

## THE LIVING TEMPLE OF GOD



### INTRODUCTION

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If you could travel back in time as a tourist to see any place, what would your destination of choice be? If you are a nature lover, you may want to travel to the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve were evicted. If you are an adventure thrill seeker, you may want to be on a kayak at the time of the great flood to see Noah's ark in all its splendor. If you love humor and wanted to see a comedy show of note, you may want to travel to the tower of Babel to observe the confusion when God introduced different languages and, within an instant, not one person could understand what the other was saying.

One of the places that I would include in my time travel itinerary is the Temple of Solomon. The architect of the temple was God Himself. Although God gave the building plans to King David, he was not allowed to commence construction because he had way too much blood on his hands. The task to build the temple was given to King Solomon, David's son, about 1,000 years before Jesus was born. It was a massive construction project which relied upon 30,000 laborers, 80,000 stone cutters, 70,000 burden bearers and 3,300 chief officers! (1 Kings 5). It took this formidable workforce 7 years to complete the construction. The very best stone and timber were used for the main structures. The interior was decorated with only the best and there was extensive use of bronze. And when it came to the interior, all the vessels were made of pure gold.

The temple had three sections. The inner sanctuary (or most Holy Place) had two massive golden cherubim on either side of the ark of the covenant. The ark contained the 10 commandments written by God Himself on two stone tablets. Only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place once a year to bring a sacrifice of atonement for all of God's people.

One can only imagine how spectacular the temple must have looked. One can also only imagine how reverent and holy the temple must have been. Indeed, the Lord Himself consecrated the Temple and placed His Name in the Temple. In 1 Kings 9:2 – 3 we read: ***"...the Lord appeared to Solomon...and said to him: I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before***

*me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting My Name there forever. My eyes and My heart will be there for all time.”*. In the Old Testament context, the expression “the Name of the Lord” is used to refer to the person or the presence of the Lord. So, by putting His Name in the temple, the Lord was indeed present in the temple. Can you imagine that?

Sadly, a few generations later the temple of King Solomon was severely damaged and plundered by one of the Pharaohs of Egypt. Attempts were made to restore the temple, but it was finally destroyed by the Babylonian Empire in the Siege of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

After the fall of the Babylonian Empire, the Book of Ezra describes the work that commenced to build a second temple. This temple was completed between 450 and 500 B.C. The temple had to endure many attempts to bring it down. Then 63 years before Jesus was born, the Roman Pompeii entered the Most Holy place of the temple (reserved for the High Priest only) and desecrated it. A few years later, the temple was looted, and all the temple treasures were stolen. Then in 20 BC, Herod the Great restored and expanded the temple and it became known as Herod’s Temple. This is the temple in Jerusalem we read about where Jesus spent so much time teaching and healing people. It is also the temple where Jesus became angry and chased away all the traders.

#### END OF THE SECOND TEMPLE

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Sadly, the second temple was also doomed. In our Gospel reading, Jesus foretold of the destruction of the second temple. In Matthew 24 we read: *“his disciples pointed out to him the buildings of the temple...he answered them: “...Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”*. Did you know that the Lord also warned of the destruction of the first temple? In 1 Kings 9: 6 - 8 after the Lord consecrated the temple, He also warned King Solomon: *“if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments, and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel...and the house that I have consecrated for My Name I will cast out of my sight...And this house will become a heap of ruins.”*

The destruction of Herod’s temple indeed came about in 70 AD. The Roman Army under the command of Titus destroyed most of Jerusalem including the temple.

#### THE THIRD TEMPLE

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So, what happened to Ezekiel’s vision of the temple? Ezekiel was a prophet at the time of the destruction of King Solomon’s temple in 586BC. We now know the second temple was also destroyed. God showed to Ezekiel water flowing from the temple. The water would start as a trickle, to become a stream and then a vast river. The river would ultimately flow into the dead sea and cause the sea water to become fresh. On the banks of the river, trees and all living creatures will flourish. The fresh waters of the river will bring an abundance of fish. The trees on the banks of the river would be every green. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. Where is this temple now that is meant to be the source of the fresh water?

Ezekiel's vision must have been of a third temple? Part of the answer may be in what Jesus was alluding to when He said: ***"I am able to destroy the temple, and to rebuild it in three days."*** Matthew 26:61. But where is this third temple that Jesus was going to rebuild in three days? Today there is a Muslim mosque in Jerusalem where the temple used to be.

Paul connects the dots for us in his first letter to the Corinthians. The city of Corinth in Greece was a major economic hub in its day with a strategic harbor and trading routes. Corinth had a metropolitan population and was home to many temples, including the famous temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and war.

In the context of physical temples, Paul could not be any clearer about the existence of the third and true temple: ***"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that the Spirit dwells in you?"*** 1 Cor 3:16. How profound, we are now the third temple. Both collectively as the church and individually as a follower of Jesus. Paul confirmed it again: ***"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"*** 1 Cor 6:19. Yes, each one of us is now the temple of God.

What is equally profound, is that there is now more need for a Most Holy place in the temple where only the High Priest may enter. In Matthew 27 we read how Jesus died for all our sins on the cross. He was both the High Priest bringing atonement for our sins and the Perfect Lamb being sacrificed for us. In verse 51 we read that upon the moment Jesus yielded His Spirit and died: ***"And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom"***. The curtain that separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple was no longer needed. From that point onwards, God and his children were united through Jesus Christ. God, through His Spirit now lives within each one of us and each one of us is the living temple of God. Praise the Lord!

## AM I A HOLY TEMPLE?

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When we understand that each one of us is the temple of God and that God now dwells within us, our call to holiness should be much clearer: ***"...God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."*** 1 Cor 3:17b. Peter said: ***"as He who called you is holy, you also must be holy in all your conduct since it is written: "You shall be holy, for I am holy"."*** 1 Peter 1:15 – 16. And perhaps the words of hymn 383 will also be more meaningful to us. Consider some of the phrases of the hymn again:

*Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.* – Yes, the Lord is within me.

*We stand on holy ground.* – I am indeed on holy ground and must be holy.

*Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.* – God's glory is meant to shine through me.

*Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving within this place.* – Lord let your power move within me.

*He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace.* - Lord, cleanse and heal me with your grace just like the leaves of the riverbank trees in Ezekiel's vision.

*No work too hard for Him, in faith received from Him.* - Lord I believe with all my heart, with all my mind and all my soul – please help my disbelief.

Why are we called to be holy? Can you imagine the temple of God not being a holy place? And how can fresh water flow from an unholy temple? Ezekiel's vision is so clear. Fresh water must constantly trickle from the temple (collectively and individually) to build the Kingdom of God. The fresh water is a narrative for the fruit and the work of the Holy Spirit that is meant to flow from each one of us individually and from the church collectively. It is meant to bring salvation, life, healing and hope to the world around us until Jesus returns for the final judgement day. Jesus confirmed to his disciples: ***"And the gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed through the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and the then end will come."*** Mat 24:14

Each one of us should check whether water is indeed trickling from our temple. If we find no trickle of water, or water that is polluted, please check whether the Lord is indeed dwelling within you. Perhaps you have created a chamber in your temple where you hide the Lord. Perhaps you only permit the Lord to dwell in you when it suits you. Or perhaps you have allowed other gods, false prophets or bad friends into your temple. If any of this is a true, please repent today! It may be autumn now, but do a complete spring clean of your temple today. Cast out and evict the unwanted gods, false prophets and bad friends from your temple. Allow God to be at the centre and everywhere in your temple. Allow Jesus to minister to you, to feed you and to heal you.

Please do not delay and please take note of the warning that the Lord gave to King Solomon: ***"if you turn aside from following Me, then I will cut you off. Your temple that I have consecrated for My Name I will cast out of my sight and you will become a heap or ruins."*** (paraphrasing of 1 Kings 9:6 – 8). If the Lord allowed the temple He designed to be destroyed because of disobedience and disloyalty, none of us are immune if we follow the same path.

But is never stops there. Just as any temple needs to be constantly swept clean, dusted off and polished, we also need daily cleaning. Each day we must pray and read the Word of God. Each day we must guard our thoughts before they drive inappropriate actions, that become habits, shape our character and lead to the wrong destiny. Fortunately, we are never alone when we listen to the voice of the Helper who dwells within us.

## CONCLUSION

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Brothers and Sisters, if your temple is looking anything as messy as mine and is indeed due for a proper spring clean, I want to invite you pray with me now. Hymn 382 in our Mission Praise book was written by Dave Bryant and is apt for the spring clean we need (please say after me):

Jesus, take me as I am,  
I can come no other way.  
Take me deeper into You,  
Make my flesh life melt away.  
Make me like a precious stone,  
Crystal clear and finely honed.  
Life of Jesus shining through,

Giving glory back to you.

**AMEN**

*Collect (Prayer before the readings): Almighty God, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You. Pour Your love into our hearts and draw us to Yourself, and so bring us at last to Your heavenly city where we shall see You face to face; through Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

Readings: Old Testament: Ezekiel 47:1 - 12  
New Testament: 1 Corinthians 3:9 - 17  
Gospel: Matthew 24:1 - 14

Hymns:

1. 555 (Common Praise): Praise my soul the King of Heaven  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDe0ABw5IHs>
2. 383 (Common Praise): Be still, for the presence of the Lord  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U>
3. 881 (Mission Praise): Lord, I lift your name on high  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03MdMcBFNdK>
4. 513 (Common Praise): Lord, the light of your love is shining  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rce9UHYZwl4>