

A Brief History of the Temple and God's Presence

- A major theme in the Old Testament (OT) is the presence of God. We often put the focus on Israel and their attempts to follow the law, but the OT is really about God and where God lived.
- When the Israelites left Egypt and wandered through the wilderness, they were accompanied by the presence of God himself in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
- When God commanded the creation of the Tent of Meeting he took up residence in that tent and was mobile, just as the people were mobile.
- But as the people took over the land God had led them to and began to put down roots, they began to yearn for more stability than the mobility that God made available to them. (At least they thought so!)
- So they asked for a king (rejecting God as their king in the process)...and then one of the kings they got (David) decided his house was much nicer than the house God lived in and that wasn't right so he decided to build God a new house.
- But God had other plans—he didn't like the blood David had on his hands and he wouldn't permit David to build him a home...but he would allow David's son Solomon to do so.
- So Solomon built God a glorious house—the Temple. And God took up residence in the Temple (1 Kings 8:1-11). The Temple is God's place, where his presence and glory were.
- But a funny thing happened. Though Israel should have followed God (he lived among them, after all), they didn't. They turned from God. They turned away from God. They didn't look after the poor and widows among them. They worshiped false gods.
- So God turned them over to foreign nations (first Assyria, then Babylon) who took Israel captive and deported many of them out of Israel into a foreign land.
- And Babylon went one step further. Its army destroyed Jerusalem, the holy city, and they destroyed the Temple, the place where God lived!
- Ezekiel describes this time in a vision he saw in Ezekiel 10: God's glory actually left the Temple. God, like his people, was homeless. And it was their fault—they had turned from him.
- But Ezekiel also knows of a future time when God's "Temple" will be rebuilt, when God's presence will come back to Israel and will again take up

residence in the Temple (40-48).

- Many years after Israel was defeated and deported, a more benevolent ruler allowed them to return home. Men like Nehemiah came back and oversaw the rebuilding of the wall in Jerusalem (and even the city itself). Men like Ezra came back and oversaw the rebuilding of the temple.
- This time became known in Jewish religion (Judaism) as the Second Temple period. Their history was understood through the Temple.
- But scripture doesn't tell us God came back to live in the Temple. So what do we make of Ezekiel's prophecy?
- The Temple continued to function religiously for Israel even as Jesus came on the scene. Among the things Jesus taught was the Temple no longer housed the presence of God—God's presence was in Jesus! WHAT???
- In John 2:13-22 Jesus trashed the Temple, the very place God was believed to live in. No wonder the Jews were so angry with him! So their question for him to prove his authority makes sense—on what grounds, as a teacher or prophet, does he act to violate the presence of God?
- But Jesus' answer blows them away—he acts like this because the Temple he is speaking of that will be destroyed and rebuilt in 3 days is not the physical Temple but the spiritual one! HE is the Temple—the presence of God is IN HIM! This is why he can say: "I and the Father are one!" (John 10:30)
- So they kill Jesus. But Jesus isn't a regular person; he has the presence of God, remember? So he rises from the dead. But at the point of his death something very interesting happens...something deep in the Temple: the curtain separating the holiest place from the rest of the Temple was torn in half (Matthew 27:51). The curtain that kept God "contained" was broken...so the presence of God could escape the boundaries that had been set for him. But he was already gone—because he was in Jesus.
- After Jesus is raised but before he ascends to be with the Father, he tells his disciples something very interesting. He was with them in Jerusalem and he gave them this command: "Wait for the gift my Father promised" and he ties it in with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).
- Hmm. The Spirit. The mysterious presence that empowered people throughout the OT to do strange but powerful things for God. The Spirit. The very thing that marked one out as chosen by God. The Spirit. The very thing that indicated the availability and immediacy of God's presence. And Jesus told them to wait for it. Hmm.
- So the apostles hung out. They waited. And suddenly, on Pentecost, they

- received "power when the Holy Spirit [came] upon" them (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).
- What does this mean? Is it just a way of explaining how the apostles operated differently from the rest of the believers? Does it simply tell us the apostles had special abilities at that time? Or does it mean more?
 - As a result of the great show of Spiritual power, many are baptized. But the baptismal instructions carry great weight—this is not a passive process, a mere washing in water to make one clean on the outside. No, baptism is a radical spiritual transformation. It carries the weight of the Holy Spirit. We emphasize the forgiveness of sins, but scripture emphasizes BOTH the forgiveness of sins AND the gift of the Holy Spirit! The promised gift!
 - So what does all this mean?
 - Ephesians 1:13-14. The Spirit is the deposit of God's glory; the guarantee of our redemption; we are God's possession because we are linked to him by his Spirit!
 - 1 Corinthians 6:19. The Spirit is IN YOU. This is God's price, paid *by* him *to* him to redeem you.
 - 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. The Spirit is in you. YOU are God's temple. THE CHURCH is God's temple! God doesn't reside in a building...because he resides in you!
 - God's presence is available to us...because his presence is IN US!