Sacred Ground, Modern Myths:
Is Israel Really Rebuilding the Third Temple?

By
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With the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, there is a persistent claim that Israel is using the conflict as a means to rebuild the Third Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Certain commentators, notably Tucker Carlson and Candace Owens, have doggedly pushed this idea, even circulating pictures of Israeli Defense Forces soldiers with Temple patches on their shoulders as proof. Conversely, others have pointed out that Orthodox Jewish groups and conservative Evangelical Christians are providing the patches, not the Israeli government. And they are doing it, some claim, hoping that the Middle East turmoil will result in the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, thus paving the way for the rebuilding of the Third Temple and, in the case of the Christians, the return of Jesus Christ.

But is this true? To answer this, consider the following history of the first two Temples.

The site of the First Temple, often called Solomon's Temple, was revealed to King David during a deadly plague in 1 Chronicles, chapters 21 and 22. God had smitten Israel with a plague due to David's sin in numbering the people against God's command. When the plague was halted, David was commanded to offer sacrifices to God on Ornan's threshing floor on Mount Moriah while the angel of the LORD stood by with a drawn sword. Jewish tradition holds this site sacred long before David declared in 1 Chronicles 22:1, "This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel." It is believed that Mount Moriah is the location where God met with Jacob when he dreamed in Genesis 28:12 of "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" while fleeing to Haran to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. Additionally, it is believed that it is where Abraham took his promised son Isaac when challenged by God to offer him up as a living sacrifice, only to be stopped by God and divinely provided with a ram as a substitute in Genesis 22:1-19. It is even held by some to be the location where God initially formed Adam from the dust of the ground in Genesis 2:7. David's son, Solomon, completed the First Temple. It stood for 371 years before being destroyed by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar on the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av.

The Second Temple had its beginning when King Cyrus of Persia decreed in Ezra 1:2-3:

> *[2]Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. [3]Who is*

there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua, according to Ezra 3:1-2, uncovered the foundations of the original Altar of Burnt Offering from Solomon's Temple, built a new altar on the original altar's bases and began offering daily sacrifices once more on the Temple Mount. Then, in the second year of their return, Ezra 3:10-11 records:

[10]And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. [11]And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

The Second Temple was completed during the reign of Darius, King of Persia, exactly 70 years after the First Temple had been destroyed. Built under adverse conditions, it was later desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid King, when he sacrificed a pig on the altar and erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple. That sparked the Maccabean Revolt, a Jewish uprising led by Mattathias Maccabee and his son, Judah. Three years later, the Maccabees defeated the Seleucid forces, recaptured Jerusalem, cleansed the sanctuary, and rededicated the Second Temple during a miraculous event still celebrated by Jews today as Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights.

The Romans captured Judea in 63 BC and under their rule King Herod the Great began an extensive renovation and expansion of the Second Temple. He even doubled the size of the Temple Mount complex, expanding it to roughly 36 acres by constructing massive retaining walls, of which the famous Western Wall is a surviving remnant. It was in this expanded Temple complex that the Baby Jesus was presented before the Lord in Luke 2:22 and the 12-year-old Jesus stayed behind to converse with the doctors in Luke 2:46. It is this same Temple complex that the man Christ Jesus visited several times to teach and preach during His earthly ministry and where He overturned the tables of the money changers and drove out those whom He said had turned His Father's House into a "den of thieves." This is also the same Temple complex that Peter and John, and later Paul, preached about the risen Jesus, much to the chagrin of the Jewish leaders.

The Second Temple stood until it was destroyed by the Romans on August 2 in 70 AD, on Tisha B'Av, the 9th day of the Jewish month of Av, the same day as the destruction of the First Temple some 657 years earlier. The Romans commemorated the destruction of the Second Temple and their victory in the Jewish Wars with the dedication of the Arch of Titus in 81 AD. Prominent on the Arch are depictions of Temple treasures, including the Menorah and Table of Showbread, being carried off by the victorious Roman soldiers.

Both Christians and Jews have various views regarding a third temple. Some believe it will be rebuilt while others believe there is no need for physical building to be rebuilt because it already exists, albeit symbolically, today.

Among Christians who believe there is no need for a physical building to be rebuilt on the Temple Mount there is a belief that the Bible's prophecies regarding the Temple have already been fulfilled. The desecration of the Temple spoken of in Daniel 9:27 was partially fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC and completed by Titus when he destroyed the Temple in 70 AD. They argue that the Temple of God is

here now, manifested by the Church and by the individual believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, based on Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 3:16:

> *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

Because these Christians reject the need for a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, they take an allegorical approach to 2 Thessalonians 2:4 where Paul says the Antichrist sits "so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." This, they explain, refers to a spirit of apostasy or a false leader usurping authority within the visible Christian Church instead of a building made of stone on the Temple Mount. They also argue that the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ is the Church Age, having begun either after the resurrection of Christ or the destruction of the Second Temple.

Those Christians who hold that there is no need for a Third Temple are prominent among the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, and main-line Protestant churches and it is the majority view among Christians today.

Most of the early Christians held to a more literal interpretation of the Bible prophesies concerning the Jewish Temple. They believed that the desecration of the Second Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes was merely a type or a foreshadowing of what would happen to the Third Temple. Titus, they believed, fulfilled Daniel 9:26 and set the stage for the future fulfillment of verse 27:

> *[26]And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. [27]And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*

Notice the order of these events in Daniel's prophecy. First, Messiah is "cut off, but not for himself;" referring to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Next, the destruction of "the city and the sanctuary" occurs; fulfilled by Titus and the Roman legions when they destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Then comes "the prince" who does three notable things, two of which are dependent on a rebuilt Temple:

1) Confirms a "covenant with many for one week;" which restarts Daniel's 70th week, corresponding to the 7-year Tribulation period and leading up to anointing of "the most Holy" and the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ in Daniel 9:24.
2) Causes the "sacrifice and the oblation to cease" "in the midst of the week;" which necessitates a new Temple replacing the one Titus destroyed so that the Temple sacrifices can be reestablished, otherwise how can they be stopped?
3) Causes "the overspreading of abominations" to "make it desolate, even until the consummation;" which means that when Jesus warned that when you "see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" in Matthew 24:15, He was warning of an event that was going to take place AFTER the Second Temple was destroyed.

This view is known as Chiliasm, or more broadly, premillennialism, and is typically found today among Baptists and Evangelicals. Although they have some variation in their interpretation of some of the details

and timing, they essentially agree that God has a plan for Israel involving the rebuilding of the Temple, a Tribulation period, and a future 1000-year Kingdom of Jesus on this earth.

Among the Jews, we find that the Orthodox deeply hope and pray for a new Temple with the full restoration of animal sacrifices and offerings led by priests descended from Aaron. The Conservatives also hope and pray for a new Temple but as a House of Prayer, believing that animal sacrifice is outdated and no longer needed. The Reformed do not believe in the necessity of a new Temple or the restoration of animal sacrifice. Instead, they believe that local synagogues are the true modern temples and that working to make the world a better place replaces the need for sacrifices.

Does evidence support the claim that Israel or religious groups are actively seeking to use war and turmoil in the Middle East to cause the destruction of the Islamic Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, thus paving the way for the rebuilding of the Third Temple?

In the case of Israel, the Temple patches appearing on some soldiers' uniforms are not official or sanctioned patches, nor are they indicative of Israel planning to rebuild the Temple. Israel's official policy toward the Temple Mount is to preserve the status quo by allowing the Islamic Jordanian Waqf to oversee and maintain the Temple Mount. This has been the case since 1967 when Israel gained control of Jerusalem during the Six-Day War. In fact, Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly issued official statements reaffirming Israel's commitment to upholding the status quo and rejecting any state-sanctioned plan to construct a Third Temple. Furthermore, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, which is the supreme halachic (Jewish law) authority for the Jewish population within the State of Israel, has maintained a strict, historic ruling forbidding Jews from setting foot on the Temple Mount plaza. Since the exact location of the ancient Holy of Holies is unknown, they believe that walking on the site risks accidentally defiling the Holy of Holies.

Orthodox Jews who hope and pray for a new Temple are divided into three main camps. The first camp, consisting of the vast majority of Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and Hasidic Jews, believe that people must not take any physical action to rebuild the Temple. Instead, they believe it will be built by God Himself, possibly descending fully formed from heaven, and God will oversee the direct placement of the Temple, miraculously clearing away any obstacles that may be in the way. Accordingly, they believe that any attempt to build it via political or military means is an offense against God.

The second camp is heavily influenced by the medieval rabbinic philosopher Maimonides. They agree somewhat with the first camp in that everyday humans should not build it. Instead, they look for a specific human leader, the Messiah, who, according to Maimonides, will successfully fight against the enemies of God, regather the Jewish exiles, and rebuild the Temple on its exact site. Until Messiah comes, they believe that any attempt by any state or religious group to lay a cornerstone or attempt construction is both premature and inappropriate.

The third camp is a very vocal minority within the Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox movements. Groups such as The Temple Institute and The Temple Mount Faithful argue that the Jewish people have a proactive commandment to build the Temple as soon as it is physically, politically, and practically possible. They view the commandment "let them make me a sanctuary" (Exodus 25:8) as an active, binding obligation that does not depend on the arrival of the Messiah. They believe that physically preparing vessels, crafting the furnishings, preparing the priestly garments, training priests, obtaining the ashes of the Red Heifer, and beginning the construction of the Third Temple will show God that the Jewish people are serious and He will send the Messiah to sanctify it.

Conservative, evangelical Christian premillennialists have another view. While they do not believe that there is any need for the Third Temple, so far as our salvation is concerned, they do believe it is essential for the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Though often accused of believing that building the Third Temple will hurry the Lord's return, they believe instead that it will be built in God's time either just before or just after the start of the Tribulation so that the Temple sacrifices can be in place to be ended in accordance with Daniel 9:27. They also believe it needs to be in place for the literal fulfillment of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4:

> *[3]Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; [4]Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

This event, they believe, will be at the midpoint of the Tribulation, tying together the statement, "in the midst of the week" (Daniel 9:27) with the institution of the mark of the Beast and the worship of the Beast (Revelation 13:15-18). Therefore, any movement toward building the Third Temple is viewed by these Christians as evidence that we are watching Bible prophecy unfold and that we are in the latter part of the Latter Days.

As mentioned earlier, this anticipatory view of a Third Temple being built on the Temple Mount was the prevailing view among early Christians. The Roman Catholic Church later embraced the amillennial view that had been largely developed by Augustine of Hippo in the 4th/5th century and that view was largely retained by the Protestant Reformers. Although the more literal premillennial position has enjoyed a resurgence during the last two centuries it remains a minority view today. Nevertheless, it is the more Biblically accurate position, requiring the least amount of allegorical twisting of both Scripture and history and appears closer to the beliefs of the early Christians.

Thus, it is essentially only a small vocal minority of Orthodox Jews actually trying to hurry the arrival of the Messiah by rebuilding the Temple. Bible-believing premillennial Christians are not attempting to hurry the Lord's return but are, rather, eagerly anticipating it as we see Bible prophecy fulfilled regarding the building of the Third Temple. Third Temple patches on the uniforms of Israeli soldiers only heightens the anticipation.

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