

Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12

“Sabbath Sacrifices in the Messianic Temple”

“Thus says the Lord God, “The gate of the inner court facing east shall be shut the six working days; but it shall be opened on the sabbath day and opened on the day of the new moon. The prince shall enter by way of the porch of the gate from outside and stand by the post of the gate. Then the priests shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate and then go out; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening. The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the LORD on the sabbaths and on the new moons. The burnt offering which the prince shall offer to the LORD on the sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish...When the prince provides a freewill offering, a burnt offering, or peace offerings as a freewill offering to the LORD, the gate facing east shall be opened for him. And he shall provide his burnt offering and his peace offerings as he does on the sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and the gate shall be shut after he goes out.”

Similar to Ezekiel 45:17 preceding, a scene of the future Millennial Temple is in view, with the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* a notable feature of the worship and sacrifice which will be taking place. Unlike what has been stated previously in 45:17, though, the sacrifices detailed in Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12 are not claimed to be involved with any kind of sin or sin-remembrance.

The Sabbath is going to be a major highlight of the Temple worship and activities during the future Millennium: “This is what *Adonai ELOHIM* says: “The east gate of the inner courtyard is to be shut on the six working days, but on *Shabbat* it is to be opened, and on *Rosh-Hodesh* it is to be opened” (46:1, CJB). The prince or *nasi* (נָסִי), who will play an important role overseeing and administrating the Temple complex and its functions, is noted to be the first one who will make sacrifices to the Lord during this future time:

“The prince shall enter by way of the vestibule outside the gate, and shall attend at the gatepost while the priests sacrifice his burnt offering and his offering of well-being; he shall then bow low at the threshold of the gate and depart. The gate, however, shall not be closed until evening” (46:2, NJPS).

Of course, the worship and sacrifices involve many more participants:

“The people of the land are also to prostrate themselves in worship before *ADONAI* at the entrance to that gate on *Shabbat* and on *Rosh-Hodesh*” (46:3, CJB).

Almost all Bibles render the Hebrew *am-ha'eretz* (עַם־הָאֶרֶץ) as “people of the land,” although the NJPS actually has “common people.” It is frequently taken to be the general population of the Land of Israel, perhaps given a prior usage in Ezekiel 7:27: “The king will mourn, the prince will be clothed with horror, and the hands of the people of the land will tremble. According to their conduct I will deal with them, and by their judgments I will judge them. And they will know that I am the LORD.” In his commentary on Ezekiel, S. Fish actually does reference Isaiah 66:23 for “*the sabbaths and in the new moons*,”¹ which speaks to the worldwide Sabbath observance to be anticipated (discussed previously). In the estimation of Daniel I. Block, “the expression *people of the land* (*‘am hā’āreṣ*) denotes more than simply the residents of the territory. These are citizens, members of the cultic community...at worship.”² With the futuristic scene of Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12 in view, it indeed sits within the realm of semantic possibilities to view *am-ha'eretz* as “people of the Earth,” and not exclusively the Land of Israel.³

The specific sacrifices to be offered on the Sabbath are noted in 46:4 to be, “six unblemished sheep and an unblemished ram” (ATS). This is notably a larger quantity than that stated for Sabbath offerings in Numbers 28:9-10:

¹ Fisch, 46.

² Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 671.

³ The two main meanings for the Hebrew *eretz* (אֶרֶץ) are “*earth*, whole earth (opp. to a part)” and “*country*, territory...specif. *land of Canaan*, or *Israel*” (*BDB*, 75).

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"Then on the sabbath day two male lambs one year old without defect, and two-tenths of an *ephah* of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and its drink offering: *This is the burnt offering of every sabbath in addition to the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.*"

Some have read the different quantity to be offered in Ezekiel 46:4 as a direct contradiction with what was originally specified in the Torah. Others, however, and we should think rightly, recognize that what is stated in Ezekiel is reflective of a new, futuristic era. Some might even label this to be a kind of "Ezekielian Torah." John Goldingay is probably right to indicate, "A...feature of these regulations is an increase in the dimensions of the sabbath sacrifices, marking increased enthusiasm for the sabbath from Ezekiel's day."⁴

That observance of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is witnessed in the prophecy of Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12, has not gone unnoticed by various Christian examiners. Many of them, as is easily seen, are at a significant loss as to explain this—mainly because historical Christianity has widely dismissed with the institution of the seventh-day Sabbath for sure, and various theological traditions are also very pessimistic toward Sunday or the first day of the week being treated as any kind of "Sabbath" either. Frequently, dispensational examiners who believe that God has two groups of elect, Israel and "the Church"—and hence God has two paralleling programs in history⁵—view the observance of the Sabbath in the future Millennium as something that entirely concerns ethnic Israelites and Jewish people, and not God's people generally. Lamar Eugene Cooper's remarks in his Ezekiel commentary are reflective of this:

"Sabbath observance in the millennial temple allowed the fulfillment of the typology of the Mosaic covenant foreshadowing Jesus the Messiah, our Sabbath rest...In the Old Testament believers looked forward to the coming Messiah. In the church age believers serve the resurrected Messiah. In the millennial kingdom Israel will observe the elements of their covenant in celebration of the salvation of Messiah in retrospect of his work."⁶

Even more significant dispensational presuppositions are present in the thoughts of Messianic Jewish theologian Charles L. Feinberg, in his commentary *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*. While Feinberg appreciably recognizes that the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is not an institution to be left in the dust of Old Testament history, he not only presses how such an institution is only for Israel proper, but also how the Tanach or Old Testament is apparently not something which concerns non-Jewish Believers too much. Feinberg's adherence to the pre-tribulation rapture⁷ should also not go unnoticed as well:

"The emphasis here is unmistakably on the Sabbath and the new moon, which alone should indicate the Jewish setting of the passage, and that we are not here on Christian or New Testament ground...In short, the Sabbath of the Old Testament will be reinstated for a restored and consecrated Israel. The Sabbath will be in force as soon as the church is translated because the end of Daniel's seventy weeks will occur on Jewish ground (Matt. 24:20). Then the Sabbath will continue on into Messiah's reign, for this is the consummation and culmination of Israel's, not the church's, history."⁸

Some further questions and inquiries about the relevance of the seventh-day Sabbath are detected in the observations of Ralph P. Alexander, who is likewise apparently committed to an Israel-Church dichotomy:

"The Sabbath and the observance of the new moon would be part of the worship ritual during the Millennium. It may seem incongruous that the Sabbath, the sign of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Exod 31:13, 16-17), would be observed in the millennial kingdom when it is not observed during the church age under the new covenant. Is this a retrogression in God's purposes? Not if it is

⁴ Goldingay, in *ECB*, 663.

⁵ Consult the relevant sections of *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* by J.K. McKee.

⁶ Cooper, pp 402, 403.

⁷ Consult *The Dangers of Pre-Tribulationism* by J.K. McKee.

⁸ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, 267.

understood that all God's covenants would be fulfilled and operating in the messianic kingdom (cf. 37:15-28). The Mosaic covenant would find its fruition in the messianic kingdom in that Israel finally would be God's people and he would be their God in a relationship that was to exist under the Mosaic covenant...The Mosaic covenant showed Israel how to live a holy life in a relationship with God, and that type of life is still valid under the new covenant (cf. Jer 31:33-34; Rom 8:4)."⁹

What too often eludes Christian examiners, is how the New Covenant—decisively made with Israel proper, but surely open for those from the nations grafted-in to Israel's olive tree (cf. Romans 11:16-17)—involves the forgiveness of sins for sure, but also the supernatural transcription of God's Torah onto a redeemed heart and mind (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). *This would include a knowledge and appreciation of the institution of the Sabbath.* A future Sabbath keeping to be anticipated in the Millennium, not just by Israel proper—but the whole world (Isaiah 66:23)—is hardly to be viewed as some kind of "retrogression." **On the contrary, such a Sabbath keeping is to be viewed as a grand and glorious blessing of God, toward which salvation history steadily moves** (cf. Hebrews 4:9).

Unfortunately, Christian examiners—especially dispensationalists—tend to be locked to traditional interpretations of Romans 14; Galatians 4:8-11; and Colossians 2:16-23 (discussed further), and believe that the Second Century dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath for sure, by much of emerging Christianity, was a good thing *when it really was not*.¹⁰ Moving beyond this, and embracing an ecclesiology of an enlarged Kingdom realm of Israel (cf. Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:15-18),¹¹ will prove highly useful for today's Messianic movement of the future—and the significant things which the Lord has in store for us as we anticipate the arrival of what Ezekiel 46:1-4, 12 anticipates!

⁹ Alexander, in *EXP*, 6:986.

¹⁰ Consult the previous discussions in Chapter 4, "How Did We Lose the Sabbath?"

¹¹ Consult the publication *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* by J.K. McKee.