

The concept of the Temple begins in the Book of Exodus. God commands Moses to build a tent - the nomadic equivalent of a house, so that the children of Israel will be aware of His presence within them. **Exodus 25:8**.

This happened approximately 1445 years before the common era. According to **1 Kings 6:1** the exodus preceded the time when Solomon began to build the Temple (ca. 966 B.C.) by 480 years.¹ For almost 500 years the tent was the place where the presence of God dwelt symbolically.

In true hebraic fashion the Temple, and particularly the mystery of the presence of God, is described in many ways. No description is complete in itself, but together they weave a rich tapestry for us. Remember that the aim of these descriptions is not so much to enable us to comprehend God's presence as to produce a sense of awe.

Israel and the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures understood that it was only by God's grace that He consented to dwell with His people. The Deuteronomist presents the central sanctuary as the place where Yahweh caused His Name to dwell (**Deuteronomy 12:5**; compare **1 Kings 8:13**), while the priestly perspective viewed the sanctuary as filled with His glory (like the tabernacle, **Exodus 40:34**).

From a prophetic perspective, Isaiah pictures the earthly Temple in Jerusalem as a microcosm of the heavenly Temple where the King of the universe dwelt. The quaking and smoke of the Lord's presence at Mt Sinai were now demonstrated on Mt Zion (Jerusalem) (**Isaiah 6:1-5**).

Despite these descriptions, no Israelite believed that they could confine God's presence in a building:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest

¹ **A Dating of the Exodus Journey**

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The 480 years added to 966 B.C. yields a date of 1446 B.C. for the exodus.

Jephthah's statement in Judges 11:26 that Israel had possessed the land of Canaan by his time for a period of 300 years. Jephthah's own date is ca. 1100 B.C. That means that Israel was in the land since ca. 1400 B.C. and adding 40 years for the wilderness wandering yields an exodus date of ca. 1440 B.C.

The apostle Paul stated in Acts 13:19-20 that time from the exodus to Samuel the prophet was 450 years. David, who was anointed King of Israel by Samuel, captured Jerusalem ca. 995 B.C. Adding 450 years to ca. 995 B.C. yields a date for the Exodus at ca. 1445 B.C.

heaven cannot contain you; much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27).

Mixed Fortunes

The story of the Temple is a long and winding road of blessing and disobedience. At times Israel encountered the Lord in her midst and the Shekinah of God filled the Israelites with awe and devotion. At other times the House of the Lord became the place of judgement and condemnation.

The gold Temple treasures were plundered by foreign invaders like Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt (1 Kings 14:25-26). Immediately after Solomon's reign, when civil war caused division of the kingdom, Jeroboam, the king of the Northern kingdom, set up rival sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan which drew worshipers away from Jerusalem for two hundred years.

The Judean King Asa plundered the Temple treasuries to buy a military alliance with Ben-Hadad of Syria to help him in the struggle against Baasha, king of North Israel (1 Kings 15:18-19). Earlier in his reign Asa had repaired the Temple altar and carried out limited worship reforms (2 Chronicles 15:8-18).

Despite the warnings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the people refused to repent of their failure to trust God for their political well-being. They also neglected to obey the Torah and for these reasons their Temple and the holy city of Jerusalem were first plundered by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C., then burned by Nebuzaradan, his general, in ten years later.

The Temple - part of everyday life

The prophetic book of Isaiah begins with a judgement pronounced on the people in terms of the daily routine of Temple worship. In this first chapter Isaiah established the unbreakable connection between worship and social relationships. Worship is worthless if we are oppressing others and failing to live justly.

In our context today, we so easily compartmentalise our lives thereby deceiving ourselves that the spiritual is altogether separate from the temporal. Isaiah reminds us that the God of Abraham recognises no such separation. The quality of our worship as individuals and a community, is dependent upon the quality of our lives. (read Isaiah 1 - the whole chapter)

11. *What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.*
- 12 *When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?*
- 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

(Isaiah 1:11-12 & 17)

Jesus and the Temple

The Temple in Jerusalem was central to Jesus' life just as it was for all observant Jews. His parents, we are told, went up to Jerusalem each year for the Passover festival. (Luke 2:41) This yearly trip was a sign that they were more observant than most.

This spiritual attachment to the Temple is reflected in the Gospel record. The Jerusalem Temple is the focus of many of the key events in Jesus' ministry. The birth of John the Baptist was announced there (Luke 1:11-20). The offering by Joseph and Mary at the circumcision of the infant Jesus was brought there. Simeon and Anna greeted Jesus there (Luke 2:22-38). Jesus came to the Temple as a boy of twelve (Luke 2:42-51) and later taught there during His ministry (John 7:14).

The so-called "*cleansing of the Temple*" was instrumental in precipitating the events that led to His death. (Luke 19:45-47). He taught that the condition of the heart of the worshipper was more essential than the Temple to the worship God (John 4:21-24). He likened His own body to the Temple (John 2:18-22). Early Jewish believers continued to worship at the Temple as a normal part of the expression of their Jewish faith. Paul was arrested at the Temple (Acts 3:1; Acts 21:27-33).

Jesus predicted the Temple's destruction, and His words warned His followers to flee when this happened, thus saving the lives of many Jewish believer's in Jerusalem (Mark 13:2, Mark 13:14-23).

The Destruction of the Temple

After the Jewish revolt in 66 A.D., the Roman general Vespasian, and later his son Titus, crushed all Jewish resistance in Jerusalem to Roman rule. The Temple was destroyed in 70 CE.

There is an intriguing historical fact recorded in the Talmud that is associated with the time of Jesus and the destruction of the Temple. Every year on Yom Kippur (The day of Atonement) a sacrifice was made for the nation. It involved two goats. (**Leviticus 16**)

Then he [the High Priest] shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. **8** And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. **9** And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering, **10** but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel....

And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness....

A tradition developed of tying a cord of red wool to the horns of the scapegoat so that it could be identified in the desert if someone came across it. After the goat died the scarlet cord that was saved would then supernaturally change to pure white, and then the priests would know that Israel's sins were truly forgiven by God. Perhaps this ritual came from, or is referred to by Isaiah 1:18, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." We don't know for sure who started this part of the ritual, but we do know that God honored it, because it was recorded in the ancient Jewish histories and commentaries that have been preserved over the ages. In fact, here is what is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a-39b,

"Our Rabbis taught that throughout the forty years that Shim'on the Tzaddik served... the scarlet cloth would become white. From then on it would sometimes become white and sometimes not.... Throughout the last forty years before the Temple was destroyed... the scarlet cloth never turned white."

This corresponds to the very year in which Israel's religious leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah on the basis that He was possessed by a demon. (**Mark 3:22**)

Since then the site of the Temple has been a Roman Pagan shrine, a Byzantine Church, a Mosque, a Crusader Church and a Mosque again.

Some Jews and Christians believe that the Temple will be rebuilt on the same site. Needless to say there is alarm expressed by Moslems and the Israeli authorities at these ideas.

Jesus and the Temple - association and distance

Luke's gospel begins and ends the account of Jesus' life in the temple. This is not a coincidence. The Temple in Jerusalem was a potent symbol of Jewish faith in the first century of the common era. Even Jews in the diaspora associated their faith with the Temple.

Luke begins with a description of a Temple priest going about his duties when he has an angelic visitation. He ends his account of Jesus' life with the disciples going back to Jerusalem with great joy and continually visiting the temple to praise God for what had happened. (Luke 24:50-53)

At the beginning of the account Jesus' relative Zechariah is fulfilling his priestly duties at the altar of incense when he is told in a prophetic announcement that his wife Elisheva (Elizabeth) will conceive and bear him a son. His son is described as a forerunner before the Lord who would serve in the spirit and power of Elijah.

When Jesus was forty days old He was presented by His parents at the Temple according to the requirements of "pidyon ha ben" the redemption of the son. (Luke 2:22) The prophets Simeon and Hanna prophesied about Him in the Temple precincts. (Luke 2:25-38)

When Jesus was 12 years old and preparing for bar mitzvah He stayed behind in the Temple to discuss Torah with the teachers. (Lk 2:41-51) On this occasion Jesus referred to the temple as "My Father's House" (Luke 2:49)

During the last week of His earthly ministry Jesus returned to the Temple taught there It is important to note that it was not Jesus' discussions on halakhic (Jewish law) issues with the Pharisees but His confrontation with the Temple authorities and all that they stood for that, humanly speaking, caused His death.

There is a "yes" and "no" that runs through the whole of Jesus ministry. The clue to this whole story of Jesus and the Temple is hidden in the meaning of

His last act in the Temple. This is also indirectly discernible in the interactions of His Galilean ministry. (Mark 3:6, 22)

Three Temple Teachings in the life of Jesus

Jesus aligned Himself with John the Immerser. John understood holiness in terms of his baptism which significantly took place away from Temple. For Jesus holiness seems to have been associated with His own person; with Him present, “more than the Temple” was there (Matt 12:6). According to Jesus Israel realises holiness by repentance and becoming part of Jesus’ kingdom movement. Holiness comes from within, (Mark 7:14-23) through obeying the great commandment of love: repentance toward God and reconciliation with neighbour.

Purity was not provided by the action of bringing a sacrifice to the Temple, it is acquired by reconciling oneself with one’s neighbour. (Matt 5:23-24) While not in opposition to the Temple there is an ambivalence which is hard to ignore. This “yes” and “no” stance to the Temple is one of the key factors in understanding Jesus’ Jewish character and His mission. The fact that His atoning sacrifice takes place at the same time as the afternoon sacrifice in the Temple and yet outside the city wall adds to the tension inherent in His relationship with the Temple.

There are three episodes in the life of Jesus that illustrate the Jesus’ view of the Temple.

2. His visit at 12 years of age during Passover (Luke 2:41-52)

In a Jewish household the attainment of 12 years of age by a son is a time of great excitement and expectation. At thirteen a boy goes through the process of Bar Mitzvah - literally “son of the commandment”. A boy takes the responsibility for keeping the commandments of the Torah. It is a transition from childhood to adult responsibility.

Just before this event in His life Jesus enters the Temple and begins a discussion with the Torah teachers. Luke’s description of the event (possibly gleaned from Mary) is as follows;

After three days they 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 and his answers. (Luke 2:46-47)

"After three days" probably means "on the third day" -- one day traveling north to Galilee by caravan, one day returning south to Jerusalem, and then the third day searching until they found Jesus.

And where was he? Deeply engrossed in discussion with the Torah teachers. Sometimes we hear this passage explained as if Jesus were teaching the teachers, but that misunderstands the context. The listeners would be sitting on the ground at the feet of the teachers, who were also seated on low stools. Rabbinic teaching used questions on the part of the students, from which discussion would rise.

Everyone who heard Jesus on this occasion was struck by his understanding. The Greek noun is *existemi*, "be amazed, be astonished, of the feeling of astonishment mingled with fear, caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand."

At age twelve, Jesus is listening to teaching in the temple during Passover. But 20 years or so later, he is the Teacher in these same courts, and his many, many hearers will be struck again by His insight and authority.

Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" is more than a boy's somewhat naive question. This is a turning point in Jesus' life and the first personal announcement of His ministry. Mary speaks about "your father and I" in verse 48. But in verse 49, Jesus changes "*your father*" to "*my father*" and applies it to the God of the Temple.

The personal intimacy of the phrase "my Father" referring to God is unprecedented in Jewish literature, where it might be expressed as "in heaven" or "our Father."

The fact that Jesus' first utterance in the Gospel is, "I had to be in my Father's house" is a ringing endorsement for the Temple and Jesus' identification with it. The second aspect of this statement is the fact that His relationship with the Father is announced in the Temple. The place which symbolized the relationship between God and His chosen people.

In the absence of an earthly Temple building the Body of Christ is the equivalent of the Temple. Paul writes,

"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (2 Cor 6:16)

The Temple was always meant to express the relationship between the people of God and their God. However, it also expressed the fact that they belonged to one another as members of the people God had chosen.

APPLICATION

So here is the challenge: To what extent is our relationship with God expressed in devotion to the community of which we are a part? Am I just a passenger or am I an active participant in the life and development of the congregation?

2. The visit during the festival of Sukkot (John 7:2, 27-27)

To understand the significance of Jesus' words in this portion of John's gospel it is important to know a little about the context. Sukkot (Tabernacles) is the autumn harvest festival. It is also known as the feast of booths or shelters (Chag Ha-sukkoth). The agricultural significance of the feast is acknowledged by the Bible and it is referred to as the Feast of Ingathering (**Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Leviticus 23:39; Deut 16:13-15.**)

"You shall celebrate the Festival of In-gathering, at the end of the year, when you gather in your labors out of the field" (Exodus 23:16).

Hence, it is also called Hag HaAsif, the festival of Ingathering. The harvest is in, the barns and vats are full. The work is done and the hearts of the people are filled with joy. For this reason Sukkot is also known as "The Season of Rejoicing" No wonder Jeremiah lamented, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." (**Jeremiah 8:20**)

The Celebration of Water Pouring (Simchat Beit HaShoevah) is a ceremony included in the temple services not mentioned in the Torah, but given in the Mishnah (*Succah 5*). The water pouring became a focus of the joy that the Torah commands for Sukkot. On no other festival were the people commanded to be joyful, and as a result Sukkot (Tabernacles) became known as "the season of our joy," just as Passover (Pesach) is "the season of our freedom" and Shavout (Pentecost) is "the season of the giving of the Torah."

At this season of Sukkot, Isaiah 12:3 was often quoted,
"Therefore with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." In

The drama of the water drawing ceremony took on a new dimension of meaning when Jesus (Yeshua) attended the Feast of Sukkot that year. On the seventh day of the feast, Hoshana Rabbah, which literally means "the great hosanna, the great salvation," the festival activities were different from those of each of the six previous days when the priests circled the altar in a procession, singing **Psalm 118:25**. On the seventh day of the feast, the people circled the altar seven times. That is why the day is called Hoshanah Rabbah, as the cry, "Save now!" "Hoshana!" was repeated seven times. Jesus' statement in **John 7:37-39** was said on Hoshana Rabbah.

Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (**John 7:37-39**)

In the middle of a Temple ritual, during one of the most important ceremonies of the year, Jesus draws attention away from the Temple to Himself. This is a self-conscious act which reminds us that the Temple and its ritual were not ends in themselves but a means to an end - and God in Jesus is that end.

Matthew expresses the same sentiment in another context when he records Jesus saying, "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here." (**Matt 12:6**)

APPLICATION

We are always in danger of replacing the Lord with the business of being church. Our worship and service can very easily become ends in themselves. One way of identifying this problem is to ask the question, "How flexible am I to changes in the way we do things at church?"

This is why the Apostle John pictures the Lord Jesus standing at the door of the church at Laodicea and knocking, waiting for an opportunity to get in.
(Rev 3:20)

3. The so-called “*cleansing of the Temple*” at Passover

(Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-16)

Jesus shares the concerns of the Old Testament prophets. With Jeremiah Jesus thought that the sacrifices at the temple were misused as substitutes for personal repentance (Jer 7 & 26).

The daily sacrifice (the tamid sacrifice) and the individual sacrifices were something you bought for money (hence money changers and dove traders in the temple). The traditional protestant interpretation of this text tends to focus on the money changers rather than the deeper issues which Jesus has in mind. Jesus action in the temple was a prophetic act, in which the heart of God was being expressed.

And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers. (Luke 19:45-46)

According to the New Testament scholar Joseph Frankovic, Jesus is using a common rabbinic teaching technique known as G'zerah Shevah. "Jesus liked to hint at a verse of Scripture by lifting vocabulary from it without quoting the whole verse. By doing so, he was able to marshal the full force of the verse's context with only a word or two."

Frankovic says that the combination of allusions to Isaiah and Jeremiah in Luke 19:46 is an instance of G'zerah Shevah. G'zerah Shevah is a technique by which an inference is drawn from analogy of expressions, that is, from similar words and phrases elsewhere.

The Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament references of Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11 share the phrase "my house".

these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in *my house of prayer*;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called *a house of prayer* for all peoples.

In Luke 19:45-46 Jesus skillfully uses the teaching techniques of His day to produce maximum impact upon His audience.

On the other hand, the phrase "but you have made it a den of thieves" is a

*"Has this house, which is called by my name,
become a den of robbers in your eyes?
Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD."*

In this passage, God called the people to repentance, rebuking them for their complacent, superstitious confidence that the presence of the Temple in their midst would protect them from the national captivity that had earlier befallen the House of Israel. In **Jer 7:12**, He reminded them of the sanctuary at Shiloh, which earlier had been destroyed as a result of the sins of Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas.

Then in **Jer 14-15**, He proclaimed,

14 Therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.

Jesus' reference to **Jer 7:11** would have brought the entire message of Jeremiah 7 to the minds of those who heard Him. When we realize this, we can see that Jesus was doing more here than simply rebuking the vendors in the Temple precincts. He was also warning the Temple authorities that the Second Temple could be destroyed, just as Solomon's Temple had been. As a result, "the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him" (**Luke 19:47**). They perceived a threat to their livelihood in Jesus' words.

APPLICATION

Jesus calls people to repentance, rebuking them for their complacent, superstitious confidence in the temples they have built. They can be temples of reputation, temples of confidence in self, temples of pride or temples of judgement. God will tear down the temples we build just as the Temple in Jerusalem fell.

So what temples are you building?

Further Reading:

1. Jesus the Jewish Theologian - Brad Young
2. Understanding the Difficult words of Jesus - David Bivin
3. Our father Abraham - Marvin R. Wilson
4. Behold the man (DVD Series) Dwight A. Pryor
5. Unveiling the Kingdom (DVD Series) Dwight A. Pryor

Find out more from www.messiahspeople.org.