

The Temple/Church Metaphor: A Biblical Study of the New Testament's Use of the Temple as a Metaphor for the Church Looking at the Old Testament Altars, Tabernacle and Temples, the Inter-Testament Period, and the New Testament, with Six Key Passages.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation idea began approaching fifty years ago. I grew up being told that the human body was the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” or Jesus Christ and that as such, it should not be abused by smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, or other self-destructive behavior.¹ That teaching is alive and well today.²

However, as I attended college and began studying Greek and took classes on various books of the Bible, I began to question the application of the text. So, for the last fifty years as a preacher and teacher, I have sought a better way to understand 1 Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are God’s Temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s Temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s Temple is holy, and you are that Temple” (NRSV) and 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Or do you not know that your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (NRSV). As I studied and reflected, I noticed a few things which supported my questions. There had to be a better way to see these passages.

Commentators and scholars were not consistent in their interpretation. For some, the body of the individual was the Temple in both passages. For others, in chapter 3 the Church was

¹ Too often those telling us not to smoke and drink were overweight and had other health issues often from not enough exercise or poor eating habits. As I looked back over the years, there was a bit of hypocrisy.

² A quick search of YouTube videos will yield a plethora of videos demonstrating this idea. These range from famous preachers such as Bill Graham to little-known people on TikTok.

the Temple and in chapter 6 the individual body was the Temple. Still, others saw both chapters represent the Church as the Temple. These interpretations will be explored in depth in the fourth section.

For me, the answer came in exploring the idea that Paul was using a metaphor to describe the Church. “A metaphor is a picture of the literal and physical carried over to the moral and spiritual, as in John 10:11, ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’”³ Understanding the connection between the words ‘Temple’ and ‘Church’ was key to finding an interpretation. “A metaphor or simile has three parts: the topic or item illustrated by the image, the image itself and the point of similarity or comparison (the actual meaning of the metaphor or simile in the passage).”⁴ The Church is the first. The Temple is the image used for the illustration. The task was to find the points of similarity which carried the meaning of the passage. I began this adventure by determining what the roles altars, the Tabernacle, and the Temple filled in the Old Testament. I then sought to apply those in some way to the Church.

However, as I continued this journey, I discovered a depth I had not expected. The Temple carries so much meaning for the Church. I have come to have a greater appreciation and understanding of the role of the Old Testament Temple. This fact will be carried out in the second section of this dissertation. I have always loved the Church both universal and local. I have always considered being part of a local Church important to the Christian walk. I have come away from this appreciating just how active participation in community is indispensable. That might seem strange coming from someone who has given 45 years to pulpit ministry.

³ Black, David Alan. 1995. *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

⁴ Osborne, Grant R. 2006. *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Rev. and expanded, 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Perhaps familiarity has numbed my love. Perhaps hurts from past ministry and Church experiences have blinded me to just how critical the community really was. I never gave up on the Church, but I am in love with her all over again.

The Temple is just one of several metaphors for the Church. It is called the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, a flock, a family.⁵ Each metaphor helps complete the picture of how the Church interacts with the world around it, to order itself, and to help it understand how its members relate to one another. It is in exploring the metaphors and similes (and other figures of speech) that we understand and apply scripture correctly. The Bible is rich in these figures of speech. Those who speak of taking the Bible “literally” often miss the meaning of pericopes because they miss those figures of speech.

These metaphors or similes come from the first century and any interpretation must keep that fact in mind. “Family” reflects families from the first-century Roman empire. There is always the danger of reading modern symbols or structures into a metaphor that would be foreign to the original readers.

Sometimes one word carries with it a load of meaning. Take Revelation 2:18 as an example. “Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (NIV). The prophetess’s name was undoubtedly not Jezebel. By using that name, John brings the whole of the Israelite queen from 1 Kings, the wife of Ahab into play. “Temple” is another such word. In the Old Testament, it was a place of sacrifice, worship, communication, rebellion, and the heart and soul of Jewish life and religion. There are

⁵ An excellent resource for these metaphors is Bird, Michael F. 2013. *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, pp 716-718.

several ways that the word is used in the New Testament. The illustration of the Church as the Temple reflects not only the Jewish Temples in Jerusalem but also the pagan Temples in places like Ephesus and Corinth. Both these Churches received letters from Paul that contained Temple metaphors.

The plan of this dissertation is to explore the various passages where the Temple metaphor is used to describe the Church. In what ways are the Temple and Church similar? In what ways do they differ? There is a structure for the Church in the Temple and function to be found in those similarities and differences.

The first section will be devoted to the altars and the Tabernacle from the Torah. I will explore the use of altars in the Patriarchal period.

Considering the importance of the concept of sacrifice in the Bible, it follows that altars are important structures. The building of altars covers all periods in the biblical text beginning with Noah building an altar after the flood (Ge 8:20) and continuing to the building of the altar in Herod's Temple. Altars also vary in their locations and purposes, with some altars being built for personal use and others being built within Temples for community use.⁶

However, altars play another role in scripture. I will argue that these are some of the places God chose to interact with mankind and makes promises and covenants with His people. This role after the Patriarchal period is absorbed into the Tabernacle, Temple, and finally the Church.

The section also looks at the construction of the Tabernacle using God's plan handed down to Moses on Mt. Sinai and constructed by Israel in the wilderness. I will look at the role of the Tabernacle: its structure, its furnishings, and those assigned to carry out its purpose. I will also review the history of the Tabernacle as it appeared after the wilderness experience.

⁶ Thompson, Jeremy. 2020. *All the Altars in the Bible*. Faithlife Biblical and Theological Lists. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

The second section looks at Solomon's Temple and the role it played in the life of Israel. Again, while sacrifice and celebration were the main functions of the Temple, it will be noted that it was a place where God again would most interact with mankind. I will do a detailed study of the construction and dedication of Solomon's Temple. That will be followed by a study of the Second Temple, including the difficulties in getting it built. The Temple during the Intertestamental period will be reviewed. Herod's reconstruction of the Temple is also considered. I will also look at Ezekiel and the promise of a rebuilt Temple. This is important to understand the promise of a third Temple. I explore the possible interpretations.

The third section covers related passages in the New Testament. I look at Jesus and his interaction and some statements concerning the Temple. Particular emphasis focuses on the cleansing of the Temple recorded by all four gospel writers. I will also look at the Synoptic gospels and their view of the Temple as well as John's view of the Temple. I cover the book of Acts. I specifically reference Acts 2 and 7, Stephen's speech at his stoning. I look at 2 Thessalonians though it may well not use a metaphor for the church. There will also be a note on the eschatological use of the Temple from The Revelation, but much of that is beyond this work's scope.

The final section will cover the major metaphor pericopes of the Temple and the Church. This is the heart of the paper. I will explore key passages where the metaphor is used or implied: two from First Corinthians (chapters 3 and 6), Second Corinthians (chapter 6), Ephesians (chapters 2 and 3), and First Peter (chapter 2). It will conclude with some applications of the teachings as to why proper interpretation matters.

Several pericopes speak about the Temple which are not included in the work. Some did not serve as metaphors and didn't contribute to the understanding of the metaphor. Others were

apocalyptic and subject to such debate that they would muddy this discussion. Daniel's seventy weeks fall into this category.

DEFINITIONS

Here are some definitions of terms to be used. The meaning of "Temple" is broad and general. "A Temple (from the Latin *templum*) is a building reserved for spiritual rituals and activities such as prayer and sacrifice."⁷ However, for this dissertation, the Jewish Temples were built in Jerusalem, first by Solomon and rebuilt by the returning exiles from Babylon. The New Testament use will also include the Church which is figuratively modeled after these Temples. There are quick reference to pagan temples in Ephesus and Corinth.

Before the construction of the Temple, the Torah spoke of altars and referenced a Tabernacle. These were part of the narrative of the interaction between God and man. The altars were part of the patriarchal period while the Tabernacle, constructed in the wilderness and served as "precursor of the Temple during most of the period between the formation of Israel, at Sinai, and its final establishment in the Promised Land in the early period of the monarchy."⁸

The third definition is that of "Church." The word is used to describe a "collection of people that meet together for the worship of the Judeo-Christian God. This only applies to the worship of God after the coming of Christ."⁹ It can also be used of a building or an event held by the community. In this work, "Church" will refer to a local assembly or community of believers.

⁷ Wikipedia contributors, "Temple," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Temple&oldid=1183096325> (accessed November 2, 2023).

⁸ Elwell Beitzel, 1988, Grand Rapids, MI, "Tabernacle, Temple", Vol. 2, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, Baker Book House, p. 2015.

⁹ Faithlife, LLC. 2023. "Church." Logos Bible Study. Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Factbook*. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, LLC.

An occasional reference to the Church universal might appear but never the sense of a building or ‘going to Church’ as an event.

PERSONAL NOTE

I have had the privilege of visiting many of the cities discussed in this work. These include Corinth and Ephesus, as well as Rome and Athens. Some of the opinions expressed here will come from my experience in those places. I have seen the ruins of the temples at Corinth and Ephesus. Being in these cities has given me a perspective beyond the works that I read and quote.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

This work was made possible by the mentoring of two professors, both of whom have passed away. They contributed greatly to my understanding of biblical interpretation. Dr. Harold Ford was the first. I had him during my undergraduate work at Puget Sound Christian College. Dr. Ford introduced me to the idea that it was permissible, and even essential, to question conventional thoughts. He permitted me to question what I had been told. Sometimes those questions confirmed what I had been taught and other times I moved on from those teachings.

The second professor was Dr. Robert Lowery. He was my major professor in my graduate studies at Lincoln Christian Seminary. It was Dr. Lowery who taught me what questions to ask and how to find those answers. The greatest lesson he taught me was how to approach the Word of God. It was he who said, “Take the Bible naturally.” Let poetry be poetry, prophecy be prophecy, and so on. He helped me understand similes, metaphors, and hyperboles. The approach of using metaphor for the Temple and Church came through him. I will always be indebted to them both.

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Except for the Greek quotations, the choice of translations used at any point was mostly random, based on what translation was open at the time.

The key passages (Ephesians, 1 Peter, and 1 & 2 Corinthians) are my translation.

THE ALTARS AND TABERNACLE IN THE TORAH

THE ALTAR IN GENESIS

The study of the Temple/Church relationship began centuries before David even dreamed of constructing it.¹⁰ The Temple built by David's son, Solomon, was predated by the Tabernacle built by Moses in the wilderness. That structure was predated by a series of altars built by the patriarchs. Those altars played an important part in understanding the Tabernacle, the Temple, and later the church.

“The earliest altars mentioned in the Old Testament are associated with the patriarchs. Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 12:7–8; 13:4, 18; 22:9), Isaac (Gen 26:26), and Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1–7) all constructed sacrificial altars. These altars were built in connection with a promise or instruction from God, and were likely used for worship or commemoration.”¹¹ Altars play a key part in the biblical story as sacrifice was of great importance. Altars went beyond sacrifice, however. Altars were places where God and humankind entered into covenants, perhaps with individuals, families, or a group of people. Promises were made at altars. These covenants, promises, and other interactions happened in other places, but many were at altars. God had a place to meet mankind.

Perhaps the first altar was inferred in Genesis 4 and the story of Cain and Abel. While no

¹⁰“After David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent.’ Nathan replied to David, ‘Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you’” (1 Chr 17:1-2, NIV84).

¹¹Thornhill, A. Chadwick. 2016. “Altar.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mungum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

commands regarding any sacrifice were mentioned nor was there a specific mention of an altar, both Cain and Abel brought an offering to God.¹² There was some discussion between God and the two brothers over the sacrifices that were offered (Genesis 4:2b-8). That discussion led to Cain becoming angry, resulting in Abel's death.¹³ This discussion became the first example of God and a human interacting at an altar of some sort. This pattern developed through the Torah, especially in Genesis.

The first mention of an altar was in Genesis 8:20, “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it” (NIV).¹⁴ After spending a year and a month in the ark, once out, “Noah’s first thought is Godward.”¹⁵ This encounter at an altar was the first to include a promise God made. After being pleased by the aroma from the animals Noah sacrificed, God said, “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done” (8:21 NIV).

¹² Some commentators have suggested that there was no need for an altar when Abel and Cain made their sacrifices as paradise still existed and was washed away by the flood. (Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. 1996. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.) Yet, Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden and the angel guarding the entrance suggests paradise was already lost. An offering was made somewhere, and where an offering is made, an altar of some sort exists.

¹³ The story of Cain and Abel is not really about altars but a dialogue about what was or wasn’t acceptable sacrifices. In the text, there is no indication of what the problem was. Cain’s reaction, anger, and eventually murder of his brother, are the purpose of the story. It is part of the growth of sin in mankind which culminates with the flood.

¹⁴ The idea of a clean animal before Sinai is an interesting side study though beyond this dissertation. Why did Noah know about clean and unclean animals, and bring extra clean animals is simply speculation, but perplexing, nonetheless.

¹⁵ Kidner, Derek. 1967. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pg. 100.

Not only did God make a promise to never act in this manner again, but he and Noah entered into a covenant and by extension, with mankind and the whole of creation.

“This first explicit covenant (if we take 6:18 to refer to this) is remarkable for its breadth (embracing ‘every living creature’), its permanence (‘perpetual’, ‘everlasting’, etc.), and its generosity—for it was as unconditional as it was undeserved. For good measure, its sign and seal, a feature of all covenants, was such as to emphasize God’s sole initiative, far out of man’s reach.”¹⁶

The covenant included a command for Noah and his family to be fruitful and fill the earth. There would also be a change in the relationship between man and living creatures. These would now dread and fear mankind (9:2). Yet, they were now to be food as well as green plants. As part of the covenant, blood was not to be in the meat and an accounting for lifeblood was to occur (9:4). The covenant was made, and a sign was given. The rainbow was created, and God would remember His part (Genesis 9:1-17).

A significant point of this story is that the encounter occurred at an altar. God had spoken to Noah before, instructing him to build the ark. God offered detailed directions for its construction and summoned the animals to be loaded into it. He, as well, was the one who shut the ark door. Now, he and God entered an arrangement next to the altar Noah constructed. God would do his part, not destroy the world with water, and Noah his part, filling the earth and not eating blood.

A covenant is an agreement, a treaty, or a pact between parties, which both parties swear by oath to observe. Covenants that the Lord makes with people are therefore binding; he guarantees them with an oath. They usually begin with a historical statement declaring what the Lord has done for people, then add a section of stipulations for the participants of the covenant to abide by, and conclude with a series of promises telling what God will do for them. Covenants usually have a sign that serves as a perpetual reminder for both sides that the covenant is being kept. In this chapter the covenant is

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 109.

unconditional, God simply promising what he will do, and it is universal, for it includes all of creation. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow.¹⁷

So, God met Noah and his family on Mt. Ararat at an altar Noah constructed on what must have been a most glorious day. They disembarked the ark to a new world, a new creation. Noah had a part to play in this covenant. God had his. And the story moved on. The sagas covered the family of Noah and the story of Babel.

Genesis 12 started a new saga, the Abram/Abraham saga. This section of scripture contained four altars, 12:6-7; 12:8; 13:18; 22:2, 9. The first of these was built by Abram at Shechem. This altar marked an important moment in the story. It was built at a moment when Abram was obedient.¹⁸ Abram had left Ur with his whole family. They had settled in Haran. Following his father's death, Abram continued his journey to a yet-to-be-named land with the promise, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:2-3 NIV). As Abram arrived in Shechem, the story marked the fulfillment of a promise and the establishment of a covenant. "The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an

¹⁷ Ross, Allen, and John N. Oswalt. 2008. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis, Exodus*. Vol. 1. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, pg. 78.

¹⁸ "Three times in the first eleven chapters God's judgment had fallen: mankind was banished from the garden of God (3:23-24), destroyed by the Flood (chs. 6-9), and divided by diverse languages (11:1-9). There were also five primal curses. The serpent was cursed and proclaimed to be the enemy of the woman (3:14-15); the ground was cursed (3:17); Cain was condemned to doubtful harvests and anxious wandering (4:11-12) and Canaan to servitude (9:25-27); linguistic distinctions ensured chaotic misunderstanding between the nations (11:1-9)... Now a new departure is about to be made which will remove the doubt about God's intention to bridge the guilt between himself and mankind." Baldwin, Joyce G. 1986. *The Message of Genesis 12-50: From Abraham to Joseph*. Edited by J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball. The Bible Speaks Today. England: Inter-Varsity Press, p. 28.

altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him” (12:7, NIV). In the instructions given to Abram in Ur, there was a promise, “The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (12:2, NIV). The question became, would he leave all and go to this unknown place? Would he leave family, tradition, and all that he knew and understood for a promise from a God he barely knew?¹⁹ The altar was an answer to that question. And at this altar, God again made a promise, “I will give this land.” There was no mention of sacrifice, no response from Abram, only an altar and a promise. God and Abram once again interacted at an altar. They found themselves in Canaan, “where by a fresh revelation they were told that this was the land God promised to show them.”²⁰

After leaving Shechem, Abram went on to the East and pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai. There he built another altar (12:8b). He built an altar and “called on the name of the LORD” (NIV).

“. . . the Hebrew text says that “he made proclamation of Yahweh by name.” Some translations render 12:8 as “[Abram] called on the name of the LORD [Yahweh],” and the New Living Translation interprets the verse to mean “he worshiped the LORD.” But the usage of the expression in the Torah points to a more specific meaning; this is the same kind of expression found in Genesis 4:26 where the worship of Yahweh began.²¹

Abram called on or worshipped YHWH. There is no indication of what form that worship

¹⁹“The wrench of leaving the family and going out into the unknown, with all its uncertainty and associated hardships, is familiar to every pioneer. In the case of Abram God was weaning him away from everything that would remind him of his cultural roots, and testing his faith so that it would develop muscle. This could best happen when the softening influences of familiar surroundings had been removed, and every step required dependence on the God who had called him,” *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30.

²⁰ Henry, Matthew. 1994. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody: Hendrickson, p. 34.

²¹ Ross, Allen, and John N. Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, p. 97.

or calling took, only that he built an altar for that purpose. Abram and God once again interacted at an altar. Several scholars have seen some content in the language. An example is, “The expression, ‘to call on the name of the Lord’ (RSV), means more than just to pray. Rather, Abram made a proclamation, declaring the reality of God to the Canaanites in their centers of false worship.”²² If correct, this idea adds to another dimension of the connection between the Church and the altar/Temple, that of a place of proclamation to those around.

Abram built a third altar. “So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the LORD” (Genesis 13:18, NRSV). In one sense, not much is noted about this particular altar. Yet, it does have some importance. “*The oaks of Mamre* (cf. on 12:6), some twenty miles south of Bethlehem, became the chief centre of Abram’s movements, near which he would purchase his only property, the burial cave of Machpelah. Meanwhile, *tent* and *altar* epitomized his way of life.”²³

Abraham’s final altar was the most important of the four listed in Genesis. God commanded Abraham to go again to an unknown place to be revealed at the appropriate time. There he was to offer his only son, the son of the promise. No resistance was recorded, and he arose early the next morning and headed to Moriah. He loaded a donkey with all he needed for a sacrifice, wood, knife, and fire, everything except an animal to sacrifice.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from

²² Allen, Ronald B. 1988. “Abraham.” In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 1:11–15. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p. 12.

²³ Kidner, *Genesis*, pg. 129.

me.” And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided” (22:9-14, NIV).

This was a key passage in the life of Abraham. His faith was demonstrated in his willingness to offer his promised son.²⁴ The repeated phrase, “‘God will provide’ and the naming of the place as ‘The Lord Will Provide,’” (vv. 8 and 14) spoke to the confidence he had in YHWH. His faith became a model in the New Testament in Romans 4 and Hebrews 11.

Abraham’s response to God was noteworthy. Yet, God’s response was critical as well. Once Abraham passed God’s test, he once again renewed his promise and covenant with Abraham.

“I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me” (22:16-18, NIV).

“God now confirmed the promise with an oath. It was said and sealed before; but now it is sworn: *By myself have I sworn*; for he could swear by no greater, Heb. 6:13. Thus he interposed himself by an oath, as the apostle expresses it, Heb. 6:17.”²⁵ The promised descendants and the land they were to possess were repeated here at the altar Abraham had prepared for Isaac. On this day, standing on Mt. Moriah, the future home of the Temple of Solomon, God interacted with man.

Genesis’s next saga was that of Abraham’s son, Isaac. In chapter 25 Abraham dies and

²⁴ This will also be a pattern for God and his willingness to offer his son. A sacrifice that actually happened, unlike this one where a substitute was offered.

²⁵ Henry, Matthew. 1994. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 54.

leaves everything to Isaac.²⁶ The story contained the conflict between his two sons and the deception of Abimelech. Isaac was forced to move several times. He would dig a well and others would argue so he moved on. Finally, he settled in Beersheba. God appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham” (26:24, NIV). As his father had done between Bethel and Ai, Isaac built an altar. Once again, he called upon the name of the Lord. “Isaac responded in faith, as his father had done, by building an altar to the Lord and proclaiming there, for all to hear, who the Lord was and what he was like (26:25; cf. 12:7–8; 21:33).”²⁷ An altar became part of an interaction between God and man. This time, a promise and covenant were renewed for Isaac, the promised son.

Four actions of Isaac demonstrate his trust in God’s promise. First, he built an altar, following the example of Abraham (12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9) and setting a precedent for his own son Jacob (33:20; 35:7). Second, he *called on the name of Yahweh*, worship that also followed Abraham’s example (12:8; 13:4; 21:33). Third, he *pitched his tent there*, making this his residence. Finally, he once again had his servants dig a well, the fourth well he had dug since leaving Gerar.²⁸

While at Beersheba, Abimelech came to make a treaty with Isaac. When asked why they wanted a treaty after such harsh treatment before, “They answered, ‘We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, “There ought to be a sworn agreement between us”—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you’” (26:28a, NIV). “This was a covenant between equals, a recognized way of establishing alliances, and the same word is used for this alliance as

²⁶ The only exception is that Abraham gives gifts to the sons of his concubines and sends them to the East, presumable to avoid future conflict.

²⁷ Ross, Allen, and John N. Oswalt. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, pg. 162.

²⁸ Steinmann, Andrew E. 2019. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. Edited by David G. Firth. Vol. 1. The Tyndale Commentary Series. London: Inter-Varsity Press, p. 261.

is used for God's covenant with his people."²⁹ Isaac had built a well and pitched his tent there. So, it would have been quite possible that this treaty they entered into took place at or near the altar. If so, the altar was not only a place where covenants between God and mankind happened, but between men as well.

The appearance of altars in Genesis ended with two from Jacob. The first of these was in chapter 33. After a friendly reunion with his brother Esau, Jacob went to a place he named Succoth and then on to Shechem. It was in Shechem that his grandfather, Abraham, had built his first altar in Canaan. Jacob built an altar there as well and named it El-Elohe-Israel. "In this way, he publicly acknowledged that the Lord God was his God and that he had led him back to the land he would inherit. The name of the altar commemorated his relationship with God. God had prospered and protected him, as he had promised. Jacob was now Israel."³⁰ The promises and covenant that God made with Abraham were now posited upon one man, Jacob. He was reconciled with his brother and shared some blessings he had received from the promise, but he was to carry the promise forward.

The final altar in Genesis was constructed by Jacob at Luz (Bethel). This place held a special place for Jacob. This was where God revealed himself in a dream while Jacob was fleeing his brother (35:6, NIV). A few verses earlier he and his people made a covenant renewal.

Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." So they gave Jacob

²⁹ Baldwin, Joyce, *The Message of Genesis*, pp. 110-111.

³⁰ Ross, Allen, and John N. Oswalt. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, p. 195.

all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem (35:1-4 (NIV)).

Jacob and his family gave up the false gods and the trappings of the pagan cultures around them. This was an example and a precursor of the challenge the children of Israel would face throughout the Old Testament. False gods and idolatrous practices were to plague them.

It was also at Bethel that God appeared one more time to Jacob. This time he was given a new name, Israel. The covenant promise was renewed again. “And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you” (35:11-12, NIV). This place became Bethel, the house of God.

Genesis marked the end of the patriarchal period. The book ended with the death of Joseph and the request to take his bones back to Canaan when the people returned. It also marked the end of the use of the altar as a primary place of interaction with God. In the saga of Israel’s children, and particularly Joseph, no mention or use of an altar appeared. Were they used and not mentioned or were they simply not used? There was no information, no answer. In Genesis, and beyond, God used additional places and other means to interact with humankind. For instance, God revealed to Joseph in dreams his future relationship with his family (Gen 37). God revealed the meanings of dreams of Joseph’s fellow prisoners as well as helping him interpret Pharaoh’s dream. From this point on, the Torah will follow Moses and the nation birthed in captivity in Egypt. The altars will appear in Exodus as part of the bigger picture, that of the giving of the Law and the construction of the Tabernacle.

The point remains. God had places where he met with mankind, with Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He made promises to bless them and make them fruitful. Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob were promised a land, and to be a great nation, outnumbering the stars and the sand of the shore. Genesis set the precedent, that God wanted, and wants, to interact with his creation, even in their fallen state.

The altars served the purpose of a precursor to what was to come. The events surrounding altars: sacrifices, covenants, promises, blessings, proclamation, and presence would be found in the Tabernacle and beyond.

THE TABERNACLE IN THE TORAH

Exodus was the story of the birth of a nation. Israel's children and their families, seventy in all, went to Egypt to escape the famine (Exodus 1:5). While there they followed the often-repeated promise/command, "Be fruitful and multiply." Exodus began with the list of those who entered Egypt and then recorded, "Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them" (1:6-7, NIV). Thus began a period of silence, ending with slavery and hardship for what had gone from a large family to a nation.

The period of silence would end, and a time of rescue would begin with the call of Moses at the burning bush. The Hebrews cried out in misery and hardship and God heard their voice (2:23-24, NIV). "God saw the people of Isra'el, and God acknowledged them" (2:25, CJB). "Even before the vision of the burning bush, the narrator sets the deliverance from Egypt squarely in the context of the patriarchal promise. To Israel of old, the whole course of the history of salvation could be summed up as being 'promise and fulfillment': God promises, God remembers, God acts in salvation."³¹

³¹ Cole, R. Alan. 1973. *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 2. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p 69.

After centuries of silence, once again, God made an appearance. He interacted with Moses. This time it was not a dream or vision. It was not at an altar. It was a burning bush on the far side of the desert, at Mount Horeb.³² There God called Moses to be the deliverer of his people. The book of Exodus eventually commanded the construction of a Tabernacle and a Tent of Meeting where Moses, Aaron, and others were able to interact with him. But before that point, God communicated with Moses in several ways. On the way back to Egypt the text simply said, “God said” or “The Lord said” (Exodus 25:8–9, NIV84). The means or locations were not listed. Later in the book Moses will ascend Mt Sinai and talk to God as well.

Exodus 25 was a turning point in the Israelite’s wilderness experience. The story of God’s interactions with humankind took the form of a new place. Altars constructed at random places became rare. God was to dwell with or alongside his people. “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this Tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you” (Exodus 25:8–9, NIV84). The nation of Israel and her God were moving to a more permanent connection. The covenant and promises made with individuals: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was now with a people, God’s chosen.

The “covenant” between God and the Israelites replaced the natural organic bond between a people and its deity. The covenant is conditioned on the loyal observance by the people of a specific ritual. But this Covenant belongs to the temporal order. In time to come, the true Covenant will come into being, the one written on “the tablets of the heart” (Jer 31:31-34).³³

³² This was the first time that God and fire were associated. Later, in the wilderness, his Presence will be in the form of a pillar of fire at night. Later, fire will be replaced in the narrative with a glow, a Glory or Shekinah.

³³ Agus, Jacob B. 1979. “The ‘Yes’ and the ‘No’ of Revelation.” *God and His Temple: Reflections on Professor Samuel Terrien’s The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*. Ed by Lawrence L. Frizzell, South Orange, NJ: Seton Hall University, p. 16.

“The Tabernacle (Hebrew: מִשְׁכָּן, romanized: *mīškān*, lit. 'residence, dwelling place'), also known as the Tent of the Congregation (Hebrew: אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, romanized: *’ōhel mō’ēd*, also Tent of Meeting, etc.), was the portable earthly dwelling place of Yahweh (the God of Israel) used by the Israelites from the Exodus until the conquest of Canaan.”³⁴ This structure was to last throughout the forty years in the wilderness and the four hundred years until David dreamed and Solomon constructed the Temple.

It was “a portable sanctuary that embodied all that was necessary for the worship of the Lord under nomadic conditions and also served as a prototype of a subsequent permanent building.”³⁵ The pattern and materials were dictated by God himself and given to Moses while in Mt. Sinai. Not only did he give the command, but he gifted artisans and craftsmen to perform the work (25:2). The material for the construction came from an offering the Israelites were to bring (25:2). The objects that were to be offered included gold, silver, bronze, and cloth from various animals.³⁶

This temporary structure constructed while in the wilderness served several key purposes. Foremost, “It was so that God’s people had a constant reminder of His presence with

³⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Tabernacle," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tabernacle&oldid=1186769904> (accessed November 17, 2023).

³⁵ “Tabernacle,” Douglas, J. D., and Merrill Chapin Tenney. 1987. In *New International Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 576.

³⁶ One might question where such items came from, given the nomad life lived by Israel. God prepared for this moment before they left Egypt. “The people of Isra’el had done what Moshe had said—they had asked the Egyptians to give them silver and gold jewelry and clothing; and ADONAI had made the Egyptians so favorably disposed toward the people that they had let them have whatever they requested. Thus, they plundered the Egyptians” (12:35, CJB). Israel did not sneak off as slaves, but left as a triumphal army, taking the spoils of victory with them.

them.”³⁷ The time at Sinai would be a time to remember God was with them. But as they wandered, they would need reminders of his presence. “It was a visible sign of God’s presence and His power to Israel that He watches over them day and night. He was with them through struggles and triumphs, and every day on their journey to the promised land.”³⁸ The Tabernacle would be that for them. Whenever they set up camp the Tabernacle would be in the center of camp, with the various tribes organized around it.

The vocabulary of the Tabernacle is important, and there are two key words used in 25:8. First, the verb ‘to dwell’, giving rise to the noun *miškān*, a ‘dwelling’, widely used throughout Exodus 25-40, and second, the noun *miqdāš*, ‘a sanctuary’ or ‘place of holiness’.³⁹

This thought will carry over to John’s gospel when he said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14a, CJB).

Another purpose was for sacrifice. The role of the priest was to perform the various sacrifices that were required from the people. Burnt offerings for sins, thanks offerings, atonement rituals, and others were part of their task. The Levites were to assist the priests by preparing the instruments and items for sacrifice. This was a huge part of its purpose as well.

A third area of purpose was that of communications. Moses spoke to YHWH in the tent. “The Tabernacle became a place where God talked with Moses “face to face” (Exod. 33:11, NIV; Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 600). Moses acted as His spokesman before God and God met Moses and

³⁷ **Error! Main Document Only.**Kuhn, Esther, “Tabernacle, Temple, Synagogue, What’s the Difference,” firmisrael.org/learn/Tabernacle-Temple-synagogue-whats-the-difference/ (Accessed November 17, 2023).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Motyer, Alec. 2005. *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*. Edited by Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, pg. 251.

the people of Israel at the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 29:42–43; 30:36).”⁴⁰ God would communicate to Israel through Moses at the Tent of Meeting and Israel could bring their thoughts for God there as well. Add to that, the High Priest had two stones, the Urim and Thummin, that were used to ascertain the will of God. What they looked like or how they worked is not exactly known.⁴¹

Worship was also a purpose of the Tabernacle. Its very presence in the community, the furnishings in it, and the Glory that resided there; it became a place of worship.

Under Moses, Israel came to worship a unique God. Yahweh was a righteous and living God among the capricious and dying gods of the Near East. He was cosmic in power and abode. He possessed no consort and was of such stature that other gods were reckoned on a secondary level.⁴²

It was this God, with all the trappings of sacrifice, priestly garb, and centrality of the Tabernacle which brought Israel to the place of worship.

There is some evidence in 1 Sam 1:9 and 3:3 that the Tabernacle was replaced by a permanent structure before the end of the period of the judges to serve as the centralized, sacred place to worship God. Although worship at other places was not excluded, the Tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant was the official place and the heart of the Israelites’ communal life.⁴³

⁴⁰ Hyun, Timothy. 2016. “Tabernacle.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴¹ “Some interpreters assert the Tent of the Presence was a special meeting place outside the camp, unlike the Tabernacle which was placed in the center of the camp. According to Exodus 33:7-11, this tent was for communion with Yahweh, to receive oracles and to understand the divine will. The people's elders were the subject of a remarkable prophetic event at the site of this tent in Numbers 11:24-30.” (Wikipedia contributors, "Tabernacle," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.)

⁴² Cross, Frank M. “The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach.” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 10, no. 3 (1947): 51-52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3209346>.

⁴³ Hyun, Timothy. “Tabernacle.”

THE SECTIONS OF THE TABERNACLE

The Tabernacle was divided into three sections. Each of these sections served a specific purpose and was accessed by differing groups of people. The whole complex was called the ‘Sanctuary.’⁴⁴ This section was in the Courtyard. In the courtyard was a rectangular inner section contained two rooms, the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place.

THE MOST HOLY PLACE

At the heart of the Tabernacle was a special room. In this room was kept the Ark of the Covenant. This was the room where the Glory of God resided and his Shekinah. This word described, “the visible presence of the Lord. Moses calls this the ‘cloud’. It later covered Sinai when God spoke with Moses, filled the Tabernacle, guided Israel [and] filled Solomon’s Temple”.⁴⁵ For the most part, only the High Priest entered this room, and only the Day of Atonement.

THE HOLY PLACE

Just outside the Most Holy place was the Holy Place. It was separated from the inner room by a curtain. In this room was located the Table of Bread of the Presence, the incense altar, and the lampstand. Priests would regularly enter this room to tend the oil and incense as well as change the bread on the table.

THE COURTYARD

This was the area inside the curtain. It contained the altar for sacrifices and the Laver. Priest and Levites performed their daily duties of burning offerings here. The curtains around the

⁴⁴ Motyer, “Exodus.”, p.235.

⁴⁵ Douglas, J. D., and Merrill Chapin Tenney. *New International Bible Dictionary*, p. 545.

courtyard marked the external dimensions of the Tabernacle. “Even more significant, the single entrance to the courtyard was wide—some 30 feet wide! There may be only one door. But that door is wide and welcoming. There’s room for whosoever will to come”.⁴⁶

FURNITURE IN THE TABERNACLE

Not only were the divisions of the tent important to the work of God among his people, but the furnishings were critical to the fulfillment of its purposes. Each of these items was going to be incorporated into the Temple that Solomon would build some four hundred years later. These furnishings will also play a part in the symbolism of the kingdom/Church Jesus establishes.

THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Central to the Tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant. “The ark was instructed to be two and a half cubits (approximately 3.75 feet) long, one and a half cubits (2.25 feet) wide, and one and a half cubits tall. While no weight is listed in the Bible, the ark has been estimated to weigh as much as 288 pounds (Derby, “The Gold of the Ark,” 253–56).”⁴⁷ The contents included the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded. Later the Philistines would add golden tumors before they returned it to Israel.

The Ark was present when Joshua crossed the Jordan and was carried into battle on a few occasions. Once it fell into the hands of the Philistines.

⁴⁶ Richards, Lawrence O. 1991. *The Bible Reader’s Companion*. Electronic ed. Wheaton: Victor Books, p. 69.

⁴⁷ Sarlo, Daniel, and John T. Swann. 2016. “Ark of the Covenant.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The lid of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat. This was constructed with Cherubim whose wings pointed toward one another. “The mercy seat represented Yahweh’s throne on earth, and His presence resided there.”⁴⁸ It was here that blood for the atonement of sins was sprinkled. “The ark of the covenant of God, with its mercy seat, or place of atonement, overspread by the two cherubim, was the most intimate of all the expressions of God’s nearness to his people.”⁴⁹

THE TABLE OF BREAD OF PRESENCE

Just outside the Most Holy Place was the Table. On the Table were twelve loaves of unleavened bread. A priest would enter the Holy Place each week and refresh the bread, eating the old bread and replacing it with new. The priest did so “to commune with God and enjoy his hospitality on Israel’s behalf (Lev 24:8).”⁵⁰

THE LAMPSTAND

A seven-branched lampstand also stood in the Holy Place. The stand was opposite the Table, “the base of which branched out into seven shafts holding almond-blossom-shaped lamps. Almond blossoms, petals, and calyxes (the green whorls of flowers) ornamented each branch.”⁵¹ The lights of the stand were to continually burn. There is some debate as to the meaning of the stand. “Jewish interpreters see in the menorah a symbol of the chosen people, hammered out of the seed of Abraham, intended to serve as a tree of light, calling mankind back to Eden and

⁴⁸ Barry, John D., David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder, eds. 2016. “Mercy Seat.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴⁹ Kaiser, Walter C. 2009. *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academics, p 86.

⁵⁰ NIV Archaeological Study Bible. 2005. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 153.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

God's tree of life."⁵² Others have a different idea. "The arboreal design and floral adornment of the lampstand, which was kept perpetually burning recalled the burning bush through which God manifested himself to Moses."⁵³ Others simply note that there were no windows, and the room needed a source of light.

ALTAR OF INCENSE

Prayer was a focus of the Holy Place, and an altar was dedicated to those prayers. It stood before the curtain which separated the two rooms. "Priests were to burn a special blend of incense on the altar twice daily, and atonement was made over the altar annually (Exod 30:10)."⁵⁴ This altar played an important part in the service offered by the High Priest. "On this altar, sweet spices were continually burned with fire taken from the brazen altar. The morning and the evening services were commenced by the high priest offering incense on this altar. The burning of the incense was a type of prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8; 8:3, 4)."⁵⁵

THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

In the Courtyard, outside the inner chambers was a large altar for sacrifice or burnt offering. This was a hollow box, covered with bronze. It had four horns, one on each corner. It stood on a mound of dirt or stone to be higher than other objects in the Courtyard. "Moses was as specifically instructed as to the construction and consecration of the Altar as of any thing else

⁵² Richards, Lawrence O. *The Bible Reader's Companion*, p. 69.

⁵³ Archaeological Bible Study Bible, p. 153.

⁵⁴ Faithlife, LLC. 2023. "Incense Altars." Logos Bible Study. Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Factbook*. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, LLC.

⁵⁵ Easton, M. G. 1893. In *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature*, 34. New York: Harper & Brothers, p. 34.

connected with the Tabernacle or its worship, and from these divine instructions we learn what was the design and intent of the altar in the worship of God, as then ordained so specifically and minutely.”⁵⁶

The altar’s purpose was:

- (1) the place to which the people brought their offerings to God;
- (2) the place at which reconciliation was made for sin;
- (3) the place on which the parts of the sacrifices which belonged to God were consumed by fire.

Here, at the altar, were the victims slain; around the altar the atoning blood was poured or sprinkled; in the case of the sin offering, the blood was smeared upon the horns: with live coals from the altar did the priest replenish his censer when he went in to burn incense before the Lord. On this altar was laid the daily burnt-offering, together with the "sacrifices of righteousness," "the burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering" (Psalm 51:19), by which the people expressed their consecration to God. Here were consumed the fat and choice parts of the peace-offerings, etc.⁵⁷

This altar was the continuation of the altars first used by the Patriarchs for their worship, sacrifice, and receiving of covenants and promises. The Patriarchs’ altars were not for the atonement of sin, however. That would be the role of the altars in the Tabernacle and Temple. The Patriarch’s altars were not located in any specific place, but places where God met them.

THE BRONZE LAVER

As the priests entered the Tabernacle to perform their work, they came to and through the bath.

The bronze laver was for Aaron and his sons (the priests) to wash their hands and feet before they entered the Tabernacle, “so that they will not die” (Exodus 30:20). The priests also had to wash their hands and their feet before they approached the altar with a food offering (verse 21). God declared that this was to be a statute forever to them. The

⁵⁶ Christopher, H. 1876. *The Remedial System; or, Man and His Redeemer*. Restoration Reprint Library. Joplin: College Press, p. 118.

⁵⁷ Orr, J. “The Brazen Altar and Court of the Tabernacle” *biblehub.com*. (Accessed November 9, 2023).

washing of the priests was to be observed by Aaron and his descendants in all ages, as long as their priesthood lasted.⁵⁸

All these furnishings served the purpose which God ordained. He wanted to be present with his people. “To give a definite external form to the covenant concluded with His people, and construct a visible bond of fellowship in which He might manifest Himself to the people and they might draw near to Him as their God, Jehovah told Moses that the Israelites were to erect Him a sanctuary, that He might dwell in the midst of them (Ex. 25:8).”⁵⁹

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD

A final key element to the Tabernacle was those who were to serve as priests and their assistants.

Who was to offer the sacrifice? Can any one do it? . . . From Adam to Moses the person and functions of the priesthood were not so well defined as under the Jewish institution. During this period of more than two thousand years, religious worship was confined to the individual and the family. At the first, the father necessarily discharged the functions of the priesthood and was consequently the priest of the family. After him came the first born, or eldest son, and so it continued until the priesthood of Aaron.⁶⁰

Aaron and his sons were chosen to hold the office of priest. Members of their larger family, the Levites, served as helpers and assistants, supporting the priestly duties. “It was the priests in the Old Testament who approached God, as intermediaries between God and humankind: they prayed, offered, sacrificed, and purified the whole people. God’s commandment was transmitted to them, and thence to the whole of Israel, and they were to be pure and clean

⁵⁸ “What Was the Significance of the Bronze Laver?” 2002-2003. Got Questions Ministries. www.gotquestions.org. (Accessed November 21, 2023).

⁵⁹ Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*, V. 1, p. 427.

⁶⁰ Christopher, H. *The Remedial System*, p. 119.

(Levit. 11).”⁶¹ Not all Levites served in the same capacity. There were divisions within the tribe based on which family a Levite was born.

A threefold organization is discernible: (1) Aaron and his sons were priests in the sense, part of the family of Kohath. (2) The middle echelon included all the other Kohathites, who had certain privileges in carrying the most sacred parts of the Tabernacle (Num 3:27-32; 4:4-15; 7:9). (3) The bottom echelon comprised the families of Gershon and Merari, who had lesser duties (3:21-26, 33-37). Only the priest had the right to minister at the altar and to enter the sanctuary (Exod 28:1; 29:9; Num 3:10, 38; 4:15, 19-20; 18:1-7; 25:10-13). Certain Levites, particularly Asaph, became musicians and probably wrote some of the Psalms (1 Chro 6:39, 43; 15:16ff.; 16:4ff.; 25:1-9; Pss. 50, 73-83).⁶²

CONCLUSION

As Israel moved from being a large family that entered Egypt to learning how to be a nation, God provided the Laws and institutions necessary for them to function. God desired to be with his people. Before the Fall that was the natural state. “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” (Gen 3:8-9, NIV84). Though shattered by the Fall, God still had some presence with his people. He interacted with Cain, Abel, and Lamech. He walked with Enoch. He instructed Noah on building an ark. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had special relationships involving promises and covenants. God would become known as their God. Yet, beginning with Moses and the birth of a nation, a different way to have a presence was established. The Tabernacle with its sections, furnishings, and special priests would become the primary contact point for Israel. This structure was temporary and would serve until Solomon built him a Temple.

⁶¹ Sahinoglou, Grigoris. 2023. “Priesthood in the Old and New Testament.” myocn.net/priesthood-in-the-old-and-new-testaments. (Accessed November 12, 2023).

⁶² Douglas, J. D. and Tenney, Merrill C. *International Bible Dictionary*, p. 346.

THE TEMPLE

Israel built its Tabernacle and moved from forty years of desert-dwelling to taking possession of the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses died. Aaron died. The book of Joshua made a few references to the Tabernacle.⁶³ The treasures from Jericho were placed in its treasury (Joshua 6:24). The book of Judges did not refer to the holy place, altar, or Tabernacle. First Samuel referenced the Tabernacle in chapters 1 through 3 in the call of Samuel. It was as though the Tabernacle lost meaning and importance for most of that period. As noted earlier, it most likely took on a more permanent form when set up in Shiloh and Nob⁶⁴ for example.

Then entered David. One of the first things David did was attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. “Let us bring the Ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul” (1 Chr. 13:3, NIV).⁶⁵ David went on to defeat the Philistines, and his fame grew, and nations feared him. So, again, he determined to bring the Ark to Jerusalem and prepare a tent for it. The Levites carried in the Ark with great joy and fanfare as it entered the city. “As the Ark of the covenant of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her

⁶³ NRSV has two references to ‘Tabernacle,’ both in chapter 22. The Tent of Meeting appeared twice, both in chapter 18 (here the Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) was set up in Shilo. The Ark was used in the crossing of the Jordan and in the capture of Jericho. In chapter 7, Joshua was before the Ark to determine in sin of Achan at Jericho. The final reference to the Ark was in chapter 8 when the covenant is renewed at Mt. Ebal. An altar was also built but it was not the Altar of the Tabernacle.

⁶⁴ Shiloh is mentioned in 1 Samuel 1-3 as Elkanah and Hannah go to worship. And David went to Nob for food and Goliath’s sword.

⁶⁵ However, they carried the Ark on a cart and not on poles. Uzzah died when he sought to steady it. David was angry and abandoned the effort for the time being.

heart” (15:29, NIV). And so, YHWH took up residence in the Holy City. People returned to their homes and life returned to normal. The Presence, the Name, had a new home.

“After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the Ark of God remains in a tent’” (2 Sam 7:1, CJB). With these words, David embarked on a dream to build a house for YHWH. It was not to be, for God had another builder in mind, his son, Solomon.

David expressed his desire and reason for the erecting of a house for the Lord. As David’s life was coming to an end, he called the leaders of Israel and shared his vision. He gave supplies for the construction Solomon was to undertake. These leaders would add generously to those supplies offered by David. Then David offered a prayer before the community (1 Chr 29:1-9, CJB).

“Blessed be you, *ADONAI*, the God of Isra’el our father, forever and ever. ¹¹ Yours, *ADONAI*, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. The kingdom is yours, *ADONAI*; and you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Riches and honor come from you, you rule everything, in your hand is power and strength, you have the capacity to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ Therefore, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name (1 Chronicles 29:10-13, CJB).

The joy and excitement expressed by all involved spoke to the purpose the Temple was to serve. The Tabernacle/Temple served four basic purposes. 1. It was to be a place for the “Name” or Glory of YHWH to dwell. 2. It would serve as the principal place of sacrifice and atonement.⁶⁶ 3. Blood would be sprinkled on the altar, the people, the Ark, and the Mercy Seat. 4. The Temple was to be a place of worship. This worship involved sacrifices being made as

⁶⁶ Through the life of the Temple, Israel will be challenged to make the Temple the sacrifice place. The Temple period saw sacrifices being made on the High Places in Israel. This practice rarely disappeared until the Babylonian Captivity.

thanks offerings to God. Also, there was to be singing, praying, and other forms of worship.

Communication was to be key from the Temple. Prophets would often prophesy within the Temple. These were not always true prophets, delivering the true word of God, but many were. Teachers would teach. On several occasions, the Torah would be read (2 Kings 22).

SOLOMON BUILT HIS TEMPLE

Four years after becoming king and preparing supplies and people to do the work, Solomon began building his Temple.⁶⁷ Four hundred and eighty years after leaving Egypt the Temple was started. He completed the project in seven years. Solomon patterned the Temple to the specifications given by God to Moses⁶⁸ and his father David's plans. Both 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles went into great detail describing the construction. The dimensions of the foundation, the height of objects, and the covering of most items with gold were carefully listed. It was truly a grand Temple.

“Israel believed that God made his dwelling in a house, *bayit* . . ., which was an assurance of his steadfast love. . . . The house of Yahweh is always called the Temple, which probably resembled the ground plan of a rectangular house type.”⁶⁹

The furnishings within the Temple were key to its purpose and operation. Some, like the

⁶⁷ First Kings speaks of the challenge Solomon had to establish himself over the challenges of his brother. Second Chronicles speaks of him going to offer sacrifice on a High Place (because there is no Temple) and asking God for wisdom in leading his people. His first order of business seems to be planning and preparing for the construction project.

⁶⁸ Solomon's Temple was larger and grander, but the basic layout of the Courtyard, Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place were the same as the Tabernacle instructions given to Moses.

⁶⁹ Longman, Tremper, III, and Peter Enns, eds. 2008. In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*. Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; InterVarsity Press, p. 21.

Ark, were originals from the old Tabernacle constructed in the wilderness. Others, such as the Altar of Sacrifice, were rebuilt on a grander scale. The old Altar Bezalel built “was five cubits square and three high. Solomon’s will be twenty square and ten high.”⁷⁰

Once all was prepared, the Ark of the Covenant was brought in. It was installed in the Most Holy Place along with the wings of the cherubim.⁷¹ Once the Ark was in place the Glory arrived.

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions.¹² All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets.¹³ The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang:

“He is good;
his love endures forever.”

Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud,¹⁴ and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God (2 Chr 5:11-14, NIV).

Solomon then blessed the people assembled. In the blessing, Solomon noted that this place was built “for the Name of the LORD, the God of Israel.” What followed was a dedication prayer. In it, he acknowledged that the Temple could in no way contain God. Yet, his Presence was there. It was a place of prayer. It was a place where oaths could be made before the Altar.

⁷⁰ Wilcock, Michael. 1987. *The Message of Chronicles: One Church, One Faith, One Lord*. Edited by J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, p. 137.

⁷¹ The Chroniclers made note that the poles to carry the Ark were left in place. This would preserve the holiness as human hands would not touch the Ark. Also, perhaps they made note of them, given the death of Uzzah. The Ark was long gone by the time they were recording this account.

When Israel failed and turned their backs to God and battles were lost, they could come here to be restored. It would be a place of forgiveness. At the end of the prayer, fire came from heaven and consumed the offerings and sacrifices. Then the Glory filled the Temple. The celebration went on for seven days to celebrate the Altar and seven more. Then they went home “joyful and glad of heart for the good things the Lord had done for David and Solomon and for his people” (7:10, CJB).

The Lord appeared to Solomon and said:

I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there. “As for you, if you walk before me as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, “You shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel.” But if you turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now so imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them—that is why he brought all this disaster on them’” (7:12-22, CJB).⁷²

From this moment on, God’s Presence, the sacrifices and offerings, worship events, and celebrations, among other things were connected to both the Temple and Jerusalem. “From this

⁷² This will create challenging interpretation when Christian Nationalism usurps Israel’s covenant with God for one of their own. This covenant and promise from God to Solomon was for Israel. “My people” at this point was Israel. This nationalism is not limited to America but has a long history in Europe and elsewhere. See Volle, A. "Christian nationalism." Encyclopedia Britannica, June 16, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-nationalism> for a definition and history.

time, the claim begins to be made that the presence of God is to be found decisively in the Jerusalem temple. This idea is reflected in the main biblical texts, especially in the Psalms, which speak specifically of ‘Zion’ as the Lord’s chosen habitation.”⁷³ The prophets also associated the Presence of God and the Temple. “Every prophet considers both the Temple and Zion as the dwelling place of God.”⁷⁴

The words of YHWH to Solomon proved to be prophetic. Israel struggled mightily with the keeping of their side of the covenant. Their ability lasted only this generation. Solomon himself was unable to maintain the covenant. While ignored by the writer of Chronicles, the writer of Kings recorded that he had a thousand wives and concubines. These led him astray and he started following the gods of these women. He built an altar for Ashtoreth and Molech. He did not follow his father’s path and did evil (1 Kings 11). As a result, most of his kingdom would be ripped away from him. Because of the promise made to his father, David, two tribes would remain in his kingdom and keep his family on the throne, while the other ten would rebel. Upon his death, Rehoboam and Jeroboam divided the kingdom into Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Israel would abandon the Temple in Jerusalem in favor of their own. The Temple in Jerusalem would serve Judah.

The Psalms shared the love some had for the Temple. The beginning of Psalm 84 was an example.

- ¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD Almighty!
- ² My soul yearns, even faints,

⁷³ Badcock, Gary D. 2009. *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today*. Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, npn.

⁷⁴ Pedersen, Johannes. 1926. *Israel, Its Life and Culture*. Volume II. London: Oxford University Press, p 155.

for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God (84:1, NIV).

However, Solomon's failure would be the pattern Judah would follow. There was a mixture of good kings and wicked kings. At times the Temple fell into disrepair, was plundered by enemies, and housed foreign idols. Other kings, Josiah and Hezekiah, and others would embark on rebuilding and repairing it. Finally, God had enough, and judgment day came.

Habakkuk complained to God that he wasn't doing anything to save Judah from itself (1:2-4). God's answer was startling. He was about to. What he was going to do was send the Babylonians as executioners of his divine judgment (1:5-11). Habakkuk was horrified. They were worse than Judah. God responded that he would deal with them. Judgment was on its way. There were several stages and deportations involved.

At one point Ezekiel witnessed a vision with a profound impact on the Temple. "Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim" (Ezekiel 10:18, NIV). The Glory (the Presence) of Adonai left the Temple. It had entered the Tabernacle millennia ago. It came to the Temple the day Solomon dedicated it. And now, one of the primary purposes of the Temple was gone. The Presence had left. Shortly after this, Babylon would destroy the Temple. Nebuchadnezzar hauled off the furniture and implements. Some items, such as the bronze pillars, were broken into pieces to be taken. Other items remained whole, taken to Babylon, and kept there.

One item disappeared forever. The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat were never to be seen again.⁷⁵ No one knows where it went. It was simply lost. This meant that the Presence

⁷⁵ There are all kinds of stories as to where it is. Some suggest Nebuchadnezzar took it to Babylon where it was destroyed (Eastman, p. 56). The Apocrypha says Jeremiah took it to hide in a cave on Mt Nebo. (Woudstra, Marten H. 1988. "Ark of the Covenant." In *Baker*

of God was forever manifested in different ways. And in a very real sense, the visible Presence was lost forever. The light that rested above the Mercy Seat was extinguished, never to be relit.

For decades, Judah would be without its place of sacrifice and atonement.

Communication was now in the form of prophetic voices apart from the Temple. Judah was unable to hold its religious festivals. Judah and those from Israel who survived would have to remake themselves and prepare for the building of a replacement.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

As a metaphor for the Church, this story contains several parts. On one hand, as the Temple, the church becomes the place where God is present. The Church bears his name. It is a place of worship and atonement.⁷⁶ The Church proclaims God's message. To its priesthood, it offers a place of service.

The meticulous care taken in the construction of the Temple is worth noting as well. Those assigned the task of building God's House did so with attention to detail. As the community builds its Temple, the Church, similar care and attention to detail needs to be taken. There needs to be a strong, true foundation. The construction is an important lesson for the Church.

On the other hand, there is a warning here. Israel could not keep the covenant God had made with them. The Church has a New Covenant, remembered in the body and blood of Jesus.

Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1:169–71.) A monastery in Ethiopia claims to be in possession. As will be demonstrated in later chapters, it is gone because God had no further need of it.

⁷⁶ The atonement offered is not in the form of animals sacrificed on an altar. The atonement the Church offers is in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He is the once-for-all sacrifice.

There is always the danger that the community of believers wanders away following their idols and their sins. That warning will play itself out in a study of 1 and 2 Corinthians below.

THE SECOND TEMPLE

Solomon's Temple was destroyed in 587/6 BCE⁷⁷ along with Jerusalem's defenses and palaces. Judah found themselves living in a foreign land. While false prophets like Hananiah promised a quick return,⁷⁸ Jeremiah told them to make a life there. He wrote a letter to the exiles:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” ⁸Yes, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. ⁹They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the LORD.

¹⁰This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you (Jeremiah 29:4-12, NIV84).

When those seventy years were complete Babylon was overthrown by Cyrus the Persian. In his first year, God moved him to release the exiles and allow them to return home. “Anyone of his (the Lord, the God of heaven) people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in

⁷⁷ Redditt, Paul L. 2016. “Temple, Zerubbabel's.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

⁷⁸ Hananiah's prophetic word, “Within two years I will bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD's house, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the exiles from Judah who went to Babylon, says the LORD, for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon” (Jer. 28: 3-4, NRSV).

Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:3, NIV). With those words, exiles began to return to Judah.⁷⁹ Along with them, they brought back some of the vessels from the Temple taken by the Babylonians.

The foundation of the second Temple was laid in 535 BCE⁸⁰. There was much fanfare and public excitement (3:11). “But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid” (3:12, NIV84). The enemies of Judah and Benjamin came to Zerubbabel and asked to assist in the building. His answer was, “You shall have no part with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us” (4:3b, NRSV).

Haggai and Zechariah both prophesied during the construction of the second Temple. “Haggai rallied the Hebrew people to rebuild the sanctuary (Hag. 1:14). Zechariah further encouraged the building project (Zech. 6:9–12) and witnessed the vision of cleansing and investiture for the High Priest Joshua who would oversee temple worship (Zech. 3; 6:9–15)”.⁸¹ The plan to build was frustrated for a generation. The exiles lost enthusiasm and hope during the period when construction was stopped. Bribes were paid and a letter was written to then King Artaxerxes (Ezra 4). The King ordered a halt to the work which continued until Darius was king. A request for permission to continue the work was sent along with a plea for assistance. After a

⁷⁹ Ezra records the number, “The entire assembly numbered 42,360—not including their male and female slaves, of whom there were 7,337 (2:64-65).

⁸⁰ “In the second year after their return, the foundations for the temple were laid (Ezra 3:8).” Cerone, Jacob N. 2016. “Postexilic Period.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

⁸¹ Hill, Andrew E. 2012. *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*. Edited by David G. Firth. Vol. 28. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, p. 37.

search of the Persian archives, it was determined that Cyrus had indeed commissioned the construction of the Temple and Darius granted the request to begin again, along with financial and material assistance. Finally, under the rule of King Darius, it was completed in 516/5 BCE.⁸²

In completing the construction and rededicating it, God's Name returned to Jerusalem and the Temple.⁸³ The prophets called the people to repentance and a new commitment to the covenant they shared with God. Judah now had a place of worship, sacrifice, and communication. Feasts such as Passover, Trumpets, and Tabernacles could be held. The post-exile prophets would call Judah back to the covenant and promise of God. One expectation that did not come to fruition was the expectation of the beginning of the messianic age. With the Temple completed and the last prophets calling Judah to repentance and holiness, the Old Testament ended.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The reconstruction of the Temple was a monumental event. The Temple was intended by God as a place to draw and gather the *goyim* to himself. Israel, however, saw themselves as "God's People," and forgot that as such, they had a message to deliver. Through their obedience to the covenant and God's blessing poured out upon them, the nations of the world would see and be drawn to him. But Israel was not obedient, and the nations were called upon to execute God's punishment.

The Church, as seen in the metaphor of the new Temple, has a similar assignment. Jesus commanded in Matthew 28 to make disciples of the nations. John 3 tells us that God loves the

⁸² Cerone, Jacob N. 2016. "Postexilic Period." In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

⁸³ Except as noted above, the Ark and Mercy Seat were lost, and the Shekinah was no longer present in the Second Temple.

world. The need to construct the Second Temple should be a reminder that the Church needs to keep the world in its focus.

INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD

However, the end of the Old Testament story was not the end of the Temple story. The period from the end of Malachi to the Gospels was the Second Temple period or four-hundred silent years. This was called this, “because it was a span where no new prophets were raised and God revealed nothing new to the Jewish people.”⁸⁴

The period started with the return of the exiles from Babylon and the reconstruction of the Temple by Zerubbabel in 516 BCE.⁸⁵ The ending depends upon the scholar. Some see it end with the remodeling of the Temple by Herod the Great that began in 20 BCE. Others established the period through the destruction of Herod’s Temple by Titus in 70 CE. “Primary sources for the period are the deuterocanonical literature (mostly 1–2 Maccabees) and the works of the Jewish historian Josephus (AD 37–100). The Dead Sea Scrolls provide some early contemporary manuscripts of the deuterocanonical literature.”⁸⁶ This period was divided into several different eras: the Persian Era, the Greek Era, the Maccabean Era, and the Roman Era.

PERSIAN ERA

Little information is known from the first era. “Thanks to King Cyrus of Persia, the Jews were in their own land (559–529 BC; Ezra 1:1–4) and worshiping freely in the reconstructed

⁸⁴ Wikipedia contributors, "Intertestamental period," Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Intertestamental_period&oldid=1118353062 (accessed October 11, 2023).

⁸⁵ Klippenstein, Rachel. 2016. “Second Temple Literature.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

⁸⁶ McCune, Lorne A. 2016. “Second Temple Period.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*,

temple behind the completed wall of Jerusalem (sanctioned by Darius, 540–486 BC; Ezra 6:1–12).”⁸⁷ The new Temple was patterned after Solomon’s though smaller and not as ornate. A new Altar was constructed and under the direction of the post-exile prophets, an effort to establish the function and holiness of the structure was begun. The prophetic role had ended, and the administration of the area fell to a series of governors. The High priest assumed the responsibility for the Temple and its workings.

There is one fact of which we must never lose sight. From the Return onwards the history of the Jews is essentially that of their religion. The returned exiles of Jerusalem found their sole motive of existence under the Persian rule in its preservation and in the reorganization of the cult. The Temple became the focus of their whole life.⁸⁸

That would all change with the arrival of the Greeks.

GREEK ERA

Alexander came to power in 336 BCE. With the assignation of his father, Philip II of Macedon, Alexander took command and fulfilled a dream to unite Greece and Asia under Greek culture with a common language.⁸⁹ In 331 BCE he defeated the Persians and took over Judah. He died in 323 BCE. As there was no planned succession, five generals and friends fought to divide the kingdom. The Seleucids took over Syria (Asian Turkey) and the Ptolemies in Egypt. The Holy Land was caught in the middle. Greek influences began seeping into the region. From 301-198, the Ptolemies had control. Again, little data was available from the period. In 198-163, the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Guignebert, Charles. 1959. *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*. New Hyde Park: University Books, p. 48.

⁸⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the Greek and Maccabean eras are drawn from class notes. Lowery, Robert. “Jewish Backgrounds.” *New Testament Foundations*, Jan 16, 23, 30. 1990. Lincoln Christian Seminary. Lecture.

Seleucids influenced the region. Several rulers named Antiochus governed during this period. The most pertinent to the Temple was Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He was a ruler who outlawed Jewish practices in an attempt to Hellenize Judah. On Kisley 25, 168 he came to Jerusalem with the following decree:

1. The Temple at Jerusalem was now a temple of Zeus.
2. Jewish practice must cease. He demanded:
 - a. Those who practiced Jewish law were to be executed (No Sabbath, no circumcision).
 - b. To possess a copy of the Law was punishable by death.
3. Worship of heathen gods was required.
4. Leaders were to be sold into slavery.
5. He erected a fortress, “Acra” near the temple.

The decree elicited three responses:

1. Capitulation.
2. Passive resistance. Continue Jewish practices but in private. This was when the Hasidim were first mentioned. Possibly the forerunners of the Pharisees.
3. Open defiance of the edict – in the rural areas there was guerilla warfare.⁹⁰

The worst atrocity Antiochus ordered was the sacrifice of a swine on the altar in the Temple. This event was one of the catalysts for the Maccabean Rebellion, led by Mattathias and his five sons: “John, who was called Gaddis, and Simon, who was called Matthes, and Judas, who was called Maccabeus, and Eleazar, who was called Auran, and Jonathan, who was called Apphus.”⁹¹ This led to the Hasmonean dynasty. It “was a ruling dynasty of Judea and surrounding regions during the Hellenistic times of the Second Temple period . . . , from c. 140 BCE to 37 BCE. Between c. 140 and c. 116 BCE the dynasty ruled Judea semi-autonomously in the Seleucid Empire, and from roughly 110 BCE, with the empire disintegrating, Judea gained

⁹⁰ Lowery, Robert. “Jewish Backgrounds.” New Testament Foundations, Jan 16, 1990. Lincoln Christian Seminary. Lecture.

⁹¹ Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. 1987. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* Book 12. Peabody: Hendrickson, p. 324.

further autonomy.”⁹² Temple practices resumed with the Hasmonean leader serving as both king and High Priest as they were from the priestly family.⁹³ During this time there was a struggle between the Sadducees and Pharisees for political power and influence. “For all the critique of the temple, in the final analysis, Yahweh takes pleasure in this place, and it is a source of delight for those who assemble there (Pss. 43:3–4; 65:4; 84:1).”⁹⁴

This Temple would serve as the longest standing Temple, longer than Solomon’s and the one remodeled by Herod. Herod sought to demonstrate his splendor and piety by remodeling the Second Temple.⁹⁵

HEROD’S TEMPLE

“The Temple of Jerusalem was, for the Jews, not only the hearth of their very life as a nation but the most sacred place in the world, the gateway of the next: for here only might sacrifices be offered to the One God.”⁹⁶ The Second Temple, which was not as spectacular as Solomon’s,⁹⁷ had undergone harsh treatment in its long life. Antiochus has pillaged it. The

⁹² Wikipedia contributors, "Hasmonean dynasty," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hasmonean_dynasty&oldid=1184215837 (accessed Oct 14, 2023).

⁹³ Guignebert, Charles, *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*, p. 56.

⁹⁴ Petrotta, Anthony J. 1996. “Temple.” In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., 761. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁹⁵ Perowne, Stewart. 1956. *The Life and Times of Herod the Great*. New York: Abingdon Press, p. 129.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁹⁷ “So said Herod as he prepared to embark on his construction project, ‘Our fathers, indeed, when they were returned from Babylon, built this temple to God Almighty, yet does it want sixty cubits of its largeness in altitude; for so much did that first temple which Solomon built exceed this temple,’” Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. “Antiquities, 15.11.2.38.” *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged.*”

Maccabeans repaired it and rededicated it. There were five hundred years of natural decay. It had also been under attack numerous times. “It was damaged during Pompey’s siege in 63; ten years later Crassus pillaged it; it had suffered further damage during the siege by Herod and Sosius.”⁹⁸ It needed to be repaired. Herod sought to return it to its former, Solomon-like, glory. He did so, seeking to curry favor from the Jews.⁹⁹

In 20/19 BCE Herod began construction. It continued until 12/11 or 10 BCE. The elements of Solomon’s Temple were present, and the inner court where Jewish men were allowed to enter continued to exist. It contained the sacrifice Altar and the building containing the Holy Place and Most Holy Place. Furnishings from the Second Temple were retained.

In addition to the Inner Court, there were four more courts. The first of these was the Priest’s Court. It was accessible only by members of the priesthood. “Its level of sanctity was higher than that of the Court of Israel. Ritually pure Israelites were permitted entry into the Priests’ Court only to perform specific Temple duties, such as those related to offerings they bring: the laying of hands, confession, and slaughtering.”¹⁰⁰ Several important items were found there. They included:

the huge altar of burnt offerings, made of unhewn stone, for animal sacrifices (*m. Middot* 3:4; Mazar, *Mountain*, 116); a laver (large basin) with water for hand and foot washing; the slaughtering places for sacrifices, with six rows of four rings in which the heads of the animals were placed.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Perowne, Stewart, *The Life and Times of Herod the Great*, p. 129.

⁹⁹ Easton, M. G. “Temple, Herod”.

¹⁰⁰ “The Inner Court.” templeinstitute.org/illustrated-tour-the-court-of-israel.

¹⁰¹ Hauser, Alan J., and Earl Kellett. 2016. “Temple, Herod’s.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

The second, closest to the inner court was the Court of Israel or the Court of Men. There was a platform on the end of the court, “upon which the Levites would stand and sing. Representatives of the tribes of Israel would also stand in the Court of Israel to witness the daily *Tamid* offerings. Israelites were permitted entry for prayer or prostration.”¹⁰² This platform was also used by Levites to read scripture and sing psalms. Only Jewish men who had been through purification were admitted. This court existed in previous Temples.

The third court was the Court of Women. It too had existed in previous temples. It was a place where women had access to parts of the Temple. It was used by both men and women as a gathering place.¹⁰³ Pilgrims made special use on specific occasions.¹⁰⁴ Access did have limits. “Only Jews who were not impure from exposure to death were permitted entry to the Women's Court by Rabbinical decree. However according to the Torah, the level of sanctity of this court is the same as the outer court of the Temple Mount, and even a corpse could be brought inside.”¹⁰⁵

The most distant court from the Inner Court was the Outer Court or the Court of the Gentiles. It was the closest place a non-Jew would be allowed to come. “Gentiles were likely allowed into this court because proselytizing was a common practice during the first century AD (e.g., Acts 10:22). The Jewish community wanted to welcome those who came to the temple not as Jews, but as “God-fearing” Gentiles interested in Judaism.”¹⁰⁶ It was suggested that Herod

¹⁰² “The Court of Israel.” *Temple Institute*. templeinstitute.org/illustrated-tour-the-court-of-israel/.

¹⁰³ Hauser, Alan J., and Earl Kellett. 2016. “Temple, Herod’s.” *Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

¹⁰⁴ “The Inner Court.” *Temple Institute*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Hauser, Alan J., and Earl Kellett. 2016. “Temple, Herod.” *Lexham Bible Dictionary*

made sure this court, available to all, would show the grandeur of his work.

CONCLUSION

Be it Solomon's Grand Temple, the Second Temple built during Ezra's time by Zerubbabel, the remodeled work of the Maccabean era, or Herod's makeover, the Temple still served the main purposes. It would be the place of the Presence (though without the Ark, Mercy Seat, or Shekinah), sacrifice (atonement and salvation), offering of thanks and praise, proclamation, and access.¹⁰⁷ With the Court of Gentiles being a place where proselytes and God-fearers were welcome, access to the kingdom of God was slowly being extended to the *goyim*. Israel found its focus and existence in the Temple. "Five centuries characterized by three great facts: (1) violation of the Temple during the attempt to impose Hellenization; (2) Persecution which followed under Antiochus Epiphanius; and (3) Improvements due to Herod the Great."¹⁰⁸

It is this place, for all its good and bad, that Paul and Peter used as a metaphor for the Church. They intended to highlight the good things. The times and ways that the people used their Temple to accomplish their purpose. It also serves as a warning to the Church to be ever vigilant to take care of the new House of God.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

One challenge when studying the Temple is what to do with Ezekiel 40 and following. In this pericope, Ezekiel had several visions.

¹⁰⁷ See Joseph Greene. 2018. "Did God Dwell in the Second Temple? Clarifying the Relationship Between Theophany and Temple Dwelling." *Journal of Evangelical Society*. 61.4, pp. 767-784.

¹⁰⁸ Strauss, James D. 1990. "Kingdom of God-Eternal Life-Lordship." *Foundations of Theology*. Lincoln Christian Seminary. Class Handout.

He brought me, in visions of God, to the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. When he brought me there, a man was there, whose appearance shone like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. The man said to me, “Mortal, look closely and listen attentively, and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you; declare all that you see to the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 40:2, NRSV)

What followed was a description of a Temple. It contained dimensions, walls, rooms, and gates, all in detail. But where does this Temple fit in the story of Israel? There are four popular interpretations of the passage that seek to explain where it fits.

The first interpretation is called the literal prophetic. According to this view, the described temple was a blueprint for the Second Temple that Zerubbabel built. When the Jews returned from Babylon this was what they were to build. “In defense of this theory it must be said that as Ezekiel was confidently expecting a literal return from exile, it would not be surprising for him, as a priestly as well as a prophetic figure, to outline the shape of the new temple that would surely need to be rebuilt in Jerusalem.”¹⁰⁹ The problem with this version is that, while detailed, it does not provide a complete plan. Much was left to a builder’s imagination. “Moreover, this whole vision (40–48) must be taken as a unity and there are elements which are so impracticable that a completely literal interpretation of the vision must be ruled out (e.g. the siting of the temple on a very high mountain, 40:2; the impossible source and course of the river of life, 47:1–12; the unreality of the boundaries of the tribes which could never be worked out geographically in hilly Israel).”¹¹⁰

A second interpretation is symbolic. This one looks to a Christian view where the Church

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, John B. 1969. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 22. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pp 245-246.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 246.

is the fulfillment of this visionary temple. That Ezekiel appears prominently in Revelation gives credence to this view. The main objection to this view is that it offered no real help to the exiles in Babylon. One of the rules of interpretation is that the original audience needed to understand what was being said and find value in it. That objection suggests that what the exile needed was a new temple. And they eventually would once they were free to return.

Yet, Ezekiel was writing to exiles in Babylon. Their world had been turned upside down. Their king was in chains. Their city was but a ghost of what it had been. And their beloved Temple was gone. All that was valuable was pillaged. Not a stone remained upon another. What they may have needed most was hope. Hope that one day they might go home. Hope that one day their city might be rebuilt. Hope the Presence might return, and the Name might be honored again.

So, God sent a prophet, Ezekiel, with visions. The message was that one day those things were indeed going to happen. God was bringing them the needed hope in the form of a promise. And a Temple was rebuilt, thus the symbolic interpretation has merit. But the vision was more. It was a placeholder. God described a grand Temple but was going to deliver a grander one. It would have a new priesthood and a new purpose. It would have a greater impact, not just on the Jews, but the whole world.

The story of the coming of the Kingdom of God centers on the “Now and Not Yet” theme. The Messiah has come, kind of. There is more to the messianic story than what has been revealed. Christ came, dwelt among us, and revealed his Glory, as John 1 reminds us. He also died for our sins, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God. The story does not end there. The Messiah is returning, bringing the Kingdom to its full completion. The righteous take their place in heaven with God and Jesus (Rev 21-22).

Similarly, the promised temple portrayed in Ezekiel has a now and a not yet component. When Zerubbabel and Ezra rebuilt the Temple, it fulfilled the “now” of Ezekiel’s vision. But the vision is bigger than just that Temple. A not-yet component exists as well. God will bring the promise to completion with a Temple yet to be built, the Church.

God has delivered on every promise that he has made. Often those fulfillments are bigger and better than what was originally promised. As an example of such a promise, a father might promise his child a special road bike when he reaches a given age. When the child turns that age, he is given a motorcycle or car instead. Ezekiel’s Temple was a promised bike. The Church was the delivered Ferrari.¹¹¹ Thus Ezekiel’s Temple was both literal and symbolic.

A third interpretation is a variant of the previous one. This one is held by dispensational premillennialists and others, including some orthodox Jews.¹¹² The Temple described in Ezekiel will be literally built, as described. But since the Second Temple built by Zerubbabel does not match the one described by Ezekiel, a Third Temple must be built in a period yet to come, the Messianic period.

If it follows from this that Old Testament festivals, blood sacrifices, priesthood and worship at a temple are to be reintroduced, after the New Testament revelation of Christ and his finished, fulfilling work,¹¹³ it shows how completely this view misinterprets the significance of Christ’s salvation and how it casts doubt on the consistency of God’s dealings with mankind. But its fault is basically in regarding Ezekiel 40–48 as prophecy

¹¹¹ Later sections will pick up the implications of this interpretation.

¹¹² Articles such as Berkowitz, Adam Eliyahu, “Jews Begin Building Third Temple on Israel Independence Day.” May 6, 2022. www.israel365news.com/352915/jews-begin-building-third-temple-on-israel-independence-day/.

¹¹³ As Scofield’s note on 43:19 implies: ‘Doubtless these offerings will be memorial, looking back to the cross, as the offerings under the old covenant were anticipatory, looking forward to the cross.’ The whole dispensationalist view is given a searching scrutiny in O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 1945. From Taylor, John B., p 247.

and insisting on a literal fulfilment of it, if not in the past then in the future.¹¹⁴

This view sees the fulfillment of any of God's promises that exceed the original as an unfulfilled promise. This is literalism to an extreme. It would be like someone saying to God, 'Thanks for the car, where's my bike?'¹¹⁵ The holders of this interpretation await a new Temple yet to be built. This interpretation is still alive and well.

The final major interpretation is called an apocalyptic work, not a prophetic one. Ezekiel had several apocalyptic features: symbolic creatures, numbers, flying wheels, throne room scenes, etc. This view says that what Ezekiel recorded was a picture of the Messiah and his age.

The vision of the temple was a kind of incarnation of all that God stood for and all that he required and all that he could do for his people in the age that was about to dawn. On this view, which of all the interpretations seems to take the most realistic view of the literary character of the material with which we are dealing, the message of Ezekiel in these chapters may be summarized as follows:

- (a) the perfection of God's plan for his restored people, symbolically expressed in the immaculate symmetry of the temple building;
- (b) the centrality of worship in the new age, its importance being expressed in the scrupulous concern for detail in the observance of its rites;
- (c) the abiding presence of the Lord in the midst of his people;
- (d) the blessings that will flow from God's presence to the barren places of the earth (the river of life);
- (e) the orderly allocation of duties and privileges to all God's people, as shown both in the temple duties and in the apportionment of the land (a theme taken up in Rev. 7:4-8).¹¹⁶

Deciding where this temple fits in the storyline of God's redemptive impacts on what one does with all the temples so far reviewed. If the first interpretation above holds, then the story is over. The second temple, Ezekiel's temple, was built and history moved on until Rome arrived

¹¹⁴ Taylor, John B. 1969. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 22. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, pp. 245-246.

¹¹⁵ This author discussed this idea in Thacker, Bruce. "Premillennialism in Perspective." M.Min. Thesis. Puget Sound Christian College, Edmonds, WA, 1983. Unpublished.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, John B., pp 247-248.

and leveled it again. The second Temple was Ezekiel's Temple, and it was temporary. It served the purpose of replacing Solomon's Temple and a little more.

If the second interpretation is correct, then the vision is fulfilled in the Church's establishment on Pentecost in Acts 2. The Church will then fulfill the prophetic role of the Temple until the Second Coming. Once Christ returns and takes his beloved Church to the New Heaven and New Earth, no Temple will exist and God's Presence will be with his people in a complete way, similar to that of the Garden.

If the third, then the Church does not figure into the vision and the world awaits another. This is a major tenant of Dispensational Premillennialism and other Christian theological positions.¹¹⁷ It is also a position held by some fundamental Jewish groups as well. "Although in mainstream Orthodox Judaism the rebuilding of the Temple is generally left to the coming of the Jewish Messiah and to divine providence, several organizations, generally representing a small minority of Orthodox Jews, have been formed to realize the immediate construction of a Third Temple in present times."¹¹⁸ The Temple Institute, templeinstitute.org ([youtube.com/@TheTempleInstitute](https://www.youtube.com/@TheTempleInstitute)) is an example of the Jewish expectation for a Third Temple. Their Statement of Principles is found at templeinstitute.org/statement-of-principles-2/. Their first principle is "We hope that by doing our part, we can participate in the process that will lead to the Holy Temple becoming a reality once more." Many other groups are listed in a Bing search as well.

If the last interpretation, that Ezekiel is not prophetic at all, fulfills Ezekiel's vision, then

¹¹⁷ Even if this is not the correct interpretation God intended, someone with money and a strong belief might yet build a temple and in the process have a self-fulfilling prophecy.

¹¹⁸ Wikipedia contributors, "Third Temple," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Third_Temple&oldid=1185557417 (accessed December 4, 2023).

a second Temple has nothing to do with the vision and the Temple Zerubbabel built was nice and commanded by God via Cyrus, but disconnected from Ezekiel. That also means that the Church has nothing to do with the vision. This does not affect the metaphor of the Temple and the Church in other passages. It just means that Ezekiel and the Church are not connected as well. Thus, it means that there is no other Temple here on earth nor will there be.

RELATED NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

Before discussing the key Church and Temple passages, several passages concerning the Temple in the New Testament deserve discussion. While not metaphors per se., these passages add to the understanding of the Temple and thus add to how Paul's and Peter's metaphors help in interpreting them as related to the Church. The Temple played a role in the Gospels, Acts, several of Paul's epistles, and the Revelation. This section looks at some of those areas.

JESUS AND THE TEMPLE

THE SYNOPTICS

Several references to the Temple in the Synoptics were incidental. They referenced the location where something happened or the identity of the people such as guards (Temple guards) who were part of the story. There was the woman with two copper coins, the Adversary taking Jesus to the Temple tower during the temptations, and the question of the Temple tax. At Jesus's trial, all three Synoptic writers recorded that false testimony was brought saying Jesus would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days.

Luke offered the first references germane to the subject at hand. Jesus's first interaction with the Temple was when he was eight days old. His parents took him there "for his b'rit-milah, he was given the name Yeshua, which is what the angel had called him before his conception" (2:21b, CJB). Sacrifice was made in accordance with the Law.

While the family was there, Simeon¹¹⁹ saw the child. Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he "would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26, NIV84). He

¹¹⁹ "Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him" (2:25, NRSV).

then took the child and said, “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (2:29-32, NIV84). The keeping of a promise was noted here. Not only had Simeon received a promise that was kept, but the promise was made throughout the Old Testament of a Messiah was kept. Eve was promised that her seed would crush the serpent’s head. Abram was promised his heir would be a blessing to the nations (*goyim*). David was promised an heir eternally on his throne. On this day, in the place of promise, all these promises and more found fulfillment.

This was born out by the words of Anna¹²⁰ at the same event, “Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38, NIV84). One of the main purposes of the Temple was a place of covenant and promise. God showed two old saints that the promises of old were being fulfilled.¹²¹

The same chapter records the second interaction Jesus had in the Temple. This time he was twelve and had traveled for the Feast of the Passover (2:41-52). When the feast was finished and the family headed home, Jesus remained behind. His parents returned to find him. Three days later young Jesus’s parents’ “found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding

¹²⁰ “There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day” (2:26-27, NRSV).

¹²¹ Jesus is the answer to the promises and covenants made and celebrated at Altars, in the Tabernacle, and in the Temple of the Old Testament.

and his answers” (2:46-47, NRSV). When queried about his actions, Jesus simply replied that he needed to be in “my Father’s house” (2:49, NRSV). A second purpose for the Temple was a place for God to communicate with his people. This was a major part of Jesus’s ministry and began early in his life.

The teaching aspect of Jesus’s ministry continued his whole public life. Of the Temple references in the Synoptics, many refer to teaching in the Temple on several occasions. While Jesus taught throughout Judea, Galilee, and other places, Jesus taught in the Temple. A note was made that he not only taught but healed people as well. These times were often confrontational. The Jewish leaders saw him as dangerous. They sought to arrest and kill him but were afraid of the people. This allowed the teaching to continue.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

One important event, recorded by all four gospels, was the cleansing of the Temple. John placed this event at the beginning of his gospel, chapter 2:13-22. The Synoptics place the event in the later part of their gospels, at the beginning of the Passion Week.¹²² “Most scholars regard the synoptic version as being closer to historical events, while few think that John’s version of the cleansing is more accurate.”^{123 124}

In the Synoptics, it was the Passover Week and Jesus came to the Temple, as was his

¹²² Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48.

¹²³ Regev, Eyal, 2019. *The Temple in Early Christianity: Experiencing the Sacred*. Edited by John J. Collins. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, p. 200.

¹²⁴ The timing of the event and some of the differences are not germane to this work. There are three theories: Synoptics were right, John was wrong; John was right, Synoptics were wrong, or the event happened twice. See Milne, Bruce. 1993. *The Message of John*. The Bible Speaks Today. Ed by John Stott. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, pp. 67-68.

custom. What he found was a commercial operation. Sacrificial animals were being sold. Money was being changed.¹²⁵

For the three Synoptic writers, the account of the Temple cleansing was brief at best.

Mark's account was the most complete:

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the Temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the Temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers (11:15-17, NRSV).

Mark, et. al., saw two issues that Jesus addressed as he came into the Temple. Jesus spoke of the purpose of the Temple. This was to be a "house of prayer." Quoting Isaiah 56:6-7, he recalled the prophetic promise that one day the Temple would bring foreigners to the Temple to serve him (the Lord), to love the name, and to worship. Yet, here in what was undoubtedly the Court of the Gentiles, Jesus found the noise and clamor of trade. Where worship should have been open to all, the bleating sheep, mooing cattle, and the sound of money changing hands could be heard. Foreigners and Jews alike found distractions.

A second issue for Jesus was the corruption connected with the commerce being conducted. What might well have been necessary had turned into a place where thieves and robbers operated. The writers didn't identify who was robbing. Perhaps it was the merchants and money changers. Animals for sacrifice had to be without blemish. To prevent unclean and blemished animals from the Altar there were inspectors. Such inspectors could reject an animal and require the worshiper to purchase another. No problem "if prices had been the same inside

¹²⁵ There was a viable reason for such activity. A sacrificial system of the scale going on in Jerusalem would need to provide for making the sacrifices possible. Travelers from distant places could not bring what they needed, nor the correct monetary instruments to pay the Temple tax. The problem was the close proximity to the Temple.

and outside the Temple, but a pair of doves could cost as little as 4p outside the Temple but as much as 75p inside the Temple.”¹²⁶ And who was to say the inspectors were always honest about the condition of the animals? Money changers also had a profit margin which they shared with the Levites in the Temple.¹²⁷ It could have been random people stealing from unsuspecting pilgrims. Maybe both could be found in the court. At any rate, Jesus acted and drove them out.

The Synoptics continued the pattern of the Old Testament concerning the Temple. Jesus used it in much the same as others in the past. It was a place of worship and prayer. It was a place to teach and communicate God’s message. It was a place of promise. It represented the Presence and bore the Name of YHWH.

JOHN’S GOSPEL

The Temple had greater significance in John than in the Synoptics. Jesus visited the Temple several times. On one occasion he cleared the Temple. There are two sayings relate to the Temple directly, a place of worship and his father’s house.¹²⁸

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

Though John placed this event at the beginning and not the latter part of Jesus’s ministry and life, he placed it in the same context as the Synoptics, the Passover. As he entered, he saw what they saw, “people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables” (John 2:14, NRSV). Jesus’s action was more violent in John than recorded in the others. Jesus made a whip from cords. There were two differences in Jesus’s motive for clearing the

¹²⁶ Barclay, William, ed. 1976. *The Gospel of Matthew*. Vol. 2. The Daily Study Bible. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, p 245.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹²⁸ Regev, Eyal. *The Temple in Early Christianity*, p 197.

Temple. Gone was the thieving and robbing. Speaking to the dove sellers, Jesus demanded they get out. “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (2:16, NRSV). The feeling behind the action may have been the same, commotion making worship impossible, but John did not say so.

The Temple was to be a holy place. A place where YHWH was present, where the Name was to be honored and proclaimed. The crass commerce tainted that Name and the holiness of the Temple, especially of the Court of the Gentiles where all were welcome. Jesus’s words, “my Father’s house” would indicate how precious this place was to him. That seemed to be the primary motive that moved Jesus.

A second motive, however, was seen in the response of the disciples. As they reflected on the incident, they “remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (2:17, quoting Ps 69:9, NRSV). The Temple was a special place for Jesus. It was his Father’s house. From age twelve he had taught there, visited there, and worshipped there. Not only was this his Father’s house. It was his house as well.

A PLACE OF WORSHIP

Two very significant sayings are recorded by John with direct reference to the Temple. The first was with the woman at the well in Samaria. As part of their discussion, the woman asked about where the proper place of worship was, her Samaria temple or the one in Jerusalem. Jesus’s answer was ‘wrong question.’ It is not where one worships but how one worships. And soon, a physical place will matter even less. Jesus told her that worship would be in spirit and truth. There will be a new alternative to a temporal location. John 4 used the Samaritan faith to show that Jesus was the spiritual alternative.¹²⁹ Though John did not go through it, this opened a

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 210.

door that Paul would. Some argue that Jesus became that new Temple. Paul, instead, would argue that the Church became the new Temple where the community of believers would worship in spirit and truth.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE

The other direct saying of Jesus involving the Temple was John 14, “In my Father’s house are many rooms” (14:2a, NIV84). Several commentators and scholars have seen this house as a heavenly Temple that replaced Herod’s.

Commentators who see a Temple here take for granted that such a heavenly Temple is characteristic of John and seek it out whenever possible. Yet a plain reading of John does not associate the “house of many rooms” with a heavenly Temple. The passage does not contain hints of a Temple or its attributes. Rather, John associates Jesus with the Temple in a more delicate, complex manner, and it is not his way to simply assume that Jesus dwells in a heavenly Temple. Rather, the purpose of John 14:2–3 is similar to that of John 14:23, whereby Jesus and the believers dwell with the Father.¹³⁰

While the Synoptics had Jesus visiting the Temple only once, the Passion Week, John had Jesus at the Temple a total of nine times.¹³¹ John didn’t foresee, or have Jesus foresee, the destruction in 70 CE. He shared Jesus’s interactions there.

In his treatment of the Temple theme John wants his readers to understand belief in Jesus in light of the Temple, treating him as a generator of holiness and an agent of worshiping God, just as the Temple is before 70 CE. John merely uses characteristics of the Temple that are familiar to his readers in order to shed light on Jesus and let the reader understand his sacred character. He wants to show Jesus’s holiness as a source of life and spirit, one that connects the believer with God. John wants the reader to understand that Jesus is somewhat similar to the Temple.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 212.

¹³¹ “Jesus visits the Temple in John at least three times—on Passover (2:13–14), Tabernacles, and Hannukah—while in the synoptic gospels he attends the Temple only at some point before Passover, the time of his arrest. John mentions his presence there nine times. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p 218.

Jesus, in John, respected and honored the Temple. He had a zeal so great he turned to violence to clear the Gentile's court. He also foresaw the day when worship would change from locale to heart and mind. "Yet, as in the case of the rabbis after 70 CE, when such transference takes place and the original Temple no longer exists, the new concept which is built upon it becomes more valid and substantial."¹³³

The gospels continued the picture of the Temple as a place to Worship. All people were welcome to come and pray, sing, and revere their God. It was a place of proclamation. Jesus was proclaimed as the promised Messiah. Jesus taught truth and brought healing. Jesus would not condemn the sacrificial system, only demand it be accessible to all, rich and poor. Jesus's picture of the Temple made for a great picture of the church.

THE TEMPLE IN ACTS

The Temple played a role in Luke's gospel and Acts. Luke ends his gospel with the ascension of Jesus. "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the Temple blessing God" (24:52-53, NRSV). The book of Acts repeated the ascension of Jesus and added the appointment of a replacement for Judas, Matthias.¹³⁴ Two pericopes are important here.

ACTS 2 THE CHURCH IS BORN

Chapter 2 covered the birth of the Church. In this record three miraculous events take place: a great sound, tongues of fire, and a language spoken that all could understand. The first

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p 219.

¹³⁴ Matthias had been chosen and was "added to the eleven apostles" (1:26, NIV84). There are some who suggest that Peter jumped the gun here and that God had Paul in mind. Luke, however, a traveling companion of Paul was the one recording this event under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so this author accepts Matthias as the twelfth.

two were germane to the Temple/Church metaphor. Luke recorded that “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place” (Acts 2:1, NRSV). Two questions arise from this verse. Who were “they” and where was the “one place?” To answer the second question, the day was significant. It was the day of Pentecost, one of the feast days when people would go to the Temple as part of their celebration.¹³⁵ It would be a logical conclusion that the believers were at the Temple. Additionally, Luke’s Gospel ended with the disciples continually in the Temple. At the end of the day, three thousand people heard Peter’s sermon and believed. The Temple was the logical place for the birth of the Church. The Temple as the birthplace of the church helped set up the metaphor for the Church.

The who “they” were was more speculative. There were two possibilities. First, it could have been the one hundred and twenty mentioned in 1:15. The second, it could have been the twelve apostles. I. Howard Marshall argued for the former.¹³⁶ The latter was argued by J. W. McGarvey:

The persons thus assembled together and filled with the Holy Spirit were not, as many have supposed, the one hundred and twenty disciples mentioned in a parenthesis in the previous chapter, but the twelve apostles. This is made certain by the grammatical connection between the first verse of this chapter and the last of the preceding. Taken together they read as follows: “And they gave lots for them, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Stott, John R. W. 1990. *The Message of Acts*. Ed. John Stott. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press., p 62.

¹³⁶ Marshall, I. Howard. 1980. *Acts*. Ed. R. V. G. Tasker. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 68.

¹³⁷ McGarvey, J. W. 1892. *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*. V 1. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Foundation., p. 21.

The “where” was most likely the Temple, and the “who” was simply left ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so. What was important was the “what happened.”

Luke recorded that “suddenly” the sound of wind and something that looked like tongues of fire descended. Neither of these was actually wind nor fire, but only appeared to be. Both events had Old Testament connections. The sound was like the wind. “The symbolism is reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies (2 Sa. 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezk. 13:13): the wind is a sign of God’s presence as Spirit.”¹³⁸ God's Spirit had arrived. The fire had an even bigger presence in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 3, Moses met God at a burning bush. It was at that bush, from that fire, that Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt. God communicated with Moses. God also revealed his Name at that time and place. Later, during the exodus, God made his appearance on Mt. Sinai in the form of fire. From the top of that mountain, God revealed the terms of his covenant with Israel. He gave the plans for the Tabernacle. Later, he would lead his people on their journey with a pillar of smoke by day and fire by night.

Once the Tabernacle was complete, God arrived in the form of smoke and fire. “The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:33, NIV84). This Glory was to reside above the Mercy Seat between the wings of the cherubim. God’s Presence took up residence with his people. This event began a millennium of the Glory of God in his Temple. It was to be known as the Shekinah.

Judah was not able or willing to keep its part of the covenant with God. Idolatry kept creeping into Israel’s worship experience. Before Moses could get down the mountain Israel was bowing before a golden calf (Exodus 32). The people complained in the wilderness, failing to

¹³⁸ Marshall, I Howard. *Acts*. p. 68.

believe God. They wanted water. What were they to eat? They wanted meat, and on and on. When they arrived at the land promised to them, they rebelled and refused to trust and honor their God. “Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?” (Num 14:10b-11, NRSV).

In 1 Samuel 8, God voiced this rejection, “and the LORD said to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you” (v. 7-8, NRSV).

It continued with Solomon, the builder of the first Temple. After the nation was ripped asunder, the Northern tribes departed until their deportation. Judah soon followed, the Babylonians taking them captive. Ezekiel 10 recorded what was one of the saddest verses of the Old Testament. “Then the glory of the Lord departed. . .” (Ezekiel 10:18). With the Ark and Mercy Seat lost, there was no record of the Glory of the Lord returning to the Temple. His Name and Presence were still assigned to the Temple, but the Shekinah was no more.

Six hundred years would pass. Jesus had come, lived, died, rose again, and ascended on high. Then Pentecost came. Tongues of fire appeared and settled on those assembled that day. The old Temple was on its way out of existence. In roughly 40 years, the Romans would once again level the Temple. Its sacrifices were no longer needed. Jesus had made the supreme sacrifice, once and for all. Its other furnishings found new interpretations: the Sea, the Table, the Altar of Incense, and the Candlestand. These physical items were replaced by new, spiritual ones:

baptism, the eucharist, prayer of the saints, and the Light of the World.

And once again the Glory of the Lord came to take up residence among his people. This time it would be in his Church. This time it was clearly in the person of the Holy Spirit. This was not new, however. “The concept of shekinah is also associated with the concept of the Holy Spirit in Judaism” (ruach ha-kodesh).¹³⁹ The Spirit’s arrival as wind and fire was a reminder of the wind and fire when God and his Spirit arrived before.

The language miracle carried with it several implications: The first was the international nature of the list.

Luke’s list comprises five groupings, as he moves with his mind’s eye approximately from East to West. First, he mentions Parthians, *Medes and Elamites* and *residents of Mesopotamia* (9a), that is, peoples from the Caspian Sea westwards, many of whom will have been descended from the Jewish exiles who had been transported there in the eighth and sixth centuries BC. Secondly, in verses 9b-10a, Luke refers to five areas of what we call Asia Minor or Turkey, namely *Cappadocia* (east), *Pontus* (north), and *Asia* (west), *Phrygia and Pamphylia* (south). Because *Judea* (9) comes oddly between Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, some commentators think Luke is using the word to refer to a wider area like the whole of Palestine and Syria, even including Armenia, while others follow an Old Latin version which reads *Joudaioi* (‘Jews’) instead of *Joudaian* (‘Judea’), and so translate ‘the Jews inhabiting Mesopotamia and Cappadocia, etc. The third group (10b) is North African, namely *Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene* (its chief city), the fourth (10c-11a) is *visitors from Rome* across the Mediterranean (*both Jews and converts to Judaism*), and the fifth, which looks like an afterthought, is *Cretans and Arabs* (11b).¹⁴⁰

This list became the fulfillment of Jesus’s commission to go to all the world (Matt. 28:20, NIV84). The gospel message will go even further in centuries to come.

The second thing this list did, though only by implication, was the opening of the gospel

¹³⁹ Wikipedia contributors, "Shekhinah," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shekhinah&oldid=1181521979> (accessed November 11, 2023).

¹⁴⁰ Stott, *Acts.*, pp 63, 65.

to a whole new group of people. Isaiah promised, and Solomon prayed that the nations, the *goyim*, would come to the Temple, to be included in the Kingdom of God. These nations will lead the way to making that happen.

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE

A second passage in Acts helped understand the Temple's place, the speech of Stephen. This speech was long, and some see it as rather unorganized and dull.¹⁴¹ Some see two themes running through the speech. The first was that God had raised up people to deliver Israel, but they were rejected, and the Law God gave was ignored. The second dealt with the Temple/Tabernacle. People began to so closely connect God with the physical building that they determined God lived in the building and would not allow it to be replaced.^{142 143}

For Stephen, the problem with the Temple was the human hand issue. He was falsely accused of speaking against the Law and the Temple. Jesus was going to destroy the Temple and change the customs. It was to these changes that Stephen crafted his defense. Toward the end, he spoke of the Temple charge.¹⁴⁴

“Our ancestors had the tent of testimony in the wilderness, as God directed when he spoke to Moses, ordering him to make it according to the pattern he had seen. Our ancestors in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our ancestors. And it was there until the time of David, who found favor

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁴² Marshall. *Acts.*, pp. 131-132,

¹⁴³ This was a similar message false prophets delivered to Israel in the face of the Assyrians. God would not allow his people to fall. It was repeated when Nebuchadnezzar surrounded Jerusalem. The Temple was located there, and God would not let it fall. The rescue of Jerusalem from Sennacherib fed into that position as well. Both Israel and Judah fell.

¹⁴⁴ “They set up false witnesses who said, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us” (Acts 6:13-14).

with God and asked that he might find a dwelling place for the house of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' (7:44-50, NRSV).

Stephen's defense was that God was bigger than a building. God's Glory may have been present, that he had a Presence in the Temple, but it was not the whole of God. "Thus Stephen does not reject the Temple but rather warns against restricting God to the Temple: God is available to all with or without the Temple. Indeed, this notion is fundamental for the early Christians, especially with regard to Luke's stress on the Holy Spirit within the community."¹⁴⁵

Following the death of Stephen, the Church that had remained in Jerusalem began to move out. Believers who had been there for Pentecost now returned to their homelands. They took their new faith with them. They shared with their fellow Jews the message of the Messiah, and eventually, to the Gentiles around them. The Church grew around the world, freed from the House of God in Jerusalem.

Stephen's speech was helpful in understanding the metaphor of the Temple/Church. Stephen understood that God was bigger, greater, and grander than any building could possibly hold. He focused on the idea that the residence, the place where God dwelt, was not a stone building in Jerusalem. That lesson is a good reminder for Christians today. Church is critical. Christ loved the Church and died for it (Ephesians 5:25). Yet, the Church served the same role as the Tabernacle and Temple. It was, and is, a place where God intersected with humankind. The Church worshipped, taught, prayed, and celebrated the body and blood of the New Covenant. Atonement was found in its commission, making disciples: baptizing and teaching them all he

¹⁴⁵ Regev, Eyal. *The Temple in Early Christianity*, p 178.

commanded.

The Temple was still a character in Acts, but its importance decreased. For those who remained in Jerusalem, it remained a place of meeting. It also became the backdrop for Paul's arrest, as an example. In part, its importance diminished because beginning with chapter 9, the story shifted to Paul's missionary travels. Chapter 15 included a meeting in Jerusalem with the Apostles and elders concerning the message to be delivered to the Gentiles, but the place of this meeting was not given.

The second reason for the diminished role of the Temple was because the role of the Church was now featured. Paul's pattern was to begin in the synagogue and move to the Gentiles when the Jews rejected the messianic message Paul was preaching. He then established Churches and appointed elders as he left each community.

SECOND THESSALONIANS

Paul referred to the Temple in chapter 2. False teachers had come telling the Thessalonians that the second coming of Jesus had either already happened or was in the process of happening. Paul had already addressed the Church about the future coming of Christ.¹⁴⁶

Paul said that before the Parousia of Christ a "man of lawlessness" would appear and lead a rebellion which included taking a seat in the Temple of God (2:4). The challenge for interpreters of this pericope is what did he mean when he spoke of this Temple? Was it the Temple in Jerusalem that had been defiled at least three times previously? That Temple would be

¹⁴⁶ In 1 Thess 5 he addressed the "Day of the Lord" and reminded them that it was something none could predict. That chapter and this one in Second Thessalonians were intended to encourage the Church.

destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.¹⁴⁷ Or was he referencing a future Temple that was yet to be built in Jerusalem?¹⁴⁸ Or is he speaking of the Church, the figurative Temple? Options abound.

Two examples are offered.

Although the Jerusalem Temple still stood when Paul wrote, Jesus had predicted its total destruction. How then is this eschatological evil personage to take his seat in the holy place? Since the Church is called God's Temple (cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), some think the coming lawless one will find his power base in an apostate Church. However, that goes beyond what our text says. It is probably best to take "Temple of God" as a metaphor, meaning that the Antichrist will usurp God's authority. And like the arrogant king of Tyre (Ezek. 28:2) the lawless one proclaims himself to be God and, by implication, demands loyalty and worship from all people. Although Antichrist has many forerunners in history, this eschatological enemy of God has not yet been revealed.¹⁴⁹

All commentators have been puzzled by the mention of God's Temple. Is it a reference to the Temple in Jerusalem, or to the Church, or to neither? Although, before its destruction in AD 70, there were several desecrations of the Jerusalem Temple, yet it would seem a gross anachronism to make Jerusalem (even if it had a Temple) the centre of Antichrist's global movement. Alternatively, Paul may be referring to the Church, for he several times described it as the Temple in which God dwells, and may be indicating that Antichrist will infiltrate and capture Christendom. Yet it is doubtful if the Thessalonians would have picked up this allusion. I think I. H. Marshall is right: "No specific Temple is in mind, but the motif of sitting in the Temple and claiming to be God is used to express that opposition of evil to God."¹⁵⁰

This passage is difficult to interpret. Its interpretation is controlled in part by one's view of the Second Coming. Many assume 'the man of lawlessness' is the same entity as the

¹⁴⁷ At the time of the writing of 2 Thessalonians, the Temple in Jerusalem still stood so the desolation of that Temple was still a possibility.

¹⁴⁸ This is a position held by Dispensationalists who are awaiting just such an event.

¹⁴⁹ Ewert, David. 1995. "1-2 Thessalonians." In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, 3:1091. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p 1091.

¹⁵⁰ Stott, John R. W. 1991. *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Ed. John R. W. Stott. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, p. 160.

‘Antichrist’ from John’s epistles. To this, they add one of the characters from Revelation¹⁵¹ to the mix and make all three the same.

A problem with that interpretation is John’s use of the word ‘Antichrist’. John stated, “Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming” (1 John 2:18, NIV84). This paragraph could be a corrective to what people were expecting, “You have heard.” Perhaps, drawing on Paul’s ‘Man of Lawlessness’ from 2 Thessalonians, an end-time scenario had developed. This teaching might well have involved an archenemy of the Church. If such a scenario existed, John’s audience might well have heard it, and been adhering to it.

Maybe rumors of some future enemy of the Church existed, which was why John wrote, “You have heard.” John did not confirm that such a one was coming and to be on their guard, awaiting his arrival. On the contrary, he said, “Even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour” (1 Jn 2:18, NIV84). He went on to define the term. “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son” (v. 22, NIV84). The danger was not from some future entity, but those who were departing the community and denying Jesus was God’s son.

If this was the case, then a different man of lawlessness must be identified. And where he appears needs to be identified as well. Or, perhaps John’s correction of the misuse of Paul’s

¹⁵¹ Revelation “does not utilize a human as its antichrist image; it uses two “beasts” 1. A beast from the sea, which represents the political antichrist tradition; it wears 10 crowns and receives the dragon’s power, throne, and authority (Rev 13:2). 2. A beast from the land, which represents the religious antichrist tradition; it exercises the authority of the first beast, and like those of whom Jesus spoke, uses its power to perform “signs” (σημεῖα, *sēmeia*) and deceive the people, directing them to worship the first beast (Rev 13:13–14).

John later refers to the second beast as the “false prophet” (Rev 16:13; 19:20), a reference which echoes Jesus’ statements in the Synoptic Gospels and John’s statements in 1 John. (Morrison, Daniel I. 2016. “Antichrist.” In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.)

teachings showed the original intention of what Paul had said to them.

Paul mentioned that he taught them all this while he was with them. Thus, for them, this was not new material. A simple reference to this man and the Temple would remind them of what they had been taught. So many attempts have been made and failed at finding a definitive answer. John Stott may have the best answer.

This process of reinterpretation and re-application within Scripture itself, from Daniel through Jesus to Paul and John, gives an important flexibility to our understanding. Of particular significance is John's explicit and authoritative statement that the expectation of a single Antichrist has been fulfilled (or at least partly so) in the numerous false teachers who were denying the Incarnation in his day. This prepares us for the conclusion that the biblical prediction of the Antichrist may during the course of Church history have had (and still have) multiple fulfilments, and that we will be unwise to look for only one in such a way as to pronounce all the others false.¹⁵²

Paul's reference to the Temple of God could then be a metaphor for the Church, one he used on several occasions.¹⁵³ The antichrists, according to John, were once part of the community but had departed from it. This pericope was intended to encourage the Thessalonian Church. Paul's encouragement was that the opponent(s) of the Church were going to be restrained until the Day. That was the purpose of this information. The lawlessness will one day be fully revealed and dealt with. Until then, the Church, the Temple of God, be encouraged.

TEMPLE IN THE REVELATION

The Revelation made numerous references and allusions to a Temple. "The book of Hebrews discusses the tabernacle or temple more than any other New Testament book, except

¹⁵² Stott, John. *The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, p 165.

¹⁵³ Several commentators, including Stott himself (*Ibid.*, p 160), question this idea, wondering if the Thessalonians could grasp the idea. But since this is a reminder of what Paul had already taught them verbally, he could have included this idea as well as explained in greater detail the lawless man.

perhaps for John's Apocalypse, which gives prolonged descriptions of the heavenly temple."¹⁵⁴ The references to a heavenly Temple abound. Beginning in Chapter 4, the reader was taken into the throne room where God sat on a grand throne, reminiscent of the one in Ezekiel. Jesus joined him in Chapter 5. "It is here that the rest of the Revelation to John takes place."¹⁵⁵ Throughout the book, the throne room was a place of worship. Sometimes God and/or Jesus was present and sometimes other heavenly beings and/or the saints were there. It soon became clear that the throne room was also the Temple. Both Jews and Gentiles were present.¹⁵⁶ In Chapter 7, 144,000 were sealed. This was an allusion to the twelve tribes of Israel. Also, in the same chapter, standing before the throne, were a myriad of peoples from every nation, tribe, and tongue (7:9). Verse 15 was the first explicit reference to the Temple.¹⁵⁷ In Chapter 14 an angel came from the Temple calling for judgment. Chapters 15 and 16 also carried judgment coming from the Temple. In Chapter 15 the Temple was filled with the Glory of the Lord and no one could enter. These all sound rather like Old Testament events.

Two pericopes help in understanding the metaphor of the Temple and Church.

THE REVELATION CHAPTER ELEVEN

This chapter is subject to several possible interpretations of the witnesses and the Temple. The chapter began with John being given a reed and told to "go and measure the Temple of God and the Altar and count the worshipers there" (11:1, NIV84). This was a picture straight from

¹⁵⁴ Beale, G. K. 2004. *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, P. 293.

¹⁵⁵ Regev, Eyal. *The Temple in Early Christianity*, p. 224.

¹⁵⁶ The audience of the Revelation was a mixture of both Jew and Gentile.

¹⁵⁷ "Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his Temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them."

Ezekiel. His measurement assignment would include three areas. The first two were the Temple, the Altar, and included those who worship there. This would make up the sanctuary.

Outside the sanctuary was the court of the Gentiles that he was instructed not to measure. The nations were to possess that area and they would trample the holy city, the third area (11:1-2). A heavenly sanctuary was mentioned in chapter 7 and later in this chapter. However, the chapter was not focused on heaven at this point but on earth. “If a material building is meant, the Temple at Jerusalem is most probable. But it is more likely that John is referring to the Church, elsewhere called God’s sanctuary (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21).¹⁵⁸ Again, the Temple is a metaphor for the Church.

John spoke of seven trumpets sounding and three woes. This chapter was before the final trumpet and after the first woe. This was a period of testing and persecution for the Church. John used the Ezekiel image to show the protection of the Church during this period. “This image derives from Old Testament prophecy where measurement was for consolidation, construction, and protection (Ezek. 40–43; Zech. 2:1–5). This tells us that access to God (Temple and Altar) and his worshipers is under the special protection of God himself.”¹⁵⁹ The quote from *The Lord of the Rings* might play well at this point. ““You cannot pass, he (Gandalf) said. . . ‘I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.’”¹⁶⁰ God put his Church in

¹⁵⁸ Morris, Leon. 1987. *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 20. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 143.

¹⁵⁹ Elwell, Walter A. 1995. “Revelation.” In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, 3:1214. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

¹⁶⁰ Tolkien, J. R. R. 1991. “The Fellowship of the Ring.” *The Lord of the Rings*. Book 2. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, p. 322.

his protection. Those outside the Temple could not destroy it.

This was followed by the two witnesses. Much discussion and disagreement centers on these two. Their exact identity was not given, only their mission, to testify to those trampling and being trampled in the holy city. These witnesses were unstoppable during their period of service. One of the missions of the Church was to proclaim the message of the Messiah. The Church was to face trials and challenges throughout the Church age and will continue to do so.

REVELATION CHAPTERS 21-22

Revelation contained one additional passage which has a bearing on the metaphor. In the final two chapters of the book, John recorded the coming of a new heaven and new earth. The last chapter described a garden, not dissimilar to the Garden of Eden as the end of the biblical story. Following a description of this city, its size, and construction materials, John noted, “I saw no Temple in the city, for its Temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22, NRSV). It was significant that the Temple was no longer necessary. The Temple was where the Presence of God could be found in an otherwise fallen world. As noted previously, the Temple could never hold God. His Glory and Presence were represented there, at first above the Mercy Seat between the cherubim. Later, his Presence in the form of his son would be found in the gathering of the faithful community (Matthew 18:20). Here, in the New Jerusalem, in the New Heaven, God and the Lamb were now fully present (22:3-4). The community which had been the Church was there with them. They were free to worship. They were free to see his face and bear his name (22:3-4) The Temple of the Old Testament and its metaphor for the New Testament Church was finished. Those made holy by the blood of Jesus and the recipients of the covenants of God now find themselves in the eternal Presence of God and of the Lamb.

KEY TEMPLE METAPHORS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Several specific passages in the New Testament utilized the metaphor of the temple: Ephesians 2 and 3, 2 Corinthians 6, 1 Peter 2, as well as 1 Corinthians 3 and 6. The first of these passages to examine is Ephesians.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22 AND 3:19-22

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The city of Ephesus was located on the western shore of what is now Turkey. It was a major seaport and key community though “the official capital of the province was Pergamum.”¹⁶¹ Ephesus would become a primary city in Paul’s ministry. “To this great city, then, Paul came in the late summer of A.D. 52 and stayed there for the best part of three years, directing the evangelization of Ephesus itself and the province as a whole.”¹⁶² The evangelistic effort was so successful that craftsmen who made silver idols for the temple of Artemis stirred up trouble for Paul and the Church. A riot ensued and after it was over, Paul took his leave and went on to Macedonia (Acts 19).

Paul found it necessary to write two letters to that Church, Ephesians¹⁶³ and 1 Timothy. A major theme in Ephesians was unification and inclusion. The first chapter began addressing the

¹⁶¹ Walker, Peter. 2008. *In the Steps of Paul: An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle’s Life and Journeys*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 137.

¹⁶² Bruce, F. F. 1977. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, p 288.

¹⁶³ There is a question as to the audience for the book. There are several reasons why Ephesus was not the only location. Many think it was a circular letter written to Churches in the area, including Ephesus. (See Guthrie, Donald. 1996. *New Testament Introduction*. 4th rev. ed. The Master Reference Collection. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, pp. 528-535 and Boles, Kenneth L. 1993. *Galatians & Ephesians*. The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, MO: College Press, pp. 182-183. Among many others.)

Jewish members about what it meant to be Christians and how blessed they had been to be chosen by God to receive the message. They were identified as “who {God} has blessed us in Christ” (1:3, NRSV). The ‘us’ Paul spoke of were the Jews. Abram’s offspring were to become a holy nation to draw the *goyim* to him.¹⁶⁴ They failed to accomplish that purpose, the result of their stubbornness of heart and rebellion against God. Now, continued Paul, those who were once the chosen were again the chosen, this time through adoption, to the place they were once destined. There were a series of “in him” statements (vv. 4, 7, 11) which speak of the blessing they had experienced. These statements showed the work of Christ to bring them back. The members of a new people group people were set in place. Those who were once Jews were now Christians. He spoke in Galatians that there were no longer Jews and Greeks, et. al. All were now equal children of faith (Gal 3:28-29).

Then at 1:13, he made a pronoun change. “And you also. . .” (NIV84) Paul moved from the first-person plural to the second-person plural, “we,” Jews, and “you,” Gentiles. Paul now included the Gentiles, “When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation” (v. 13, NIV84). “‘You also’ is a dominant theme of Ephesians. The Gentiles were formerly excluded but are now part of God’s family (2:11-22).”¹⁶⁵

In this second chapter, Paul announced a key principle to the plan of salvation and redemption. “The whole plan of Salvation was devised and put into operation *on the principle of grace*, so that all who are saved, whether Jew or Gentile, ‘are saved by grace, and not of works,

¹⁶⁴ Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 share the specific promise of blessing the nations.

¹⁶⁵ Boles, Kenneth. *Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 210.

lest any man should boast.”¹⁶⁶ Paul showed that God took the two former sets of people, Jews, and Gentiles, and created two new sets, Christian and non-Christian (2:11-18). Throughout the remainder of the book, Paul will help this first set of people learn to live as one. John Stott reflected this purpose by entitling his commentary on Ephesians *The New Society*. “. . .he {Paul} emphasized that Christ is the reconciler and that it is through union with Christ that the people of God are one.”¹⁶⁷

Paul then closed the chapter with a prayer of thanks. This prayer also included several requests for the Ephesian Church. He wanted God to give them wisdom and revelation, to know the hope they had and the riches of their inheritance. It concluded with a doxology of God’s work in raising Jesus, placing him in his rightful place in heaven, and putting all things under his feet (1:15-23).

Paul made special reference to Jesus as head of the Church and included one of the other metaphors for the Church, the body of Christ. The last words were, “And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the Church, which is his body the fulness of him who fills all in all” (1:22-23, NRSV). Paul used five metaphors to describe the nature of the Church: a body (1:23), a city (2:19), a family (2:19), a building (both a Temple and a house) (2:20-22), and a bride (5:23-32).¹⁶⁸ In the second chapter, he mixed three of them to help his audience understand this new set to which they now belong.

¹⁶⁶ Goodwin, Elijah. 1923. “The Middle Wall.” *New Testament Christianity*. Vol 1. Ed by Z. T. Sweeney. Restoration Reprint Library. Joplin: College Press, p 249.

¹⁶⁷ Stott, John R. W. 1979. *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Boles, Kenneth. *Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 240.

The first verse began with a return to the Gentiles, “As for you” (2:1, NIV84). They were dead because of the sin in their lives. Quickly he moved to talk of all men, “All of us” (v. 3, NIV84). All humans were in the same place, living in the passions of the flesh (2:2-3). Then, just as God, through his great power, raised Jesus from the dead, he made all alive. This was God’s plan all along. From the creation story, through the call of Abram, and the promises to David, God prepared beforehand that his people would live in the gift of his grace.

CHAPTER 2 – THE TEMPLE

Beginning in verse eleven, Paul reminded his Gentile readers of their former lives, separate and apart. That became the point where God intervened and sent his son. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (2:13, NRSV). A new peace was created because “He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace” (v. 15, NRSV). This would change the relationship between Jew and Gentile, and Gentile and Jesus.

19 Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, **20** ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, **21** ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὐξεῖ εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, **22** ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι (NA27).

¹⁹ Therefore, now you are no longer strangers and exiles, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the cornerstone. In whom the whole structure is being fitted together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being fitted together into a dwelling place of God in the spirit (Author’s translation).

Paul borrowed from Isaiah 57 the vision of a new Temple upon return from captivity, filled with both Jews and Gentiles. The same promise was found in chapter 56. “This passage makes clear that both redeemed Jews and Gentiles will worship together in God’s temple in the

new age, the same point Paul makes in Ephesians 2.”¹⁶⁹ Part of God’s plan and the mission of Israel was to bring together these two peoples.

The Gentiles had been strangers and aliens, not part of the covenant God had made with Israel. They had no hope and were without God. But Jesus abolished the dividing wall, the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. The old commands were abolished “that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two” (2:15, NRSV). The cross brought the two together into one body, one of the five metaphors. This became the moment when both had equal access in one Spirit to the Father. This was not to be understood as some sort of merger of two groups, but the formation of an entirely new group, a new set. God through Christ has created something which had not existed.

In Ephesians 2:19ff. the Church is portrayed rather as a building than as a body (although, just as architectural language is used of the body in Ephesians 4:12-16, so biological language is used of the building in Ephesians 2:21); but here too it is “in Spirit” that the building takes shape. As the individual components are bonded together by Christ the “corner-stone”. Here too it is in that same “one Spirit” that Jewish and Gentile believers together have common access to the Father (cf. Romans 5:2) or (by a change of figure) constitute a holy dwelling-place or temple for God.¹⁷⁰

Paul interwove two images together. This new household {οἰκεῖοι} became a structure {οἰκοδομῆ} and this structure was being joined and grew into a temple {ναὸν}. This new temple was to become the place where God would now dwell {κατοικητήριον} (vv. 19-22).

“Citizenship of the people of God was one expressive way of telling the truth concerning the position in God’s kingdom that Jews and Gentiles now equally share.”¹⁷¹ These citizens who

¹⁶⁹ Beale, G. K. 2004. *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p. 260.

¹⁷⁰ Bruce, F. F. 1977. *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free.*, pp. 430-431.

¹⁷¹ Foulkes, Francis. 1989. *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 10. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 93.

were made members of God's household were being built up. The building started with the foundation. If a building was to stand, it must have a firm and true foundation. This building which God was constructing had such a foundation. The foundation was the apostles and the prophets. Much discussion exists as to the identity of these two foundation pieces. Were the apostles the twelve Jesus trained? Perhaps it was the twelve plus Paul. Or, perhaps it was the larger New Testament grouping of apostles as in Romans for a number who were sent out. In the same manner, who were the prophets? Was Paul speaking of the Old Testament prophets or the New?¹⁷² The answer lies in the concept that these represent both ancient prophecy (God's plan all along) and historic Christianity.¹⁷³

The real answer laid in the cornerstone. The foundation began and ended with Jesus. He was (and is) the starting and ending point of this foundation. The house (οἶκεῖοι) of God stood on Christ. "It is the *proclaimed Christ* who is the basis of the new temple; and in their activity of proclaiming, the apostles and prophets play a unique role because it is their ministry that lays the foundation."¹⁷⁴

As the structure came together it grew into something special, a holy Temple. This brought into play all that the Temple represented. "The temple in Old Testament days, and especially considered as *naos*, was above all else the special meeting-place between God and his

¹⁷² For a good discussion of the implications of these arguments see McKelvey, R. J. 1969. *The New Temple*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, pp 112-113.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 113

¹⁷⁴ Martin, Ralph P. 1991. *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, p 38.

people. It was the place on which the glory of God descended, the place of his presence.”¹⁷⁵ That Presence was in the Shekinah above the Mercy Seat. The Temple was a place (the main place?) where God and humankind met. Promises were made there and kept there. Sacrifices were offered for sin. Christ made the ultimate sacrifice, and the new Temple was where one could gain access. God communicated with his people there, through the Law and prophets.

The Church, as the new temple, would be a place of worship. Paul will admonish the Ephesians to teach one another using songs, hymns, and spiritual songs (4:19). They were to have hearts that made melody to the Lord and offered thanks to God. These were to be done in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. All these were old Temple activities and truths. That place was constructed for the Name. It was a name shared by now by the Son as well as the Father.

What is the purpose of the new temple? In principle, it is the same as the purpose of the old, namely to be a dwelling place of God (verse 22). Of course spiritually minded Israelites knew that God did not dwell in man-made temples and that the whole universe could not contain his infinite being. Nevertheless, he promised to manifest his glory (the shekinah) in the temple’s inner sanctuary, in order to symbolize the truth that he dwelt among his people. The new temple, however, is neither a material building, nor a national shrine, nor has it a localized site. It is a spiritual building (God’s household) and an international community (embracing Gentiles as well as Jews), and it has a worldwide spread (wherever God’s people are found).¹⁷⁶

As Paul penned these words, the Jewish readers would certainly have thought about that great Temple Herod had remodeled in Jerusalem. It had the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. There were altars (incense and sacrifice), a table for bread, the Sea, and a candle stand. Missing was the Ark. Many of them may have made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship, perhaps for Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a truly powerful metaphor. The Church was to be

¹⁷⁵ Foulkes, Francis., p. 95.

¹⁷⁶ Stott, John R. W. *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, p. 109.

valued and respected. It was to be the place where the community came to worship and hear God's message. It was the message of salvation in the blood not of animals but of his son Jesus.

Israel had been commissioned to share the Name of their God with the world. The *goyim* were to be drawn to the Temple and to Jerusalem to join them in worship and praise to God. Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32, NIV). The Temple metaphor calls the Church to draw all people to our Savior. We teach our children, "Red and yellow, black and white, Jesus loves the little children of the World."¹⁷⁷ May we do better at inviting all the children to meet Jesus and come to his Temple, the Church.

Gentiles would not have been left out when thinking of the Church and Temple, however. Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis. This temple had played a large role in Paul's time there. That temple was as grand a structure as any other. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.¹⁷⁸ The metaphor of a temple was powerful for them as well. Undoubtedly, they had worshiped there before hearing the message of Christ. While pagan temples did not function in the atonement of their sins, those sacrifices had a place. "In the pagan worldview, the god is bought off or placated from working mischief or evil upon the people under its power by a gift or offering. The pagan god receives a compensation for doing good to its people or for avoiding wrath."¹⁷⁹ Pagan temples were a place of worship and communication which were key to their use. For the pagans, Ephesus's temple was something to honor and take pride in.

¹⁷⁷ Krieger, Donna J. Root. George F. Lyrics "Jesus Loves the Little Children. © MUSIC SERVICES, INC., Universal Music Publishing Group, Integrity Music, Warner Chappell Music, Inc.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce, F. F., *Paul an Apostle.*, p. 287.

¹⁷⁹ Gregg, Daniel, "Atonement." PDF <https://torahtimes.org>, p. 1.

The Church, the new kids on the block, were part of something even bigger and better. They were the Temple, the dwelling place of God, and his son, Jesus Christ.

1 PETER 2:4-10

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Peter began this letter by talking about the hope Christians have in Jesus. Themes like being God's elect and experiencing his mercy came early in the text. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3, NRSV). That hope brought joy. He also mentioned the suffering and glory Jesus experienced. This was a suffering that the readers would share.

Peter challenged his audience to move beyond hopelessness, they were not to despair. What they hoped for was safe in the resurrection of Jesus. He called them to live a holy life.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1:13-16, NRSV).

He spoke of the ways to live this life and what not to do. Love was a cornerstone of accomplishing this holy life. Purity and truth were also critical. This involved ridding oneself of a series of negative attributes. Then Christians were to grow up in their salvation like babies craving spiritual milk (2:1-2).

1 PETER 2 – THE TEMPLE

In the first chapter, Peter showed the wonder of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. "By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,

kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3b-5, NRSV). There would likely be a time of testing, but the testing would demonstrate the genuineness of their faith. This salvation was not an unexpected change of plan on God’s part, but that the prophets had spoken of it from days of old. “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!” (1:12, NRSV). “Now he wants to show the status that Christians have as the true people of God, so that he may encourage us to live before the world with awareness.”¹⁸⁰ They were to live holy lives.

Chapter 2 listed the items they were to rid themselves of, “all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander” (2:1, NRSV). Instead, they were to thirst after God and his ways. God was good.

This was followed by Peter challenging the readers to come to Christ. A participle in verse 4 (προσερχόμενοι) was used not so much as a command, though grammatically that is possible as in the NRSV, but as an acknowledgment of the natural course of Christian life.¹⁸¹

4 πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῶ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, **5** καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους [τῷ] θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. **6** διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ·

*ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον ἀκρογωνιαῖον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον
καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχνθῆ.*

7 ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας **8** καὶ λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα

¹⁸⁰ Clowney, Edmund P. 1988. *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 83.

¹⁸¹ Matthew 28 had the same idea. “Going, make disciples” or “As you go” instead of the command “Go and make disciples.” (πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε). I prefer the former translation possibilities. This becomes a natural part of life. It is something we do.

σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν. **9** ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς· **10** οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες (NA27).

⁴ Coming to him, a living stone, on one hand by men rejected, on the other hand in the judgment of God a precious choice, ⁵ you, as living stones, be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable [to] God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ Because it says in scripture,

Look, I will lay in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, a precious choice,

And the one who believes in him certainly will not be disgraced.

⁷ Now he is precious to you who believe, but to those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected, he became the main cornerstone ⁸ and the stumbling stone and the obstacle rock, they stumble at the Word disobeying as also they were destined. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people in [his, God's] possession, so that you might proclaim the redemptive acts of the one who called you from darkness into his wonderful light, ¹⁰ who, at one time were not a people, but now a people of God, not having mercy but now having mercy (Author's translation).

The community was drawn to Jesus. He had been rejected by the world but chosen by God. This cornerstone was not rejected by the living stones. The indicative in this pericope was “be built.” Just as Paul did in Ephesians, Peter drew on the cornerstone image. Jesus was that foundation upon which a house was to be built.

In calling Christ the stone, alias the corner- or head-stone, First Peter is thinking primarily of the relation of Christ to his Church. The nature of the relationship is probably alluded to in the adjective “living” (stone) (v.4; cf. ‘living stones’, v. 5). Since the rock or stone in Zion was traditionally a living stone, our author, like Paul in Eph 2:20, would easily apply the idea to Christ, who by virtue of his resurrection is both living and life-giving (cf. 1.3). At this point the thought of the text is thus similar to that of Eph 2. 20-2; Christ is the source of the Church's life and growth.¹⁸²

Upon this living stone the Church was being constructed, made up of the members community, referred to as “living stones” as well. Peter had in mind this spiritual house as the Temple. “To speak of a growing Temple of living stones stretches an Old Testament figure to

¹⁸² McKelvey, *The New Temple*, pp. 127-128.

convey New Testament reality.”¹⁸³ The Old Testament Temple meant God dwelling with his people. Not in his entirety, as discussed earlier, but in the Presence, Glory, and the Name.

The Tabernacle was in the middle of the camp. Israel was encamped around him. The Temple was constructed in a prominent place in Jerusalem and became the center for Israel’s and Judah’s lives.

According to Talmudic tradition, there was a stone in the Holy of Holies called *Even Shetiyah* (The Foundation Stone) because it was said to be the central core from which the whole world had grown. In an anthology of biblical legends compiled by fourth-century rabbi it is asserted that: “The Land of Israel is the middle of the earth. Jerusalem is the middle of Israel. The Temple is the middle of Jerusalem. The Holy of Holies is the middle of the Temple. The Holy Ark is the middle of the Holy of Holies. And the Stone of Foundation is in front of the Holy of Holies.”¹⁸⁴

This fit well with the three-tiered cosmology of the ancient world. The world was seen as having three layers, the heaven, the earth, and the underworld. The first was the domain of the God’s, the second was the world of men that they could see, and the last was the land of the dead. “Jerusalem in biblical theology is the center of the earth. It is the place where the entire cosmos connects and is maintained. Specifically, Jerusalem. That is why there’s a temple there. This is why it’s a garden. This is why it’s a mountain. It was God’s dwelling. He holds all things together.”¹⁸⁵ Peter’s viewed was that since the Temple was the center point of creation, the Church would become that connection place between man and God.

John would borrow this dwelling idea in John 1:14, “The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his Sh’khinah, the Sh’khinah of the Father’s only Son, full of

¹⁸³ Clowney, Edmund. *The Message of 1 Peter*; p.84.

¹⁸⁴ Comay, Joan. 1975. *The Temple of Jerusalem*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, p. 49.

¹⁸⁵ Heister, Michael S. “Jerusalem and the World Tree.” www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRFOQYXG9EI. (Accessed December 16, 2023).

grace and truth” (CJB). The word translated ‘lived’ was also translated as “dwell.” The word came from a root which meant to “tabernacle.” In the LXX, “*skēnē*” occurs some 435 times in the OT, mostly for Heb. *’hl*. About two-thirds of the references are to the tent of meeting.”¹⁸⁶

As with the other authors of the New Testament, holiness in the Church, the believing community, was critical. How Christians behaved mattered. It mattered to Paul as he wrote to the Church at Ephesus and the Church at Corinth. Yet, it is not so much each believer, but the corporate entity that concerned these writers and Peter as well.

Peter’s language is corporate. He thinks of the spiritual temple, not as the body of an individual believer, but as body of believers, the company of those who are joined to Christ. Yet, as the instructions of the letter show, Peter is concerned about the holiness of God’s temple not only when Christians are assembled for worship, but in their daily lives as well.¹⁸⁷

The community of believers was gathered to make up that Temple. For Peter, this community needed to be holy. Holiness was critical to the Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple. One could not enter either unless they were holy. Holiness was essential if the Church was to accomplish its divine purpose.

This spiritual house had a twofold purpose. First, it was to be a holy priesthood. Peter equated the community not only as the House/Temple but also, they were a new priesthood. This new priesthood was not based on family, Levite or gender, male. Instead, the members of the community were the priesthood.

Second, as the old priesthood offered sacrifices, so too the new priesthood was to offer sacrifices, this time spiritual sacrifices that God would accept. Peter did not give any definition

¹⁸⁶ Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley. 1985. In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, pp. 1040-1041.

¹⁸⁷ Clowney, Edmund. *The Message of 1 Peter*, p. 88.

of what these sacrifices might be, but passages like Micah 6:8 come to mind, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV84). Paul also spoke about acceptable sacrifices in Romans 12:1, “I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of God’s mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please him; it is the logical “Temple worship” for you” (CJB). Genesis 3 and Cain's unacceptable sacrifice could play a part here as well.

To be able to offer these sacrifices, the community needed to be holy. Holiness was at the heart of the Torah. It contained a list of things that made one unclean and the various offerings required to move from profane to common to holy. For the Church, that offering was Jesus himself, making his people acceptable to God.

Peter then put together a string of Old Testament scriptures that spoke of the rejected stone used as the foundation for the spiritual house/Temple. These rejection scriptures were Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14. The believers found these passages precious, but not those who did not believe. Peter finished by saying, “Also he is a stone that will make people stumble, a rock over which they will trip. They are stumbling at the Word, disobeying it—as had been planned” (2:8b, CJB).

Peter followed these scriptures with a list of references to Israel from the Old Testament. The community was now a chosen race. From the days of Abram, Israel was seen as the Chosen People of God. Now it is the community.

They were also a royal priesthood. This was an unexpected connection. Priests were from the tribe of Levi only. The royal family was Judah. During the Hasmonean dynasty, these were both linked, but that was because the priestly clan ruled. The children of King Jesus and the

perfect high priest were joined with their king and priest.

Peter added that they were a holy nation, God's own people. In Hosea, God had him name one of his children, "Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God" (Hosea 1:9, NIV84). Those who found their residence in the Temple that was the Church were now his people.

Peter urged the community to live "as aliens and temporary residents not to give in to series of your old nature" (2:11, CJB). Holiness was always a problem, for Israel and Peter's audience. Honorable living among the Gentiles was important. God's people were never to give anyone cause to disparage the Name.

The community became, and is, the place where the Glory and Name of God is present. For Peter, the believers have been delivered. We have, "tasted that ADONAI is good" (2:3, CJB).

1 CORINTHIANS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The city of Corinth was located on an isthmus bearing its name, connecting Achaia to Greece. It "was a prosperous commercial crossroads."¹⁸⁸ It had become a Roman colony and as such had many characteristics of such a colony. Commerce made Corinth a very rich city. An athletic contest was held there every other year which added to her wealth. Some have suggested that Corinth was not particularly a great place to plant a Church.¹⁸⁹

The accounts of Strabo and of the second-century C. E. writer Pausanias indicated that the city supported numerous sites of pagan worship and was adorned by magnificent statues of gods and goddesses in public places, including a large statue of Athena in the middle of the *agora* (marketplace). . . . The Corinthian Christians would have been

¹⁸⁸ Hays, Richard B. 1997. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce, F. F., *Paul an Apostle*, p. 248.

confronted on a daily basis by these imposing symbolic reminders of the religiopolitical world out of which they had been called. When Paul wrote of “many gods and many lords” in the world (1 Cor 8:5), his words brought vivid images to mind for his readers.¹⁹⁰

Corinth was a Church established by Paul on his second missionary journey. He came there from Athens where he had little success. “So he arrives in Corinth, as he says, ‘in weakness and in much fear and trembling’ (1 Cor 2:3)”.¹⁹¹ He would spend a year and a half in Corinth preaching and teaching (Acts 18:11).

The Church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. As was his custom, he started in the synagogue sharing the Messianic message to the Jews. Luke recorded that “When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 18:5, NIV84). He met with opposition and turned his attention to the Gentiles.

As a cosmopolitan city, it had people from many nations. “The Corinthian Church was bound to be troubled with many problems arising from the impact of Christianity on its pagan environment.”¹⁹² Add to that issue the relationship between Jew and Gentile, the mix of masters and slaves, and the rich and poor. This was not an easy place to evangelize.

1 Corinthians was a book that dealt with a series of these problems. They may very well have come in the form of a list (Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote it)¹⁹³ sent by the Church for answers. In chapter 1, following his usual greeting and a thanksgiving prayer, he jumped into one

¹⁹⁰ Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*, p.4.

¹⁹¹ Bruce, F. F., *Paul and Apostle*, p 248.

¹⁹² Guthrie, Donald. 1996. *New Testament Introduction*, p. 433.

¹⁹³ Barclay, William, ed. 1975. *The Letters to the Corinthians*. The Daily Study Bible Series. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press, p 5.

of the major issues, division. “My brothers, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you” (1:11, NIV84). His first answer would be to ask, “Is Christ divided” (1:13, NIV84)? Paul went on to talk about how the world viewed the message of the cross (foolishness). Jews wanted signs. Greeks looked for philosophical wisdom and logic. Not with that message. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (v. 25, NIV84). The chapter ended with the admonition to boast in the Lord.

Chapter 2 began with Paul speaking about his message, not bold but in weakness. This was arguably because of the challenge he experienced in Athens. The chapter ended with a discussion of the wisdom of the Spirit. “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (2:13, NIV84).

1 CORINTHIANS 3 – THE TEMPLE

Chapter 3 returned to the division question. He complained that they were too worldly to address spiritually. They just were not ready. There was an issue with jealousy and quarreling (v. 3). The paragraph was summed up, “For when one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not mere men?” (v. 4, NIV84). The Church was divided, and Paul needed to correct their division.

Paul used two metaphors to help them understand the differing roles various leaders play. The first was a gardener or farmer metaphor. One person came and planted the seed. For Corinth that was Paul. Another person would follow, watering the seed. For Corinth that was Apollos.¹⁹⁴ The important truth was God that made it grow. It was he who was to be praised.

¹⁹⁴ For different communities, different people would fill those roles.

“The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (v. 8, NIV84).

At the end of verse 8, Paul changed metaphors. He moved to “God’s building”. Paul continued the building metaphor through the end of the chapter.

Is this one of Paul’s purportedly strange, sudden metaphorical shifts? What does a ‘cultivated field’ have to do with a ‘building’? Upon closer analysis, as we will see, Paul is not speaking of a generic ‘building’ but of the temple as a ‘building’. If so, the shift from the agricultural metaphor of a ‘cultivated field’ or ‘vineyard’ to a temple may be viewed to be more natural in the light of our prior study in the Old Testament and Gospels. There we discovered that the Garden of Eden, Israel’s garden-like promised land, and Israel’s future restoration in a garden-like land were either equated or associated with a temple. We are not suggesting that Paul is explicitly equating the ‘cultivated field’ with the following portrayal of the Church as a temple. Rather, the close association of ‘garden’ and ‘temple’ in the Old Testament and Judaism would plausibly have influenced a similar link in Paul’s mind at some level. If so, this link, whether conscious or unconscious, is a better possible explanation than heretofore offered for inspiring the combination of the same images in 1 Corinthians 3.¹⁹⁵

Beginning in verse 10, Paul utilized the building metaphor by saying his role was to lay the foundation for the Church.¹⁹⁶ Others would come behind him and continue to build, but it would be upon the foundation he had laid as the founder of the Church. Different builders would use different materials. In the end, the quality of materials would be judged on the Day. Quality work and proper materials would be rewarded. “If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” (v. 15, NIV84). What followed was the often misused and misquoted passage where the temple metaphor occurred.

¹⁹⁵ Beale, G. K. 2004. *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p. 246.

¹⁹⁶ Paul tempered this claim in verse 11 by saying “no one can lay another foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (NIV84).

16 Οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; **17** εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἵτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς (NA27).

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are the Temple of God, and the Spirit of God lives among you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys the Temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, and you are that Temple (Author’s translation).

Paul used specific grammar in this passage. The noun for ‘Temple’ (ναὸς) is singular.

Paul stated that there was one temple. The verb that followed was a plural form of ‘to be’ (ἐστε) translated as ‘you are’. The community of believers in Corinth, the readers, would be the ‘you.’ Not only did Paul use the plural ‘you’ for “you are the Temple,” but the pronoun ‘you,’ (ὁμῖν) in verse 16 was plural as well. Every occurrence of ‘you’ in verses 16 and 17 is plural and every occurrence of ‘Temple’ was singular.

Added to this is the ‘in you’ referring to the dwelling place of the Spirit.

He does not say “in each of you,” as he could have done, but “in you” (plural, the corporate body of Christians in Corinth). If the plural “you” is to be preserved in the translation of the Greek into English, the expression would be better rendered “among you.” As is the case in many English translations.¹⁹⁷

The challenge for interpretation here comes from the word English word ‘you’ being both singular and plural. A quick reading of just the verse without context can yield, and has, an interpretation that “we are the temples.” That is not what Paul said.

Some translations of the pericope have attempted to help the interpretation, while others have remained vague. For instance, The Old King James translated it, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of

¹⁹⁷ Ford, Harold. W. 1988. *A Second Look at the New Testament: The Holy Spirit Revisited*. Edmonds, WA: PSCC Lithograph, p. 49.

God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”¹⁹⁸ The ‘ye’ was plural, which reflected the plural verb used, but the ‘you’ did not reflect the plural pronoun.

The English Standard Version translated it as, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”¹⁹⁹ Their translation left it ambiguous though they did offer a footnote saying the ‘you’ was plural.

The NIV 84 said, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” For the first ‘you’ they used ‘your yourselves,’ but left the other pronouns simple as ‘you.’ The Holman Christian Standard Bible did the same translation.²⁰⁰

Similar translations were found throughout. The result is that these verses can be misused.

The imagery of the Church as God’s temple, which occurs twice more in Paul (2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21), is a pregnant one both for the Jewish Paul and the Gentile Corinthians. The word used (*naos*) refers to the actual sanctuary, the place of the deity’s dwelling, in contrast to the word *hieron*, which refers to the temple precincts as well as to the sanctuary. For Paul the imagery reflects the OT people of God. Although they are never called God’s temple as such, they are his people among whom he chose to “dwell” by tabernacling in their midst.²⁰¹

In context, Paul was warning the Corinthians about the division within the Church. “Party

¹⁹⁸ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 2009. Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹⁹⁹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2016. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²⁰⁰ *The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*. 2009. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

²⁰¹ Fee, Gordon D. 1987. “The First Epistle of the Corinthians.” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Edited by F. F. Bruce. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, pp. 146-147.

strife and similar activity desecrated the building of God. They must remember that, as a community of believers in Christ, they were God's temple, inhabited by his Spirit. God would not deal lightly with those who desecrated his holy temple (3:16-17)."²⁰² People were arguing and taking sides as to who their favorite leader was. Outsiders were coming to Corinth to challenge Paul and the teachings he had left them. This was their foundation. Anything that was 'straw' would not withstand the Day. "The seriousness of the divisions at Corinth is seen in the light of this character of the Church as God's temple. Because it is God's temple the man who fails to react rightly towards it is guilty of no light sin."²⁰³

The consequences for the one who brought division were harsh. He used the word 'φθείρει.' There were several uses for the word. Here, it meant "destroy in the sense 'punish w. eternal destruction' 1 Cor 3:17b (= 'punish by destroying' as Jer 13:9)."²⁰⁴ The repeated use of the word added to the seriousness of the punishment. Destroy God's holy temple, God's holy Church, would not be a simple slap on the hand.

"And the emphasis is not universal but local. Believers in one locale, like Corinth, are a temple building where a true representation of God dwells. This makes this Corinthian building "holy," a sacred shrine, and desecrating it in any way a sacrilege."²⁰⁵ The Corinthians were to take

²⁰² Bruce, F. F., *Paul and His Converts*, p. 72.

²⁰³ Morris, Leon. 1970. "The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians" *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Edited by R. V. G. Tasker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, P. 70.

²⁰⁴ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 1979. In *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p 857.

²⁰⁵ Baker, William. 2009. "1 Corinthians." In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*. Vol. 15. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, p 58.

care of business. Division must.

Unfortunately, not all commentators interpret the passage as a metaphor for the Church.

Here is a sampling:

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the source of power for the Christian life. Only through His enablement can we serve God acceptably or live the holy and good lives God calls all His people to. Because the Holy Spirit does live in us, we are God's holy temple and we can be holy. Paul's warning is directed to believers. If anyone "brings ruin on" (*phtheiro*) God's temple, God will bring ruin on him.²⁰⁶

I do not think that this passage, like the preceding one, attaches itself to those who labour upon and are engaged in erecting God's temples, but properly to every one of those who are built; each one being God's temple; and I understand that St. Paul, addressing his words to them, admonishes them not to corrupt themselves with bad habits or vices, assuring them that God will destroy the man who shall pollute or corrupt himself.²⁰⁷

The Apostle has not yet done with his architectural figures. He advances a step farther. He now says the soul itself is a temple of God, a temple to be sacredly kept, in which the spirit of God dwells, and which cannot be desecrated with impunity. The ideas which Paul entertained of the dignity and divinity of human nature could hardly be expressed more eloquently or beautifully than in this passage.²⁰⁸

5 Bible Verses about A Believers Body As A Temple.²⁰⁹ {On the list are these texts, 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 2:19-22, and 1 Peter 2:5.}

41 Bible Verses about Your Body As The Temple Of God²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Richards, Lawrence O. 1991. *The Bible Reader's Companion*, p. 759.

²⁰⁷ Valdés, Juan de. 1883. *Commentary upon St. Paul's First Epistle to the Church at Corinth*. Translated by John T. Betts. London: Trübner & Co, pp 59-60.

²⁰⁸ Livermore, Abiel Abbot. 1881. *The Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon with Introductions and a Commentary*. Boston: Lockwood, Brooks and Company.

²⁰⁹ bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/A-Believers-Body-As-A-Temple. (Accessed December 4, 2023).

²¹⁰ openbible.info/topics/your_body_as_the_temple_of_god. (Accessed December 4:2023).

In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19, the Holy Spirit tells us that each individual person who trusts Jesus Christ to forgive his or her sins is a temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells within them. If God the Holy Spirit dwells within us, then we are a temple of God – a fleshly temple.²¹¹

This is just a small sampling of the resources which promote the idea that we, the individual Christians are the temples of God. The process involved one book search in Logos Bible Software and one Bing search. There are untold numbers of those who teach this. Is it heresy? That is for others to decide. It is not the correct teaching Paul was sharing with the Church at Corinth.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

One might ask, ‘Does it really matter which is correct?’ There are at least four reasons why it is important to get the interpretation right. The first is simply that it is important to get exegesis and interpretation correct. When one reads into a text what they think it says that is called eisegesis. It “involves the interpreter’s reading into the text ideas of his own, instead of allowing the words of the author to place his ideas into the mind of the reader through a consideration of those words.”²¹² Without careful, correct interpretation, anything and everything can be found as true in the Bible.

The second reason why it is important is because it does not fit into Paul’s argument. Paul was talking about the division that had come to the Church. The Temple had been built upon a foundation, Jesus Christ, laid by Paul. Others had come along and added to it. Some used gold and fine jewels while others used straw and wood. The members of the Church were taking sides, which was to the detriment of the Church, the Temple of the Spirit. To suddenly switch in

²¹¹ “What are the things that defile the temple (body)?” Neverthirsty.org. (Accessed December 5, 2023).

²¹² Ford, Harold. W. *A Second Look*, pp. 11-12.

verse 16 and start talking about individual Christians doesn't make sense and doesn't follow the argument. Paul was concerned that the Church was being destroyed because of the division.

A third reason is that the focus is put on the wrong place. If one just used verses 16 and 17 and argued that individuals are temples, the focus moves to the person, the Christian. Suddenly the discussion becomes that the Holy Spirit dwells in the individual, which is not wrong. It just isn't found in this text. The temptation of modern Christians is to make themselves the focus of everything. To quote a famous quote, "It isn't all about you (or me)." Some have suggested that people change scripture to personalize it. For instance, "For God so love me, that he gave his . . ." Jesus was not talking about us. He loved, and loves, the world. This speaks to the worldview one possesses. Are we looking out, or at ourselves? Preachers have said, "If I was the only sinner, Jesus would still have come." It is a nice sentiment but misses the point. We are not the center of the universe.

The last reason is that it is just shoddy exegesis. Those who would teach that the individual is the Temple have not done the work. They have taken their favorite version of the Bible and written down what they think it says.

There ought indeed to be a formal agreement between what the church does and what biblical texts say. And texts with mission relevance are far from isolated. To point out the inadequacy of proof-texting through shallow and hermeneutically spurious sprinkling of texts at a problem is not by any means to reject the painstaking effort to prove a case through patient study of texts.²¹³

They have not done the grammar, looked at syntax, checked on vocabulary, nor seen how an author (here Paul) used the words and grammar in other places. If we are to protect the Temple that is the Church from division, we must do good, solid exegesis and interpretation.

²¹³ Wright, Christopher J. H. 2006. *The Mission of God*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, pp. 36-37.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

Paul followed the warning of division in chapter 3 by defending his apostleship. He also defended the message he and Apollos had delivered. The Corinthian Church, with the help of others who followed Paul and Apollos, had been discounting and refuting some of what they had shared as foundational. In 4:8-13 he alluded to the badmouthing he had received and then gave them his perspective, “We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment, we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” (v. 12-13, NIV84). The chapter ended with Paul asking a question, “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip or in love and with a gentle spirit?” (v. 21, NIV84). He then moved on from divisions.

Chapter 5 was a subject change. “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans” (v. 1, NIV84). He then gave them instructions as to how to respond to this person. They were to “hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord” (v. 5, NRSV). This conduct was also not healthy for the Church.

Chapter 6 started with instructions about lawsuits. There was also a list of wrongdoers who would not be part of the kingdom. “And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (v. 11, NRSV).

Verse 12 Paul wrote the problem of license. There was liberty in being a member of God’s community. Paul said that while it might be ‘lawful’ it was not ‘beneficial.’ He talked about food and then fornication. He spends the rest of the chapter dealing with the problem of fornication.

CHAPTER 6 – THE TEMPLE

As was an issue in many ancient cities with pagan temples, Corinth had a sexual sin problem. “So as Paul approached the city, he would have seen the massive form of ‘Acro-Corinth’, rising up over 1,800 feet above the surrounding plain, and would probably have known that this was the location for the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, famous for its cult prostitution.”²¹⁴ Church members, and teachers for that matter, that came out of paganism, struggled with temple prostitution as it was deeply engrained in much of their daily lives. “The cult was dedicated to the glorification of sex. The worship of Aphrodite is parallel to that of the Ashtoreth (taken from the Syrian worship of Astarte) in the days of Solomon, Jeroboam and Josiah.”²¹⁵

The first step in his argument was to deal with liberty versus license. Those who took the license side “took the ultra-spiritual line that anything that had to do with the body was morally and religiously irrelevant.”²¹⁶ The body and food and the rest would one day be gone, so what they did would make no real difference. “For some of the Corinthians, it followed from their freedom to eat that they were also free to indulge their sexual appetites in prostitution.”²¹⁷

Paul answered that they were not their own. “The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (6:13, NRSV). In other words, they were not their own,

²¹⁴ Walker, Peter. *In the Steps of Paul*, p. 122.

²¹⁵ Prior, David. 1985. *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p. 11.

²¹⁶ Bruce, F. F. *Paul and His Converts*, p 76.

²¹⁷ Davis, James A. 1995. “1-2 Corinthians.” In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, p. 970.

and what they did mattered. He then repeated the statement he had used before, “Do you not know” to challenge their attitude. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?” (v 15, NRSV). Note that all plural words in this verse. He was talking about individual believers being members of Christ.

One thing is of special importance and that is, Paul understands clearly the use of a plural subject, a plural verb, and a plural predicate in grammatical usage. It is only among the ill-informed and ill-educated that this syntactical matter will be misused. Paul understands it, and it is one of the overlooked points which lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation growing out of this passage.²¹⁸

If they belonged to Christ, they could not also use their bodies with the prostitutes. It seems reminiscent of Jesus and the two-masters thing. Members of Christ were one in spirit with him. That brought Paul to v 18 and the temple metaphor.

18 Φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν. πᾶν ἁμάρτημα ὃ ἐὰν ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν· ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἁμαρτάνει. **19** ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματός ἐστιν οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἑαυτῶν; **20** ἠγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς· δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν (NA27).

¹⁸ Flee sexual immorality! Every sin a man might commit is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality against his own body sins. Or do you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within [among] you, which you have from God, and you are not you own; ²⁰ for you were purchased for a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body (Author’s translation).

“Therefore,” Paul used an imperative, “Flee” (Φεύγετε.) Paul had been talking about prostitution and that it had no redeeming value for a Christian. Here he went one step further, they were commanded to get away from it, The Greek word had four primary meanings. “1. *Flee, seek safety in flight . . . 2. Escape . . . 3. In a moral sense flee from, avoid, shun . . . 4. Guard against.*”²¹⁹ 1 Cor 6:18 is listed under meaning 3. This was strong language. Paul wanted

²¹⁸ Ford, Harold. W. *A Second Look*, pp. 52-53.

²¹⁹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, pp. 855-856.

them to have nothing to do with this.

The word translated body (σῶμα) had five main uses. “1. *Body of a man or animal* a. dead, b. living . . . 2. (plural) *slaves* . . . 3. *bodies of plants* (dealing with the dead after resurrection) . . . 4. Of the body that cast a shadow . . . 5. The Christian community, the Church. . .”²²⁰ Paul played off the usage of this word to make his point, the members' bodies and the body of Christ.

Verse 19 has the same grammatical construction as 3:16, a plural pronoun, a singular noun, and a singular predicate nominative. The predicate (is) is understood and not found in the Greek. Above this grammar was addressed and there is no reason to change that interpretation here. So what was Paul telling the Corinthians? He had a three-part argument warning the members of the community against cultic prostitution.

Part one was the danger to the individual who was committing the fornication.²²¹ This was not a non-consequential act. Earlier in chapter 6, Paul reminded the readers that fornication was on the list of sins that would be judged on the Day. And that those who were fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. They did not have a license to sin.

Part two of his argument was that the individual believer was a member of Christ's body. When he joined his body with the prostitute, he became one with her. But he had become one with Jesus. So now Jesus was being joined to her. But Christ was holy and pure. He could not be a fornicator. Because of the price Jesus paid, he was not free to link Jesus to an idol (Aphrodite.)

²²⁰ Ibid., pp. 799-800.

²²¹ Paul wrote about personal sanctification and abstaining from fornication in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. There he made no reference to what it might do to Christ's holiness or the Church.

“Contemplating the purity of the great head of the Church, he {Paul} concludes that all the members should be pure; that it would be unjust, unnatural and unrighteous to form such an unholy alliance between the members of Christ’s body and the base character just named.”²²²

Part three of his argument was that they were members of the community which was the Church. As noted above, ‘body’ was often a metaphor for the Church. So, in verse 18, after commanding them to flee he said, “Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself” (NRSV). The NIV translated the passage to make it appear that he was talking about the sinner, “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.” But the words “his” and “his own” were translations for “the.” Paul made a change here. Most sins, all but this one, were “outside the body.” One sin, fornication, is “against the body itself.” So what body was he speaking of? Paul went on in the next verse, verse 19 to define his terms. He used a similar phrase as he did in 1 Corinthians 3:16. This time, instead of “you {the community of believers} are a temple” he said, “your {plural, community} body is a temple (singular, one body, singular, one temple). Same grammar, same idea. So, Paul was telling the Church in Corinth that when its members visited the cultic prostitutes (or any other sexual sin) they were harming the Temple of the Holy Spirit. “No other sin can be said to do that because it does not have the intimacy associated with it that the sin of fornication has. Paul is saying much more than that the individual’s physical body is corrupted by such an act but that the body of Christ, corporately is also so corrupted.”²²³ The Church could not be the holy place that the

²²² Goodwin, Elijah. 1923. “The Church the Body of Christ.” *New Testament Christianity*, p. 196.

²²³ Ford, Harold W., *A Second Look*, p 54.

Temple metaphor represented.

He concluded the pericope by, “Therefore glorify God in your (plural) body (singular).” Since the days of the Tabernacle, God’s Glory dwelt in the Temple. His shekinah was there for a thousand years.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The reasons listed above apply here as well. Paul’s argument is stronger when we understand what he said. It is poor exegesis to not acknowledge the grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. And it focuses on the wrong thing. People become temples. The Spirit of God does dwell in us, but mostly as we dwell in the Temple.

There is an additional reason. Paul hints at it here. There is no greater sin which damages a Church than adultery or fornication. If the pastor falls, if an elder molests a child, or if the worship leader is unfaithful, the Church is harmed greatly. This not only affects the local community but the corporate Temple as well. TV ministries, Christian writers, or recording artists who become embroiled in sexual sins harm the Church throughout the country, and around the world.

2 CORINTHIANS 6

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Paul had a myriad of issues to address in Corinth after he left. Many of those were addressed in the first letter. Some of those same issues were still problems. So, a second letter, and most likely a third letter had to also be written. The book of 2 Corinthians was a mixed bag. On the one hand, Paul shared his pride and love for the community (2 Cor 7:4). On the other hand, Judaizers had come, and a gap had developed between the congregation and Paul. Paul dealt with the teaching of these Judaizers whom Paul sarcastically called “super-apostles” (2 Cor

11:5).

In response to these false apostles, Paul spoke of a new covenant in chapter 3 and the frailty of the messengers God selected, in chapter 4. In chapter 5, he called for the Corinthians to live a life of faith. It also included a section that continued into chapter 6 where he was trying to reconcile his relationship with the Church and close the gap. That reconciliation would come from being reconciled to the true God. He concluded this section, “We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also” (6:11-13, NRSV). The topic was picked up again in chapter 7, verse 2.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-7:1 – THE TEMPLE

As mentioned above, part of this letter was about the New Covenant. It was likely that the Judaizers were accusing Paul of abandoning centuries of Law and separation. He was clear, “Do not yoke yourselves together in a team with unbelievers” (6:14, CJB). Paul would answer that accusation. Paul began by offering a series of questions that relate to how the Corinthians were to interact with the pagans in whose midst they lived. These questions suggested that the Corinthians had not taken Paul’s warning in the previous letter (1 Cor 10:14ff) “against becoming ‘partners with demons’ by attending idolatrous banquets in pagan temples.”²²⁴ This problem was addressed by John in Revelation. Jesus spoke to the Church at Thyatira. While he admired their works, they tolerated a teacher simply addressed at ‘Jezebel.’ She was teaching the Church that syncretism with idol worship, probably regarding the guilds, was acceptable (Rev 2:18-29). Pergamum had a similar issue, eating food sacrificed to idols and fornication (2:14).

²²⁴ Bruce, F. F. 2017. *Paul and His Converts*, p. 110.

There was a large temple to the Greek Goddess Aphrodite in Corinth and some in the community were not maintaining the holiness God called them to maintain.

“The description of the Church as the spiritual temple at 2 Cor. 6.16 is introduced by a series of (five) antitheses which is intended to demonstrate that permanent relationships between Christians and non-Christians are neither permissible nor possible.”²²⁵ God’s people were to be holy, separate, and distinct. Paul asked five rhetorical questions.

The point of each question is that God’s people are to be distinct and separate from the characteristic beliefs and practices of unbelievers. Thus there is nothing *in common* between *righteousness and wickedness*, no *fellowship* between *light and darkness*, no *harmony . . . between Christ and Belial* (Satan), nothing *in common* between *believer and nonbeliever*. The fifth question is the most critical and indicates that there is no *agreement . . . between the temple of God* (i.e. the locally gathered Church) *and idols* (verses 15-16).²²⁶

A total lack of contact was not possible nor was that Paul’s intention. Paul wrote of this in 1 Corinthians 5, “I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world” (vv. 9-10, NIV84). Jesus’s prayer was that they would be in the world but not of the world (John 17:15). Paul’s concern with not associating with sinners was that they not associate with sinners who claimed to be believers and members of their community. These were causing the problem he was addressing.

There was a fine balance between being a witness to the world around them and participating in that world’s values and sins. That uncleanness had to come to an end. Paul compared the Temple of God with idols.

²²⁵ McKelvey, R. J. *The New Temple*, p 93.

²²⁶ Barnett, Paul. 1988. *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p 130.

16 τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῶ θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων; ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι

ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω
καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μου λαός.

17 διὸ ἐξέλθατε ἐκ μέσου αὐτῶν
καὶ ἀφορίσθητε, λέγει κύριος,
καὶ ἀκαθάρτου μὴ ἄπτεσθε·

κἀγὼ εἰσδέξομαι ὑμᾶς
18 καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα
καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας,
λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ (NA27).

¹⁶ But what agreement [does] the temple of God with an idol temple? For we are the temple of the living God, just as God said,

I will dwell and I will live in them.

And I will be their God and they will be my people.

¹⁷ wherefore, come out from the midst of them

And be set apart from them, says the Lord,

And do not lay hold of unclean things;

And I will welcome you

¹⁸ and I will be to you a father

And you will be to me sons and daughters,

Says the Lord Almighty (Author's translation).

The key verse was the latter half of verse sixteen. “For we are the temple of the living God.” The community of believers was a special place, the dwelling place of God. Whether Paul intended to use a metaphor here or make a bold replacement statement is up for debate. The grammar was clear and played a role in the interpretation of the 1 Corinthians passages. “We” is a plural pronoun. Paul was careful to place himself within the community at Corinth as he was trying to be reconciled to them. “Temple” was singular. There are many members of the community {we} but only one Temple. “Having emphasized the incompatibility of ‘the Temple of God’ and idols (v. 16a), Paul with this affirmation shows why the Christian community must not become involved in pagan worship: it is because its members constitute *the temple of the*

living God.”²²⁷

In these verses was found the answer to a long-desired hope. Most people’s access to God had been limited. Only priests could enter the inner courts of the Jerusalem Temple. The Shekinah was accessed only once a year and only by the High Priest. Now, Paul announced, all, “we” have access through the Church. “Clearly the Church is viewed as the fulfilment of the ancient hope that God would one day dwell with his people in a new and more intimate way.”²²⁸ The pericope ended with an Old Testament quotation from Psalm 40 that promised this new way.

The key exhortation {not to engage in idolatrous meals or services} is now undergirded with Old Testament ‘promises’ (7:1). God lives in *the temple* or congregation of *the living God* and *walks among his people* as their *God* (verse 16). Therefore, Paul exhorts, *come out of them* (i.e. the idolators), *be separate*, and *touch no unclean thing* (i.e. the idols and temples; verse 17). Moreover, since God is a *Father* to his *sons and daughters* the same principle of withdrawal and separation applies (verse 18). By ‘promises’ Paul means these Old Testament texts as quoted which teach that God lives his people and that he is their Father,²²⁹

Holy living was an important aspect of Christian living for Paul. He called on the Corinthians, “Therefore, my dear friends, since we have these promises, let us purify ourselves from everything that can defile either body or spirit, and strive to be completely holy, out of reverence for God” (7:1, CJB). Israel was never able to come close while they had the physical Temple. Now, Paul called the community to do in the spiritual Temple, the Church, what Israel could not do.

²²⁷ Kruse, Colin G. 1987. *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 8. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, p 135.

²²⁸ McKelvey, R. J. *The New Temple*, p. 98.

²²⁹ Barnett, Paul. *The Message of 2 Corinthians*, p 131.

CONCLUSION

So ends the journey through God's Word. I explored the pieces that make up the metaphor of the Temple and Church. I looked at the history of the altars, the Tabernacle, and the Temples (both). The journey has shown that these were a great image for helping the community of believers understand what they were a part of. There are other metaphors that help expand our understanding of what this community looks like, who is a member, that what the community does matters, and what its future is after the Parousia. There are some great lessons.

In the first section, altars, I showed that these served several purposes for the patriarchs. Beginning with Cain and Abel through to the construction of the Tabernacle, these altars were a place where God could interact with his creation, and in particular a chosen family. God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He entered into covenants around an altar. Altars served as a place of memorial for great events, (Jacob's wrestling with God and the ladder as an example). These were not the only places where these things happened and they didn't all happen there, but many times God and his creation intersected at an altar.

Once Israel left Egypt as a nation, not a large family, the altar was absorbed into the Tabernacle. God gave Moses the pattern and he constructed a temporary structure (that served for centuries) to be his Tent. The Tabernacle would serve as the place where God's Name and Presence were to be found. Israel worshiped there and offered sacrifices; some for atonement, some for thanks, and some for other purposes such as reclaiming one's holiness. God communicated with his new nation, even when they didn't want to hear from him. It was a place where God chose to interact with his creation.

The second section was about the Temple. I studied the construction and dedication of the first Temple built by Solomon as well as the second built by Zerubbabel. On both occasions, the

completion was a source of great excitement and joy. These Temples were just grownup Tabernacles. They were bigger and grander yet served the same general purpose. Solomon's Temple was bigger and better than Zerubbabel's. That was something Herod sought to correct. One of the most important missions of the Temple(s) was to gather the *goyim* to God. By their faith, their honoring God, and by keeping his commands, God would bless them abundantly. The blessing would be seen by the *goyim* and they would gather with Israel to honor YHWH.

Unfortunately, Israel did not keep their part of the Covenant and could not complete this purpose. The story of the Temple is a mixed bag. There were wonderful days of faith, worship, celebration of the Festivals of Israel, and atoning sacrifices offered. Then there were times when pagan idols were set up and offerings to other gods were made. At times the Temple fell into disrepair and kings would take their thrones and restore them. Through all the centuries, God's Temple in Jerusalem was home to his Presence and bore his Name. It was where God chose to interact with his creation. The best times of the Temple serve as a great image for the Church. The worst serves as a warning.

The third section looked at passages related to the Temple but not necessarily those involved in the metaphor. I looked at Jesus and the passion he had for the Temple. It was his father's house. And by his actions, he declared it was his as well. Paul talked of the Temple, often as a warning to the Church of the dangers that she faced. The community of believers was always to be aware of what was happening, who was preaching, and what was being said. I proposed that Acts teaches two lessons. In Acts 2, I suggest that the tongues of fire that came upon those assembled were similar to the fire which came to the Temple at its dedication by Solomon. That would be a powerful statement God made about that which was born that Pentecost.

The second lesson came from Stephen. His message was a reminder that God is bigger than anything man could hope to build. His sermon serves as a reminder that God is beyond what can be seen. And in Revelation, I shared that once the Parousia of Christ, the community will enter into eternity with a different relationship to God and Jesus. That which was lost in the Garden will be restored and the Church/Temple will be replaced by God and his son in its midst.

The last section looked at six key passages which share the metaphor of Temple and Church. This section is the heart and soul of this work. As before, several key lessons are learned from these passages.

In two passages from Ephesians, we hear the call to unity. Jews were once the chosen people of God. Gentiles were foreigners and aliens from the promises and covenant of God. In the Church, the new Temple these two former enemies became a new creation. This new Temple was built on the firm foundation of Christ that Paul laid down for them. They were to take care of what was built upon that foundation. The community of believers were the stones the Spirit used to build that house. There would be a Day when those who built would be judged.

Peter shared that, as Paul stated, the community members were living stones, like the rejected Living Stone. These members were being built together into something very special. Peter also let the community know they were the new priesthood, the new holy nation, and God's possession. As priests, they have sacrifices to offer. Not the blood of animals for Christ's sacrifice fulfilled that need. Other sacrifices were to be offered, sacrifices of praise, and of ourselves.

First Corinthians was where this whole journey began. In two pericopes, chapters 3 and 6, I contend that the human body is not the Temple. That is a popular interpretation of the passages. It can be found in Christian literature, referenced in songs and devotionals. Even the secular world uses the interpretation. Yet, I contend that the community of believers, the Church

is what Paul meant when he penned the verses. Paul was asking the community to deal with division and with sexual immorality and protecting the community was his main priority.

The final pericope was from 2 Corinthians where Paul states that something special is happening. As the Temple of the Spirit, the community was called to holiness. God is holy and he cannot reside with unholiness. This holiness would be an attraction and the nations would see God at work and be drawn to him.

The Temple is a wonderful metaphor for the Church. God places his Name on us. He makes his Presence known among us. Other metaphors help, but this one helps us understand the New Covenant written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31, Hebrews 8). It helps us understand why holy living is so important. It helps us understand why division is foreign to our well-being. God bless his Temple and the community that are its living stones.

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