C. but not destroyed.

After a period of misuse and disuse, Herod the Great restored and enlarged this second temple, a project that started around 20 B.C. and was completed just a few years before it was destroyed in A.D. 70. It was this same temple that Zacharias served in (Luke 1:9), that Jesus was taken to as an infant (2:27), that had been under construction for forty-six years when Jesus prophesied that He would be its permanent replacement (John 2:20), that Jesus cleansed of the money changers (Matthew 21:12), that He predicted would be left desolate (Matthew 23:38; 24:2), whose veil was *"torn in two from top to bottom"* (Matthew 27:51), and that was finally destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70.

Is there any indication in the three passages from Daniel that we are to skip over what we know was a rebuilt temple, the very temple that was standing in Jesus' day, and look for another unmentioned third temple? Would Jews living in the first century have made the historical leap over the temple that was standing before them and suppose Jesus was describing yet another temple?

As Ice and Price admit, the Bible does not say anything directly about **another** temple. The passages from Daniel cited by Stewart and Missler and Ice and Price can easily find their fulfillment in the rebuilt temple that was standing during the reign of Antiochus (Daniel 11:31; 12:11) and the second temple's destruction in A.D. 70 (9:27). In fact, Ice and Price find the fulfillment of Daniel 11:31 in the sacrilegious acts of Antiochus:

The abomination of desolation was something that took place the first time through Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. when he stopped the sacrifices and desecrated the second Temple by sacrificing an unclean pig on the altar and setting up in its place a statue of Jupiter. This literally fulfilled Daniel 11:31. Therefore, these future events will be similar in kind to the prototypes – they will be real, historical events in a last days' Temple. [9]

Daniel only mentions one sanctuary (8:11, 13; 26; 9:17, 26; 11:31; cf. 12:11). What indication does the reader have that two temples are in view? The temple that Jesus said would be torn down and dismantled stone by stone was the "last days' Temple," the only one mentioned by Daniel. We know that the last days were a first-century reality, not the prelude to the period of time just before a pre-tribulational rapture: *"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world"* (Heb. 1:1-2; cf. Acts 2:17; James 5:3).

Now we are left with Daniel 9:27 as the only verse from the Old Testament that Ice and Price contend supports the need for a third temple. But there is a problem with their reasoning. They argue that *"the city and sanctuary"* in Daniel 9:26 refers to Herod's temple that was destroyed when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70 (Luke 21:6): *"Jesus, seeing Himself as the Messiah, therefore saw the Romans as the people. . . who will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Knowing that He would soon be cut off (crucified), He likewise knew that the Temple's destruction would soon occur."* [10]

In the span of two verses, these authors find two temples, one in Daniel 9:26 and another one in Daniel 9:27, separated by 2000 years. As a careful reader will note, the "sanctuary" (temple) that appears in Daniel 9:26 does not appear in 9:27. This means that Daniel 9:27 is describing events related to the already mentioned sanctuary of 9:26 which Ice and Price say refers to the temple that was standing in Jesus' day.

For Ice and Price to find another rebuilt temple, Daniel 9:27 would have to say something like this: "After an unspecified period of time, he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering in the third sanctuary; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction of the third sanctuary, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." Of course, not one word of this is found in Daniel 9:27. [11]

What Does the New Testament Say?

Since, as we have seen, the Old Testament says nothing about a third temple, maybe the New Testament says something about it. Stewart and Missler and Ice and Price claim to have incontrovertible biblical evidence for a rebuilt temple in three New Testament passages: Matthew 24:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, and Revelation 11:1-2.

On Matthew 24:15, Stewart and Missler write: *"Jesus spoke of this prophecy being still future to His time (Matthew 24:15)."* [12] This is true. But the rebuilt temple was still standing when Jesus said that *"the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet"* would stand "in the holy place."

Notice the audience context: *“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet”* (Matthew 24:15). When **who** sees it? When **“you** see it,” that is, when those in Jesus’ audience see it. Ice and Price never explain the audience reference “you.” If Jesus had a distant future audience in view, He would have said “when they see the abomination of desolation.”

“Here’s their interpretation of Matthew 24:15: *“‘The holy place’ is a reference to the most sacred room within Israel’s Temple. What temple? The third Temple, since it is a future event.”* [13] There is no mention of a future rebuilt temple or even an implied reference. Jesus does not say, “When **they** see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the rebuilt holy place.” The holy place, the sanctuary, was right before their eyes (Matthew 24:1-2).

Ice and Price argue that *“the apostle Paul gives us perhaps the clearest passage relating to the third Temple in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.”* [14] Since Paul wrote before the rebuilt temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, what is it in these verses that tell us that the temple in which the *“man of lawlessness”* takes his seat is “the third temple”? Paul does not describe “the temple” (lit., sanctuary) as a rebuilt temple.

What would have led his audience to conclude that he was referring to, using Ice and Price’s words, *“the future third Temple,”* when the temple was still standing in Jerusalem when he wrote his letter? The *“man of lawlessness”* was being restrained “now,” in their day (2:6,7), and the Christians at Thessalonica knew the identity of the restrainer (2:6).[15]

Third-temple advocates try to muster support for their position by referencing Revelation 11:1-2. They begin by assuming that Revelation was written nearly three decades after the temple was destroyed. [16] From this unproven assumption, they conclude that John must be measuring a rebuilt temple. The passage says nothing about a rebuilt temple.

The words *“shortly”* and *“near”* (Revelation 1:1, 3) are used to describe the time when the events outlined in Revelation were to take place. These words are meaningless if the events have not taken place. The fact that John is told to *“rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it”* (11:1), is *prima facie* evidence that the temple was still standing when John received the revelation. How could John have measured a temple that did not exist in his day?

Ice and Price insist that the temple that John is told to measure is the literal temple, not a “spiritual temple.” *“For example, in Matthew 24 Jesus is speaking about a literal Temple, since in the context of the passage he is standing and looking directly at the second Temple.”* [17] Following Ice and Price’s argument, how could the temple John was told to measure be a literal temple if it hadn’t been built yet? On the contrary, John was told to measure the literal Temple that still had worshipers in it, the same temple that Jesus stood in and Titus destroyed in A.D. 70.

Conclusion

The burden of proof is on rebuilt-temple advocates to come up with just one verse that unequivocally states that there will be a rebuilt temple. Since they admit that *“There are no Bible verses that say, ‘There is going to be a third temple,’”* we must conclude that dispensationalism’s preoccupation with a rebuilt temple is misguided.

Notes

1. Thomas Ice and Randall Price, **Ready to Rebuild: The Imminent Plan to Rebuild the Last Days Temple** (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 197-198.
2. Ice and Price, **Ready to Rebuild**, 198.

3. Don Stewart and Chuck Missler, **The Coming Temple: Center Stage for the Final Countdown** (Orange, CA: Dart Press, 1991), 193.
4. TimothyJ. Geddert, **Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology** (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1989). Quoted in Peter W L. Walker, **Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 9.
5. Walker, **Jesus and the Holy City**, 8.
6. Walker, **Jesus and the Holy City**, 10.
7. Walker, **Jesus and the Holy City**, 208.
8. Stewart and Missler, **The Coming Temple**, 194.
9. Ice and Price, **Ready to Rebuild**, 200-201. Emphasis added.
10. Ice and Price, **Ready to Rebuild**, 68.
11. For an exposition of Daniel 9:24-27, see Gary DeMar, **Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church**, 4th ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), chap. 25.
12. Stewart and Missler, **The Coming Temple**, 194.
13. Stewart and Missler, **The Coming Temple**, 199.
14. Ice and Price, **Ready to Rebuild**, 199.
15. For a verse-by-verse exposition of 2 Thessalonians 2, see DeMar, **Last Days Madness**, chaps.22 and 23.
16. For a defense of a pre-A.D. 70 date of composition for Revelation, see Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, **Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation**, 2nd ed. (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999).
17. Ice and Price, **Ready to Rebuild**, 200.