

The Meaning of the Temple of God

Introduction:

1. In the early stages of the history of God's people He led them out of Egypt and established His presence among them in the tabernacle.
2. Later as He established them in the Promised Land the temple represented His presence among them.
3. He guided them and protected them and blessed them with good things. The appropriate response was thanksgiving, trust, and dependence upon Him, but that was NOT their response. Instead they rebelled, questioned His goodness and sought out other gods.
4. And so, God's presence was removed from the temple of Jerusalem (Ezek. 10:15-19; 11:22-25). He has never returned.
5. The Roman Emperor Titus destroyed the temple structure in A.D. 70.
6. But even though God had been rejected He never abandoned His desire to be with His people. He even spoke of being a sanctuary to them in the countries where they were scattered (Ezek. 11:16). He spoke of a time when He would give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. He said that they would walk in His statutes and keep His commandments. He said, "Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God" (Ezek. 11:19-20).
7. Ezekiel even saw a vision in which the glory of the Lord returned from the east and again filled the house of the Lord (43:1ff). Many Jews today are waiting for this return.
8. But N.T. writers take a different view.
9. In language reminiscent of the old temple Peter spoke of the new (1 Pet. 2:5-10). What is this new temple and what does it mean?
10. Before we can answer that we need to go back and notice some of the key features of the old temple.

Discussion:

I. Key features of the old temple.

- A. The creation account reminds us of God's desire to be with us.
 1. He created us and placed us in a garden. He designed a companion for us.
 2. He walked in the garden in the cool of the day desirous of our presence and when we hid from Him He asked, "Where are you?"
- B. First, the tabernacle and then the temple were reflections of God's desire to be with us.
 1. They were never meant to shut people out, but to bring God in.
 2. Some Jews seem to have interpreted it as representing their exclusive right to God and did shut others out.
 3. God's intent was to come into the world for the benefit of all (Isa. 56:3-8; Mk. 11:17).
 4. Israel was to be the conduit through which all the earth might come to the Lord (Isa.

49:6; cf. Lk. 2:29-32; Acts 13:47).

- C. The temple was the landing site that God used to spread His influence into the world.
1. He parked His spaceship in Jerusalem at the temple. The promised land, the promises made to Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed found their origin in God's desire to be with us (Rom. 4:13).
 2. The ancient Israelites seemed to have realized that the temple was only, at best, a kind of temporary and inadequate expression of what it signified (2 Chron. 6:18; Acts 7:47-50; cf. Isa. 66:1-2).
 3. It was the contact point through which God would embrace the world. This is the significance all nations streaming to the mountain of the house of the Lord and the law going forth from Zion (Isa. 2:2-3).
 4. In these O.T. priests and sacrifices we see God's project unfolding. It was a remediation project, a reclamation project, a project to restore intimacy and remove separation. Some of the Jews of the first century seemed to go in the opposite direction. Instead of removing separation they perpetuated it (cf. Mk. 11:17). Is this not why they opposed Jesus' association with tax-collectors and sinners?
 5. The first century was a critical point for the temple. The presence of God had not returned since Ezekiel had seen it leave. And then, in 70 A.D. Titus had destroyed the physical structure. The question then became, "Now What?"

II. The disciples of Jesus had the answer.

- A. They saw Jesus as the chief corner stone of a new temple and those who believe in Him as stones in that temple.
1. Peter (1 Pet. 2:4-8).
 2. Paul (Eph. 2:19-22).
 3. The writer of Hebrews elaborates extensively, making Jesus both the High Priest and the sacrifice of a more perfect tabernacle (Heb. 9:11-12). He identifies the earthly tabernacle as reflective of the heavenly. This indicates that the earthly tabernacle was specifically designed as part of the unfolding plan of God for the sanctification of His people (Heb. 8:1-6; 13:12).
- B. They saw their mission through the lens of the temple.
1. Seeing the temple as God working to be with His people, and as a conduit to embrace all the people of the world, they preached the gospel.
 2. They saw it as their mission to bring into reality God's plan. Paul said, "God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

3. They took it to all nations. In doing so they were following the instruction of the Lord in the great commission (Matt. 28:19).
4. They began in Jerusalem, in the temple and went to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8; 3:1).
5. This is our mission as stones in the temple. We are in the business of bringing God to the world. It is the ancient mission of the temple (1 Pet. 2:9).

III. Peter emphasizes that this is done by keeping our behavior excellent so that God may be glorified (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

- A. The rest of 1 Pet. defines specifics of doing this.
- B. It involves submission.
 1. To authorities (2:13-18).
 2. In relationships (3:1ff).
 3. Giving a blessing (3:8ff).
- C. It involves suffering (2:19-24; 3:13ff).
- D. It involves a course of life different from the Gentiles (1 Pet. 4:3-6).
- E. This is what it means to be the temple of God. This is what it means for God to dwell in us (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Conclusion:

1. From ancient times the temple has represented God's covenant presence among His people.
2. Ex. 29:45 says, "I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God."
3. As the temple of God we represent God's presence in the world.
4. Let us proclaim the excellencies of His grace, inviting the entire world into His house.
5. May each of us dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psa. 23:6).