

What is the Temple (A Basic Overview)?

By: Chad Knudson

I would recommend the following book if you want a thorough treatment on the subject.

Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.

When we begin to think about the temple we must start in the Old Testament.

- 1.) We first see the presence of God with his people in Eden. However, Eden is lost because of sin. Beyond Eden, the first glimpse we get of a temple idea is in Genesis 28:10-22. Jacob recognizes the coming down of the Lord and names the place Bethel, which means "house of God."
- 2.) As Israel is called out of Egypt, God promises that if they are obedient he will make them a great nation, a chosen race, and a royal priesthood (Exodus 19:3-6). However, Israel fails in this task. God also promises to be among his people (in the tabernacle or temple; Exo 25:8; 29:45; Lev 26:12; cf., Jer 31:1; Ezek 37:27).
- 3.) The tabernacle is built and the glory of the Lord comes to rest on it (Exodus 40). In other words, deity comes down to dwell with his people.
- 4.) The temple represents God's presence with his people.
- 5.) In 2 Samuel 7:1-17 David wants to build a permanent house for the Lord (i.e., not a tabernacle, but a stone temple), but God states that he will build a house for David and his seed (or descendant) will rule over his kingdom and over this house forever. Solomon fulfills this prophecy in an initial way, but he is wayward and sins against the Lord (1 Kings 6:1ff).
- 6.) The children of Israel are both assimilated with the Assyrians in 722 BC and driven into exile by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Consequently the temple is destroyed and all its elements.
- 7.) While in exile God promises that he will restore his people (the message of the prophets) and rebuild his temple. This temple will be greater than Solomon's temple (Ezekiel 40-48).
- 8.) When the children of Israel come back from exile after 70 years (Jer 29:10) they are told to rebuild the temple (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah).
- 9.) While rebuilding the temple many people that lived during the time of Solomon's temple are discouraged by the insignificance of the present temple. God encourages them that a future temple will be greater than Solomon's temple (Haggai 2:3-9).
- 10.) Between the Old and New Testament Herod builds a temple. This temple is the one that existed during Jesus' day.

- 11.) When Jesus appears he claims that he is the temple, the tabernacle among God's people (John 1:14; 2:18-22; Mark 14:58; John 14:23). Jesus is the ladder or the house that has come down from heaven, which Jacob saw in his dream (John 1:50-51). Only Jesus perfectly obeys God, thus, all in him are God's beloved. At his death the temple veil is tore, indicating that access to God is no longer through the temple, but through Christ (Matt 27:51; cf., John 4:20-26).
- 12.) Jesus is the true temple—God's presence with his people. Access to God is freely accomplished through Jesus, not through a priest in a physical temple (see the book of Hebrews).
- 13.) The New Testament apostles understand that God could never be confined to a temple made with human hands, but that Christ was the temple (Acts 6:13; 7:48-50). At the Jerusalem Council, James the brother of Jesus, along with the other disciples understand that the rebuilding of the temple or tabernacle of David was taking place during their day with the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:13-18).
- 14.) Paul in his epistles understands that the presence of God was with his people (in his people) by virtue of the Holy Spirit and that God was building a new temple unto himself, with Christ as the chief-cornerstone (1 Cor 3:9-12; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16-18; Eph 2:14-22; cf., Heb 8:1-2; Rev 2:1). The glory of God or the deity of God has come down to man, much like it does in Exodus 40 (Col 1:19; 2:9).
- 15.) The writer of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear throughout his epistle that Christ is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. Therefore, why go back to Judaism (and the temple), for something better has come. Rather, suffer with Christ outside the gate, outside the earthly Jerusalem, outside the temple, looking unto a better city, a better country, and a better hope.
- 16.) Peter understands that Christ is the true temple, the chief-cornerstone, which is the foundation for God's new temple (his people); people that are a holy nation, a chosen race, and a royal priesthood unto God (1 Pet 2:4ff).
- 17.) Finally, in the eternal kingdom we see the heavenly Jerusalem come down from heaven, shaped as a perfect cube (Rev 21:16). The only other place we find a perfect cube or square is in the Holy of Holies, the place where God's presence would reside with his people in the Old Testament (1 Kings 6:20). John states that there is no need for a temple, for the Lord God and the lamb are its temple (Rev 21:22). His glory will fill the whole place and his people will share in his presence (Rev 22:3-5). Eden is now restored and God is with his people forever (Rev 22:17-14).
- 18.) Thus, I think it is incorrect to advocate that there will be a future physical temple. The promises of God always pointed to a greater reality, better than the original recipients could have ever imagined. That reality is in Christ—the true meeting place between God and his people (cf., 1 Tim 2:5). Because of Christ we all experience God's presence in our lives, because he indwells us by the Holy Spirit. Why would we want to go back to the shadow, when the

substance has come in these last days? To God be the glory, for his promises are great and better than we can even ask or imagine (1 Cor 2:9).