

God's Permanent Presence with Man: A Biblical Overview of the Temple

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### **Introduction: The Purpose of the Temple**

From the beginning God choose to walk among men in the garden. (Gen. 3:8) Even after men fell into rebellion and sin, God still said: "I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." (Lev. 26:11, 12) God then choose to have a mobile tabernacle, and later a permanent temple made for his dwelling. The New Testament then opens with God coming to dwell among men in a very personal way in Christ. Thus God is very concerned with dwelling with his people and the implications of that. Therefore it will be profitable to take a closer look at some of the ways God has made his presence known among men through time.

All through history, in cultures across the face of the earth, there has been the use of temples and other similar structures as places for men to worship and for there to be some form of connection between god and man. To this day the temple is still central to Israel's worship. Even though they no longer have a temple, they continue to worship in synagogues with the expectation that one day the physical temple will once again be rebuilt. Some have even gone as far as to carve the building blocks for this new temple as they look forward to that day

John Walton explores other religions in the ancient Near East, finding that the role temple worship plays in their societies is very similar to Israel's. Most see the Temple as the center of the Cosmos, as well as the center of the community and the economy, as it is the place where humans go to communicate with or even meet with the gods. Walton then compares the Temple in Jerusalem with the temples of the other nations' gods, and finds that "the difference is in the God, not in the way the Temple relates to the God." (Walton, 127-134). The other temples are built to benefit both the gods and the people, and for the people to directly influence their god.

Instead the God of Israel does not need the people for his existence, nor does he ask for sacrifice to influence his actions on their behalf. The God of Scripture always acts for His own glory, to which the people cannot add. Yet he has decided to also always act for the good of His people, and thus he provided sacrifice so that sinful man can approach his throne on earth without being consumed by his holiness. He also promises to listen and answer the prayers prayed to Him, especially those for the forgiveness of sins.

A key question for Christians today is how we expect God to dwell among us in this day, in the last days, and for all of eternity. To do that we need to more fully examine the past first, and then take into close consideration all that the New Testament authors have to say as they interpret the larger themes of Scripture. This will take a close study of all of God's dwelling with man, and in particular with the temple as critical representation of God's more permanent presence on earth.

### **God's Presence from the Beginning: Worship and Sacrifice Before the Temple**

From the very beginning of the Bible, God has been in a close, personal relationship with His creation, and with man in particular. This relationship has manifested itself in his presence among his people. Genesis 1:2 states that in the beginning "the Spirit of God hovered over the deep", and then God created the heavens and earth and all that is in them. Following creation, God then speaks to man, giving instructions to him, showing that God is not just distant and powerful, but also cares for and communicates with man very personally. Then in Genesis 3:8 Adam and Eve "heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." He was looking for them, desiring to be present with them. Unfortunately they had disobeyed God, and were now under the curse of death. Yet even here God talks with them, and after pronouncing his curses, offers hope for the future, clothes them, and moves them to a new home to start over.

Unlike the gods of other nations, the God of Genesis 1-3 is both all-powerful and personal; he is both holy and just, as well as merciful and gracious.

In Genesis 4 we see man living in the presence of God and beginning to worship God in more deliberate ways as both Cain and Abel build alters to God. We also learn here that God is very particular about what forms of worship are appropriate for His holiness and what is not, as he accepts Abel's sacrifice but rejects Cain's. In addition, we see God actively participating in the world of men as he first warns Cain about the sin waiting at his door, and then as he casts him out for sin, yet promises to watch over him and visit disaster on any who would harm him.

As the story of Genesis advances we see the men of God continuing to offer sacrifices to him, especially offering memorial sacrifices to commemorate the mercy of God on their behalf. God also continues to talk with his people, instructing Noah in the building of the Ark, promising Abraham a son, and making covenants with Abraham and his sons. But God does not just observe the sacrifices from afar or speak from heaven. In the story of Abraham's life we get vivid pictures of God walking and talking with Abraham as they discuss the coming judgment on Sodom, as God walks between the pieces of the sacrifice to confirm his covenant, as the angel of the Lord dines with Abraham to confirm his promise of a son, and as the Lord provides a ram to be sacrificed instead of Isaac. (Gen. 15, 18, 22)

Before leaving Genesis, it is important to note that the presence of God with man is not only seen in what he does with man, but in the very form in which he is worshiped. Beale takes over one hundred pages to show various aspects of early worship that are direct and indirect reflections of the coming temple. While more will be said later, we should observe here that the temple has three major divisions in it, which can also be seen in creation itself. The Outer Court represents the entire visible earth, land and sea being represented by the sea of water and the alter

at the entrance to the temple. The Holy Place represents the visible heavens, replete with garden imagery. The Holy of Holies represents the cosmos where God himself dwells, as it is this part of the Temple that is filled with the cloud of the Lord so not even the high priest can see (Beale, 48). Beale also argues that it was God's goal from the beginning for the center of the garden, where he walks with man, to be expanded outward until it encompasses the whole earth. Thus the entire earth shall become the temple of the Lord, and more specifically all of God's people will walk with him in the Holy of Holies. Thus, from the beginning, alters, tabernacles and temples were meant as temporary signs of a larger reality that was already true in heaven and would one day be true here on earth (Beale, 29-122).

### **God Goes Camping With His People: The Tabernacle as Model for the Temple**

In Exodus, God hears the cries of his people, saves Moses from Pharaoh's hand, and then appears in the burning bush to commission Moses to rescue his people. God then shows his mighty hand as he brings His people out of captivity and to Mount Sinai, where he meets with them in a special way. The meeting of God with Moses and the people at Sinai prefigures the tabernacle to come, demonstrating that God is both imminent and transcendent. He has the people gather at the base of the mountain, Aaron and the elders come part way up the mountain, and Moses alone comes to the top, after which God descends. Yet he descends with a trumpet blast that shakes the mountain and comes in smoke and fire. Later God will go so far as to pass by Moses and allow Moses to look on him, yet he will also hide Moses in the cleft of a rock and only show his back, lest his glory consume Moses. Thus God is clearly present in a very real and personal way, and yet he is still all together separate and holy. (Walke, 447)

In addition to giving Moses the law on Mt. Sinai, God said that he desired to dwell among the people. In Exodus 29:45-46, God says, "I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be

their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” Christopher Wright argues that the very purpose of God’s redemption is to dwell among his people and that this dwelling is to differentiate them from the nations. We see this proved out in the prayer of Moses on behalf of Israel after they build the golden calf and God says that he will either wipe them out or simply guide them, but not dwell among them any longer. In Exodus 33:16, Moses prays, “What else [than the presence of God] will distinguish me and your people from the rest of the nations on the face of the earth?” (Wright, 334-335). Clowney describes God’s situation by saying: “Because of his holiness and the stubborn sin of the people, it was threatening to them for him to be present *among* them in that tent. Instead, in the form of his angel, he would go *before* them and not live among them.” (Clowney, 1995, 32) But Moses saw this for what it was, and cried out to God saying that he would not go from this place if God’s presence was not with them, in their midst. For Moses, God in front of them is not enough. He wants to know and see God personally, and he demands that God either dwell in the midst of the people or not bother to take them up at all. Anything less than a personal relationship with a God in their midst is worthless in Moses’ eyes. The gods of the other nations hold themselves at a distance from their followers, but the true God of the universe would not stand aloof from His people! “Moses, in his prayer of thanksgiving for God’s forgiveness, did not ask that God give Israel their inheritance in the land. He prayed that God take them as his inheritance, the treasure of his love.” (Clowney, 2003, 98-100)

Before the Tabernacle existed, God met Moses at a tent outside the camp. On Mt. Sinai, the Lord met Moses alone on the mountain because the people were afraid. In Ex. 20:19, the people say to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we

die.” “To many suburbanites, that arrangement might seem ideal. They wouldn't like to have God too close – surely not at their office, and perhaps least of all at home. Yet they do not want to lose all touch with God. One never knows when he might be needed. Let God dwell in a church at a convenient distance, with a clergyman as his receptionist.” (Clowney, 2003, 97)

But God was not satisfied to sit up in heaven, distant from his people. Instead he had them build him a tent just like theirs, with an outer and inner chamber (the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies), as well as cooking fire and washbasin outside (the sea and the alter). He then goes camping with them – placing his tent in the midst of their camp, and having them move his tent with them whenever they move. Yet he also isolates the inner and outer chambers, only allowing his priests to enter the outer chamber, and the High Priest the inner once a year. He then stations the Levites around the tent, showing clearly that even as he draws near to his people, he is still holy and can not be approached by the unrighteous. (Kinneer, 1997)

*The Drama of Scripture* describes the purpose of the tabernacle as “God's personal residence among his covenant people.” With nearly one third of Exodus given to descriptions of the tabernacle, it is clear both the tabernacle as a whole and the specific items in it are very important to the life of Israel and to the larger story of God. But God's presence does not just dwell within Israel and travel with them in this portable tent. The tabernacle is meant as an “emblem of the full representation of God's presence in all of creation”. The same glory that shone on Moses' face and filled the tabernacle is actually meant to be seen by, and eventually fill, all the earth. (Bertholomew and Goheen, 71-72)

The innermost chamber of the tabernacle is the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant resides, representing the throne of God on earth. Tremper Longman points out the metals, as well as cloth and other materials used to build the tabernacle, progresses from less

valuable and less beautiful in the outermost portions of the tabernacle to highest value and most intricate beauty on the inner walls of the Holy of Holies. He also notes that the blue color and cherubim in the holy of holies are representative of heaven, showing the link between the God of heaven and his throne here on earth. The tabernacle traveled with the people and was always placed in the center of the camp, yet it was also separated from the rest of the Israelites by the Levites, showing both the presence of God among the people and the holiness that still separates him from the people. Longman also notes that the design of the golden lamp stands makes them look like almond trees, a clear reference back to the alters of the past and the garden of Eden, thus tying the tabernacle into the larger motif of God's ever increasing presence with His people. (Longman, 1998, 91-94)

Many of the early church fathers argued that every aspect of the tabernacle was meant to point us to larger realities. "Irenaeus understands God's word instructing Moses to make everything according to the 'pattern' he saw on the mountain (Exod. 25:40) to mean that everything Moses delivered to the people, except the Decalogue, was to be understood typologically (*Against Heresies* 4.14.3)." (Heine, 68) Walke elaborates, showing that the Tabernacle and the liturgy that is a part of it, have two related purposes. Some of those are symbolic, where earthly items and functions represent realities in heaven. For example, smoke rising represents the prayers of the priests ascending to God's throne. This symbolism is a two-way street, representing both man's relationship to God, and God's relationship with man. For example, the Ark represents God's throne on earth, and the cherubim in the fabric above it represent God's protection of his throne. The priest's ability to eat the bread of the presence could represent God's ongoing care and provision for His people (Walke, 454-455). It is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to discuss all the symbols in the temple and its rituals. These

examples will suffice to show that the symbols show both the people's relation to God and his relationship with his people.

Secondly, the tabernacle is also full of types, which are shadows of things that will be fully realized at a future time. Where symbols point to a parallel reality, types point ahead to realities that will be fully actualized at a time to come. The sacrifices are an example of this as they point ahead to Christ's ultimate sacrifice. This ultimate actualization occurs in two ways, the first being fulfillment, as the things it pictures come to pass in ever increasing form over time. The other is consummation, when the complete reality is seen in the final form it will have for eternity. (Walke, 455-456). For an excellent treatment of the many symbols and types in the tabernacle itself, as well as how the sacrifices and priests fit into the larger picture, see Poythress' *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, especially his categorizing of God's dwellings from the heavenly dwelling through to the individual believer (Poythress, 30-31), and his partial list of connections between the tabernacle and the rest of scripture (Poythress, 96-97).

The story of God's presence does not end in Exodus. Exodus concludes with the glory cloud that was on the mountain settling on the tabernacle, and Leviticus begins with the "I Am" speaking to Moses and giving instructions on how to draw near. (Walke, 451-452) It would not be a stretch to say that all the instructions on the building of the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and even the laws for the people, are all in preparation for God coming to dwell among them, and all the commands of God in the next few books are given to instruct the people in how to live with God in their midst without either being consumed or forcing God to withdraw. Christopher Wright notes further, "The presence of God in the midst of his people was one of the most essential and most precious features of the covenant." Exodus and Leviticus are replete with covenantal themes and symbols that look ahead, but they also full of images

linking back to Genesis and to God's presence in Eden. For example, in Leviticus 26:11-13, "the phrase 'I will walk among them' uses a very rare form of the verb *hālak* (the hithpael), which is also used in Genesis 3:8 to describe God's habit of spending the cool of the day just strolling with Adam and Eve in the garden." (Wright, 334)

### **God's Presence for a Settled People: The Temple in Jerusalem**

The Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle continue to serve as the representations of God's presence on earth and as the center of true worship in Israel as the people enter and settle in the Promised Land. The leaders, people, and even the priest, don't always worship God as they should, to put it mildly, but God continues to dwell among them even in the midst of their frequent indifference and even outright rebellion. Eventually the people ask for a king, and after a false start with Saul, God makes David king. While not perfect, he does prove to be a man after God's own heart, with God blessing him and establishing a stable kingdom under his rule. David desires to build a permanent house for God to replace the Tabernacle, but due to the blood on his hands God does not allow him to build it. Leithart makes the further observation that even when we come to the point of building a permanent temple in the land, we see God is interested in blessing His people first, as he establishes David's kingdom and promises to build an everlasting house for David before allowing a house to be built for his own name (Leithart, 2000, 148). Thus God promises David that his throne will be eternal, and that his son, Solomon, will build a temple for the Lord.

When God's house does get built, it is built of the finest materials, and crafted by thousands of workers, including the best artisans in the land. The temple is far larger than the tabernacle, including an Inner Sanctuary which is 20 cubits to a side, as compared to the 10 cubits of the tabernacle. The temple is designed to be permanent, and so in place of the fancy

curtains that lined the Inner Court of the tabernacle, it is now lined with gold. The house of God gets more glorious and permanent as a picture of all those who believe who will one day put off the tent of our current body for the permanent resurrection bodies (2 Cor 5:1-10) (Leithart, 2006, 55)

Bertholomew and Goheen describe the temple Solomon built as “God’s address” on earth, the place where His name dwells, where God rests his glory and where His presence dwells. The Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple that contains it, and Jerusalem as a whole, now become Mt. Zion, the centre of the cosmos, the central place on earth where man can go to meet with God. And thus the Psalms of Ascent, sung as people journey to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices and meet with God, take on even greater meaning. The people are not simply making symbolic acts in a symbolic temple; they are fulfilling what all of creation was made for as they come to worship in the very presence of God himself! (Bertholomew and Goheen, 96-98)

In describing the Temple, *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* notes:

The temple in its most basic sense symbolizes the dwelling place of God. This is underscored by numerous references to the temple as the “house of God” or the “house of the Lord.” Its other titles include “the sanctuary” or at times simply Zion—as the psalmist emphasizes, “For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation” (Ps 132:13 NRSV; cf. Ps 9:11; 74:2; 76:2; Joel 3:17). In lieu of the carved deity symbolizing the presence of the gods in pagan temples, the architecture and increasingly precious metals encountered as one neared the holy of holies emphasized God’s presence. Indeed, at its dedication the manifestation of his presence proved overwhelming: “a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for

the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:10–11 NRSV; cf. 2 Chron 5:14; 7:1–2; Ezek 43:5; 44:4). The two massive pillars of the forecourt are also symbolic of God’s entrance into his abode (1 Kings 7:15–22; cf. Ezek 43:4)... The temple is an earthly archetype of the heavenly reality, just as Moses constructed the tabernacle after the heavenly pattern revealed to him on Sinai (Ex 25:9, 40). This contrast between the heavenly and the earthly is also underscored in several passages of Hebrews: “They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one” (Heb 8:5 NRSV; cf. Heb 9:1, 24). Specific aspects of God’s heavenly abode are duplicated in the temple. For example, God’s dwelling in a veil of smoke and darkness is replicated in the holy of holies (2 Sam 22:12; Ps 18:11; 97:2; Rev 15:8). (Ryken, et.al., 849)

The dedication of the Temple in I Kings 8 is a prayer. It is the King standing between the people and God, offering praise and making petitions on their behalf. His petition includes praising God for all he has done, and asking God to hear the prayers of the people. He makes a seven-fold petition to God that he would turn his eyes and ears towards the temple and hear the people when they pray towards this temple, and that he would forgive their sins.

Thus we see two mediators in this passage. The first is the king, praying for God to hear the people, and the second is the temple itself standing between the people and their God. Thus the temple becomes a house of prayer, or as Jesus will say later, “a house of prayer for the nations” (Mark 11:17). Both of these mediators, the king and temple, picture Christ who would come one day as the ultimate mediator between God and man! (Leithart, 2006, 69-70). This is also a progression in redemptive history from the tabernacle. In the dedication of the tabernacle

the focus is on the priests offering sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. Here the sacrifice continues, but the focus is now on the people praying to appropriate that forgiveness.

God responds to Solomon's prayers by saying he has heard and that he will indeed incline his ear toward his house. The Lord says: "I have consecrated this house that you have built by putting my name there forever" (I Kings 9:3). "Only God can make a person or place holy. He *put his Name* and reputation *there*" (Wiseman, 124-125). "God's reputation would be bound up with this building; he would own it as his own by placing his name there. God's glory would be revealed there." (Inrig, 40)

Yet Solomon also understands that the temple of the Lord is very different from the temples to the gods of other nations. In his prayer Solomon acknowledges "heaven and the highest heaven can not contain you [God]; how much less this house that I have built!" (I Kings 8:27) "Solomon knew exactly what the temple was and what it wasn't – a house for God's name, not his person. Only in a figurative way would the Lord 'live' in this structure. It would be the house of God only because he graciously chose it, not because he needed it or was bound to it." (Inrig, 40). "This tension between God's transcendence and his immanence was lessened by the fact that no representation of him was made, the cloud and thick darkness of the Holy of Holies suggesting an inscrutability as well as a revelation. Possibly too, the concept of God "putting his name" in the place of his choice (Dt 12:5, 11; 1 Kgs 8:17, 29) guarded against any notion that he was contained physically within the sanctuary. (Elwell and Beitzel, Vol. 2, 2028)

To this day, Muslims pray towards Mecca and Jews face towards Jerusalem. But followers of Christ have no such concerns, for the temple itself was never meant as the object of worship in itself; it was always a reminder of larger realities. Inrig point out that in the New Testament we learn that "when Jesus died and rose again, he rendered the temple obsolete, as the book of

Hebrews says. This is not to say there is no temple. Individual believers (I Cor. 6:19-20), local congregations (I Cor. 3:16), and the universal church (Eph. 2:19-22) are all spoken of as the temple of the Lord. Church buildings never are. There is no special physical dwelling place of God on earth in the present age. God's temple consists of the followers of Christ who bear His name before a watching world – and that is an awesome responsibility.” (Inrig, 59-60) Thus our prayers today are to Christ who dwells at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and who dwells within us by his Spirit (Eph. 1:20, I cor. 6:19).

Along these same lines, God also made it clear that “the glory and continuance of the temple and dynasty are conditional.” If the Kings do not walk in God's ways then the fate of the temple will be reversed and it will be destroyed and become a byword among the people! (Wiseman, 124-125). Later in Kings, and all throughout the prophets, even up until Jesus' day, the people will consistently turn to the temple itself, assuming that continuing some ritual will protect them from the wrath of God, rather than turning to the God of the temple and asking him to forgive their sins. And thus God will eventually destroy both his first temple, and later his second temple, in an effort to turn the people's heart back to himself.

One last note on the Temple is in order. As in the case of the tabernacle, the temple points forward to Christ and beyond that to eternity future, as well as pointing back to Eden and the purposes of creation as a whole. The rest of this paper will explore the implications for the future, but we should take just a moment to look back. Leithart points out: “Sanctuaries are also architectural recapitulations of the garden of Eden.” For example, the interior is made of wood carved with fruit, vegetables, and flowers reminiscent of Eden. Cherubim guard the Inner Sanctuary, like those guarding the route back to Eden after the fall. The twin pillars guarding the entrance to temple are adorned with carvings of pomegranates and other fruit. Eden was well

watered, with its waters separated from the waters in heaven, whereas the Temple has many basins and even a sea of water, all on stands to separate them from the earth below, with the large sea on two bulls representing Israel, but facing to the corners of the earth since Israel to bless all nations. There are ten water stands, five on a side, on approach to temple, so you must walk through the water, as the people passed through Red Sea and Jordan River. Ezekiel will add the picture of the temple as the source of living water to the nations! Sanctuaries are also “architectural holy mountains, as Eden itself was.” The Tabernacle was a portable mountain of God with a cloud resting on it as on Sinai, and the temple was the permanent residence of God’s cloud. Just as in the tabernacle, the materials used in each part of the temple increase in costliness as the rooms increase in holiness, yet all the metals are valuable and necessary, just like gifts given to people in the church where noble and ignoble are both needed and valuable in God’s eyes! Many more examples could be given, all leading Leithart to conclude his look back by looking forward again: “A temple ecclesiology is simultaneously an Eden ecclesiology, a holy mountain ecclesiology, a body and bride ecclesiology. The church is Eden because in Christ it is the place well watered with the Spirit poured from heaven at Pentecost, the source of living waters that flow to the corners of the earth (John 7:37). The church is the true holy mountain, where the Spirit is present in cloud and fire, where the living word of the Lord is heard in thunder, where we can draw near to stand face to face with the glory of the Lord and be transformed into an image of that glory, where we ascend to joy with the joyful assembly of saints and martyrs around the throne of God (Heb. 12:22-24). The church is the house/ bride of Christ, in whom he dwells by his Spirit, and the church is the house/ body of Jesus, who is the true temple of God, the diversely unified communion of saints.” (Leithart, 2006, 58-59)

### **God's Presence for an Exiled People: Life After God Destroys His Temple**

Over time, the people of God rebel against him, worshipping idols and desecrating his house. Some kings are blatantly against God, to the point of robbing gold from the temple, and even setting up idols to foreign gods in the temple. Others are subtler, continuing the sacrifices but neglecting the larger purposes of the Temple. For example, Zuck points out that “the Temple was to be a place where justice was carried out. People who had been wronged were to be able to come to this place where Yahweh put His name and cry out for justice and expect vindication (1 Kings 8:21). This statement reflects the strong emphasis placed on justice in the theology of the Old Testament. Since God is just, He expects His representatives to be just also. The Temple was to be a place where this was recognized.” (Zuck, 127) Yet the prophets will accuse the people of neglecting the needy for their own gain and he will say that he desires justice and mercy more than sacrifices themselves. Eventually God will cry out for the doors to the temple to be locked shut rather than seeing his house desecrated by people whose heart is far from him.

After hundreds of years of warnings from the prophets, with the people refusing to repent, God finally comes in judgment. First he conquers and scatters the northern kingdom, desiring for that to serve as a wake up call to the south. Later, when Judah also refuses to repent, God sends Nebuchadnezzar to level Jerusalem and destroy the temple, taking the last of his people into captivity in Babylon. Christopher Wright points out that Ezekiel's worst moment was not so much seeing the people defeated as seeing the vision of the glory of God departing from the Temple (Ez. 8-10, esp. 8:6). Yet the exile is not the end, as Ezekiel himself is confident of God's return (Ez. 34-37. Esp. 37:26-28) God makes a promise to put his sanctuary among his people and to dwell with them forever. God also promises that this presence among them will serve as a witness to the nations that they would know that he is the Lord. (Wright, 338)

In Isaiah 56:4-6, God makes this startling promise for the future: “These (foreigners) I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices I will accept on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” Wright comments on this passage, noting how surprising it is that foreign nations actually come to the holy mountain, let alone are allowed into the temple. And they are not just let into the outer courts of the temple, but they will also have their prayers heard and they too will be allowed to offer sacrifices! Wright also notes the fulfillment in Acts as a foreign eunuch comes to Jesus through the explanation of Isaiah and is then said to have joy! (Wright, 493-495)

After seventy years, the people are allowed to return to the land, and over time they rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the temple. But this post-exilic temple, even more clearly than the original temple, is designed to point to something much more glorious than itself. Even as the second temple is completed, the people who had seen the former temple wept at the lesser glory they saw. But the very fact that the temple was rebuilt at all was meant to build in them faith that God could indeed do all he promised and the expectation that one day he would indeed demonstrate his full Glory again for all to see. One day this temple would be replaced by one of even greater glory than Solomon's temple itself. (Brown, vol3, 782-783)

### **God's Presence in the Messiah: The Temple Incarnate**

As we come to the New Testament, we are immediately struck by the opening to John's Gospel. First, John harkens back to Genesis, to the beginning, as he states that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...all things were made through him” (John 1:1-2). But John does not stop there. He goes on to say, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). In Christ now God has come to ‘dwell among us’,

just as he had dwelt in the tabernacle and then the temple, now he dwells in Christ and through him we see the glory of the father that was once hid behind the curtain in the holy of holies. Dr. Heine notes that “the phrase that most Bible translations render as “dwelt among us” or “lived among us” in John 1:14 actually means “dwelt among us in a tent.” Heine goes on to show that John’s choice of this phrase, along with his references to the glory of Christ dwelling in the flesh is meant to bring to mind the glory of God filling the Old Testament tabernacle. (Heine, 82)

Picking up on this theme of God’s glory showing in and through his Son, Clowney argues that “Jesus Christ, the son of God, is ‘the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation [image] of his being’ (Heb. 1:3, NIV). The empty seat of the throne of God in the tabernacle was reserved for Jesus Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4). God’s fierce jealousy against images was his jealous love of his only Son.” (Clowney, 2003, 100)

Here we could pick up on many other themes related to the temple. For example, throughout John we see Christ fulfilling much of the imagery from the tabernacle and the temple. He is called the “light of the world,” the “living water,” and the “bread of life;” reminding us of the lamp stands, and the sea and basins of water, and the bread of the presence. We could go on, one by one, through each of the articles of furniture, each of the rituals, each of the sacrifices, and all that the priests wear and do. Each finds its individual fulfillment in Christ. But the fulfillment goes much deeper. Christ himself is the temple, the dwelling place of God. Thus for our purposes we want to look at just a few of these larger implications.

Longman asks us to “remember that the issue is God’s presence among us.” In addition to looking at the passages we have considered in John, he goes to Mark 13 where the disciples are amazed at the great marvel of the Temple and Jesus shocks them by pointing out that they will all be torn down, and then in chapter 14 indicates that he would destroy the temple and raise it

again in three days. His point is that God's presence is no longer in the physical temple but "the gospel writers clearly understood Jesus to be putting himself in the place of the temple."

(Longman, 1998, 98-99)

"Christ showed considerable respect for the temple. When he was 12 years old, he entered into the rabbinic discussions in its porticoes and described it as his Father's house (Lk 2:41-50). To him, "the house of God" was indwelt by God (Mt 12:4; 23:21). Although he twice cleansed it in righteous anger (Mt 21:12-13; Jn 2:13-16), he wept over the impending destruction of the city and temple (Lk 19:41-44). He often taught there, but he was "greater than the temple" (Mt 12:6). When his presentation to Jerusalem as the predicted Messiah was rejected, in spite of attendant miracles, he foretold its inevitable destruction (Mt 21:9-15; 24:1-2)" (Elwell and Comfort, 1247).

By Jesus' day, the Temple has become the most significant symbol in all Judaism. The people went to the temple for sacrifices, prayer, and to simply be in the presence of God. It is also here that they believed a Messiah would rise who would restore the glory of the Israelite kingdom, removing false political leaders and blessing the Jewish people once for all. Yet the temple had also become a place of great separation, emphasizing the separations between Jew and gentile, men and women, classes, religious sects, etc. Jesus comes to the Temple in his last days, just after the triumphal entry and just before his death. But he comes not to declare the Jews righteous and to overthrow the Greeks and Romans, not even to join in the separation, but to cast out the money changers and remind people that God's house was designed as a house of prayer for all nations, not just one nation but all nations. (Bertholomew and Goheen, 155-157) In the end he comes to call the unrighteous rather than the righteous, to give healing to the sick of all nations, and to forgive the sins of every man on earth that will turn and come to Him. Leithart

notes from N.T. Wright that “what Jews normally expected from the temple – an encounter with the presence of God, festivity and food, forgiveness and cleansing, instruction in Torah – the disciples come to expect from Jesus himself.” (Leithart, 2006, 66, quoting N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 435-437)

Clowney goes on to show that “the temple and all it represented found absolute fulfillment at the hour of Christ’s suffering and death: ‘destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ Altar sacrifices had only one meaning: the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world. God’s true dwelling is not in a tent of goatskins, or a temple of cedar and gold, but the flesh of Immanuel. Christ is the Sacrifice and the Priest, he is the Light of the sanctuary, and of the world. He is the Bread of life, he offers as incense his prayers and ours before the Father’s throne. When he cried, ‘It is finished!’ the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, for he opened the way into the Holy Place through his blood (Heb. 10:19-20). The function of the temple ended with his death. Jesus rose and ascended; our great High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, heaven itself, for us. Hebrews warns us there can be no going back.” (Clowney, 1995, 45)

Leithart actually sees the entire history of the temple as pointing forward to and fulfilled in the death of Christ: “Yahweh establishes his house at the center of Israel and stretches his arms out in invitation to a stubborn people, who refuse to turn to him and be healed. This too is Christologically significant, for when the human temple appears, the Jews refuse to turn toward him as well. The story of 1-2 Kings is the story of a rejected temple, a rejected and suffering Messiah and mediator, a temple destroyed but destined to be raised again on the third day. A temple Christology thus works out in a narrative of cross and empty tomb” (Leithart, 2006, 70)

Poythress points out that in addition to simply being a mediator for us, Christ also becomes the sacrifice for us (Heb. 9:28, I John 2:2), and thus the ultimate expression of God's atoning work for us, and the very reason we can pray to God for the forgiveness of sins. He also notes that Christ tells his disciples that "on that day you will realize that I am in my father, and you are in me, and I am in you ... My father will love him, and come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:20,23). Thus the dwelling of God that was manifest in Christ will at some future time be manifest in his people as well! (Poythress, 67-68)

Walke concludes: "The sacred sites, objects, seasons, personnel, and institutions under the administration of the Old Covenant are only types of the true reality ... Christ fulfills the expectation that there will be one in whom God and man merge in perfect union and provide perfect access into the omnipresent God's unique presence and care. The incarnate Son of God fulfills what the temple always was, a place where infinite merges with the finite to give salvation to the faithful." (Walke, 476)

### **God's Presence in the Church: The Personal, Local and Global Temple**

The book of Acts opens with the disciples and others praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus, to come upon them. On the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, their prayers are answered. The Holy Spirit comes on them, in descriptions that are very reminiscent of God's descending on Mt Sinai for Moses, and again in the fire descending on the alter of Elijah. Throughout the rest of the book of Acts, we see over and over again this theme of the Spirit filling the believers, and empowering them for service and for the preaching of the word. Again, this is very reminiscent of the anointing of old as well as the message of the temple.

The New Testament's more direct references to the temple are summarized in the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* as follows:

The NT writers used two different Greek words to describe the temple: *naos* and *hieron*. *Naos* refers to the actual sanctuary of the temple, the place of God's dwelling. *Hieron* refers to the temple precincts as well as to the sanctuary. Generally speaking, *naos* was used to designate the inner section of the temple known as the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, whereas *hieron* included the outer court and the temple proper.

In Paul's epistles the word *naos* appears six times (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21; 2 Thes 2:4) and *hieron* once (1 Cor 9:13). In these verses Paul maintains the distinction of definition noted above. When speaking of the actual physical temple, he used the word *hieron* to indicate the place where the priests offered up animal sacrifices on the altar (1 Cor 9:13), which was situated in the outer court (see Ex 27-29, 40). And when Paul referred to the abominable act of the lawless one in usurping God's place in the temple, he used the word *naos*—the word that designates the place of deity's presence (2 Thes 2:4).

In all the other Pauline passages, *naos* is used metaphorically—to depict a human habitation for the divine Spirit. In one instance the sanctuary image is used to describe the individual believer's body (1 Cor 6:19); in every other instance the sanctuary depicts Christ's body, the church (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21). Mistakenly, many readers think 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 speaks of the individual, but according to the Greek text, it is unquestionably clear that Paul was speaking about the collective church... (Elwell and Comfort, 1247)

Further, when Jesus speaks of the 'church,' he uses the Old Testament term for 'assembly', harkening back to the great assembly of the people at Sinai as God gave the law, the regular

festival assemblies each year, and the specially-called assemblies at the Temple entrance when Israel found the law again and repented of past sins. Hebrews goes on to explain that although God appeared in fire and smoke at Sinai, he did not dwell there long. Instead He moved with the assembly, until He came to Mt. Zion. Yet even Mt. Zion could not contain Him, and now He sits in the heavens and all believers gather before Him in the heavenly Zion. Whatever 'assemblies' we have on earth are simply shadows of the true assembly of all God's people taking place even now in the heavenly places! (Clowney, 1995, 30-31)

Some of the early church fathers, commenting on Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, also see this same imagery of the church: "He fittingly gave the answer about the sign connected with the temple, and not about signs unconnected with the temple. Now, both of these two things, the temple and the body of Jesus, appear to me, in one interpretation at least, to be types of the Church, and to signify that it is built of living stones, a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the head corner-stone; and it is, therefore, called a temple" (Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, 1.10.4.2.6.20).

Another one of the fathers explains:

Moreover, I will also tell you concerning the temple, how the wretched [Jews], wandering in error, trusted not in God Himself, but in the temple, as being the house of God. For almost after the manner of the Gentiles they worshipped Him in the temple. But learn how the Lord speaks, when abolishing it: "Who hath meted out heaven with a span, and the earth with his palm? Have not I? ", "Thus saith the Lord, Heaven is My throne, and the earth My footstool: what kind of house will ye build to Me, or what is the place of My rest?" Ye perceive that their hope is vain. Moreover, He again says, "Behold, they who have cast down this

temple, even they shall build it up again.” It has so happened. ... Let us inquire, then, if there still is a temple of God. There is—where He himself declared He would make and finish it. For it is written, “And it shall come to pass, when the week is completed, the temple of God shall be built in glory in the name of the Lord.” I find, therefore, that a temple does exist. Learn, then, how it shall be built in the name of the Lord. Before we believed in God, the habitation of our heart was corrupt and weak, as being indeed like a temple made with hands. For it was full of idolatry, and was a habitation of demons, through our doing such things as were opposed to [the will of] God. But it shall be built, observe ye, in the name of the Lord, in order that the temple of the Lord may be built in glory. How? Learn [as follows]. Having received the forgiveness of sins, and placed our trust in the name of the Lord, we have become new creatures, formed again from the beginning. Wherefore in our habitation God truly dwells in us. How? His word of faith; His calling of promise; the wisdom of the statutes; the commands of the doctrine; He himself prophesying in us; He himself dwelling in us; opening to us who were enslaved by death the doors of the temple, that is, the mouth; and by giving us repentance introduced us into the incorruptible temple. He then, who wishes to be saved, looks not to man, but to Him who dwelleth in him, and speaketh in him, amazed at never having either heard him utter such words with his mouth, nor himself having ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built for the Lord. (Roberts, Donaldson and Coxe, 1.1.5.1.0.16)

Beale will argue even further, showing that the church is not simply symbolically related to the temple, but that Christ, and later the church, are literally the new temple of God, they are

the realities that the temple was actually only a shadow of. One of his most persuasive arguments is that the church is not simply compared to the Temple, but rather the same language is used of the church as was used of the temple. For example, 2 Corinthians 6:16 states “we are the Temple of the living God: as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them.’” This should immediately bring to mind Leviticus 26:11-2, as well as Ezekiel 37:26-27. This is just one of a number of places where God uses the same descriptions for his people and his church that the Old Testament uses for the temple. (Beale, 253-254)

So we see that Jesus and Paul both take the language and imagery of the temple and apply them to the people of God, those who have trusted in Jesus by faith. “This understanding is similarly expressed by Peter in his first letter and to an extent by John in the book of Revelation. However, John also recognizes that the dwelling of God in heaven is the locus of the true temple, and the believers’ final incorporation into that temple is the consummation of God’s purposes for his people. The writer to the Hebrews has a particular concern to establish the reality of the heavenly temple as the locus of Christ’s redemptive activity, which has now superseded the earthly temple, being but a shadow of the true one in heaven.” (Martin and Davids, Tabernacle)

This brings us to the book of Hebrews. Hebrews in general has two large themes, namely showing that Christ is far greater than all the Old Testament signs, and secondly that this greater fulfillment puts an even greater demand upon us to respond. Thus Beale, Clowney, and others will argue strongly that Hebrews is the true reality for which the Old Testament was simply a pattern or shadow. This is a significant distinction, as some will argue that reading the New Testament with Christ and the church in place of the temple is a ‘spiritualization’ of the old. But Clowney would respond that what we are actually dealing with is “realization.” “It is not so

much that Christ fulfills what the Temple means, rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed.” Beale further quotes Clowney as follows:

Our reflection on the claims of Christ has already shown us that his use of the Old Testament is far from figurative. The situation is completely reversed. In the wisdom of God’s purpose the earlier revelation points forward to the climax, when, in the fullness of time, God sent his own son into the world.

Christ is the true temple, the true light, the true manna, the true vine. The coming of the true supersedes the figurative. The veil in the temple made with hands is destroyed, for its symbolism is fulfilled.

At the cross the actualization of the symbolism of sacrifice is particularly clear. It is not a figurative use of Old Testament language to say that Christ is the Lamb of God offered to make atonement for sin. The sin-offering at the temple is not being ‘spiritualized’ when we say it is fulfilled in Christ. Neither is the temple being ‘spiritualized’ when we say that in the resurrection the true temple was raised up. No earthly temple made with hands can ever again become the place of God’s dwelling. (Beale 297, quoting Edmund P. Clowney, “The Final Temple”, *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 35, 1972, p. 177, 182-183)

Hebrews will go on to make these same points even more dramatically, arguing that Christ has died once for all, that the sacrifices and the priesthood have all been fulfilled, there is no going back, the former systems existed simply to prepare us for the coming of Christ. Now that Christ has come the old is passed away and the new covenant is now in force. There is great consistency with the past shadows, but we are now to live in light of Christ and his fulfillment of the old systems.

Here we need to note a key issue of our day that relates to the former discussions, but that is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue. II Thessalonians and Ezekiel 40-48, among other passages, refer to a future temple that had not yet been built by the time of Christ's death and resurrection. This has led to much debate whether to read these passages as an expectation of a future physical temple on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem where the old temple stood, or whether to read these as being symbolic of the temple of the church. Both have a variety of pros and cons to them. In light of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament, as well as the eternal state to be discussed next, I tend to lean towards Beale's alternate interpretation. He would say they can not refer to a physical building, as that would violate Hebrews greater fulfillment in Christ. But he also says it is more than 'spiritual'. Rather, as Clowney does above with Christ, so Beale would do with the church, saying there is a true, physical temple in the church, and God dwells among us in physical form, and will dwell with his people very literally forever. These passages in Ezekiel and elsewhere are thus meant as shadows of that reality, just as the physically constructed temples of the past were also simply patterns and shadows of a larger reality. For more, see Beale, chapters 8 and 11.

### **God's Presence for Eternity: The Temple of God's Glory**

"In John's Revelation there is no material temple, even though he continues to use the imagery of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion (Rv 3:12; 14:1; 21:2, 10, 22). Three interrelated ideas dominate. First is the concept of the church made up of martyrs, whose faithful members are God's temple (3:12; 14:1). This temple grows gradually as the number of martyrs increases (6:11). Another aspect is the temple as the place of judgment (11:19; 14:15; 15:5-16:1). Finally, any temple in the new age is unnecessary, 'for its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the

Lamb' (21:22). The ultimate state will be God's dwelling with his people—the eternal, spiritual temple. “(Elwell and Comfort, 1247)

“Revelation has a focus upon the heavenly temple as the place of God's abode (Rev 15:8), the place from which the earth is governed and judgment emanates (Rev 14:15, 17; 16:1, 17). Yet it is also the place of safety for the saints (Rev 3; 12; 7:15). Where God is, there his temple is; from his throne issue both wrath and mercy. Although John does not show any interest in the earthly temple, his description of the heavenly temple containing the long-forgotten Ark of the Covenant (Rev 11:19) is clearly related to the sanctuary or temple of the OT. Yet there can be no physical temple in heaven. The saints themselves are pillars in God's temple (Rev 3:12). The reality of God dwelling with his people has arrived, and the need for copies of the original has passed. The city with its cubical dimensions (Rev 21:16–18) reflects the dimensions of the Holy of Holies, and John declares that there is no temple in the city, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (Rev 21:22). In this final reference to the temple in the NT canon the categories of the temple are submerged in the vision of God and the Lamb, in whose presence the saints experience the fulfillment of the promise of God, to dwell with his people forever (Rev 22:1–5).” (Martin and Davids, Tabernacle)

### **God's Presence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Applications of the Temple for Today**

We have already noted several applications of the temple for today. The tabernacle and temple systems give us a picture of the imminence and transcendence of God that should still inform our thinking and worship today. They also show the importance of worshiping God in the way he desires, not bringing foreign ways of worship or foreign idols into worship of God, and of the importance of the heart over any ritual. It also confirms our fears of coming into the presence of a holy God on our own merit, yet calls us to come through the sacrifice of the

atonement lamb, Christ our Lord. In addition, while Christ fulfills all the aspects of Old Testament worship, that worship also serves as a pattern for us to this day. In many ways the structure of our more formal worship, and of the Lord's Table, should harken back to the Temple worship structures precisely because they were patterned on heavenly worship structures!

From the dedication of the temple we see the centrality of prayer, especially prayer when we are under the hand of God's judgment due to sin. God is always in his heavenly temple with eyes and ears turned toward us, ready to hear and to answer our plea. And now, even more than then, we know that Jesus is standing in heaven on the right hand of God interceding for us before the Father. Furthermore, we do not need to wait for the Day of Atonement when the High Priest can go before the mercy seat on our behalf. Instead, the curtain separating us has been torn and through the once for all sacrifice of Christ we can now approach the throne confidently, with full assurance of forgiveness and thus of being heard.

Today our God is also not far off, hiding in heaven from us. Nor is he even in some tent or building that we need to go to. Instead Jesus made it possible for us to no longer worship on mountaintops, but rather allows us to worship in spirit and truth wherever we are at. His Holy Spirit makes this possible because God now dwells in every single believer. This indwelling makes us as individuals, and the church gathered, the new temple of God. The implications of this indwelling are huge, starting with the need to keep ourselves pure so as not to defile the temple. It also means that people should be able to see God in us, and be led to worship God through our lives, in the same way they were brought into the presence of God in the temple!

Much more could be said, but let me end with the practical application of Revelation. Christopher Wright concludes his look at the temple, quoting partially from Beale, "Ultimately, of course, the temple of God will encompass not only his whole redeemed people from every

tribe, nation, people and language but the whole cosmos, within which we serve him as kings and priests. That is to say, humanity redeemed through Christ and modeled on Christ's perfect humanity will be restored to our proper and intended relationship with creation. The temple too, from the symbolism of Eden, through its earthly particularity in the Old Testament and its Christ-centered transformation in the New Testament, to its final universality in Revelation, also functions as a significant missional theme in Scripture." (Wright, 340)

Thus the temple and Christ's first and final fulfillment of it give us renewed motivation to go out and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, thus expanding the temple and increasing the worship of God. Looking at this future eternal temple of God also gives hope here and now, allowing us to live as aliens in this life knowing that the same Spirit indwelling us guarantees us an eternal inheritance with God himself. This inheritance will enable us to stand in the actual presence of God himself, the presence of which the temple was only a faint shadow. In that glorious home there is no need of temple or sun any longer, as God and the Lamb serve as its light and glory. At that time we will finally see the heavens descend and the temple truly encompass the entire earth as God's glory fills all in all. Then we will join people from every tribe and tongue and nation and worship aright for all eternity, worshipping the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for all time to come! Amen, come Lord Jesus.

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