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[Second Reader]
ABSTRACT
The Temple of God and the Early Christian Church
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One of the major themes of the Bible that runs throughout the Old and New Testaments is that of the temple, or dwelling place, of God. It is a topic that begins in Genesis, ends in Revelation and unfolds throughout all of redemptive history in between. The focus of this thesis will be on how the New Testament church identified itself as the spiritual temple of God and the influence this doctrine had on the way they worshipped and lived as a religious community. Chapter 2 will examine the progressive revelation of the temple of God throughout the Old Testament beginning in Genesis. Chapter 3 will explain how Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament temples and the dwelling place of God on earth during his incarnation. Chapter 4 will analyze the key texts in defining the New Testament church as the spiritual temple of God. In Chapter 5, some of the distinctive elements of the early Christian church will be analyzed in its relationship to this doctrine of the temple.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The early Christians understood themselves to be the spiritual temple of God, which had a profound impact on how they worshipped and lived in community. It was the people, not a place that constituted the dwelling place of God. Temples played a key role in the worship of Israel and other ancient religions, but the worship of Christianity was different in that it rejected this location based worship as a direct result of this new temple doctrine. However, while this idea was new in regards to its place in redemptive history, it was not contradictory to the Old Testament history that preceded it. On the contrary, this New Testament temple is the fulfillment and ultimate realization of all that was intended in the Old Testament tabernacle and temples of Israel.

Recent Literature

There has been some work done in recent year in regards to developing a biblical theology of the temple. Most notably, G.K. Beale has written extensively on the topic in his two books *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*¹ and *God Dwells Among Us*,² which are both referenced throughout this thesis. He demonstrates the importance of the temple throughout the entire Bible, from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. This present


thesis attempts to further Beale’s work by examining the temple in early Christian worship and community. Beale draws some practical and theological conclusions as a result of his work, but they are lacking in their overall application to both the ancient and modern church. This is not due to an inadequacy in his works, but rather simply not being the main focus for either volume.

Likewise, there have been many books in recent years on the nature and identity of the church. These typically aim to set forth the most essential marks of a true church or correct some shortcomings in the modern church. One of the more influential and well endorsed books in recent years on this topic is *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever.\(^3\) The author proposes several characteristics that he argues are essential to a healthy church, consisting of expository preaching, biblical theology, the gospel, and a biblical understanding of things like conversion, evangelism, church membership, leadership, discipleship and church discipline. I do not question the importance of any of the items that Dever includes in his marks, but I do believe he is missing essential elements. How does any reader of the New Testament not include prayer among the list of essential marks of a healthy church? Or how does worship in general not get a mention as a central characteristic? He does make a qualification in his introduction that it is not an exhaustive list, but these should be included in the most basic of lists.\(^4\) In terms of community, he includes a chapter on church membership, but it is more about the particulars of membership in a Baptist church than an examination of the scriptures as to what Christian community looks like with one another in the presence of God. A biblical-theological understanding of the temple would assist in correcting all of these omissions and give a more complete understanding of the church.

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4 Ibid., 16.
Another influential work in recent years is the book *Total Church* by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis that reorients the Christian life around the gospel message and the gospel community.\(^5\) It is the gospel that creates the new Christian community and it is that same gospel message that gives the community both its identity and mission. There is much to praise in the book in regards to its vision for community that resembles what is recorded in the New Testament. One great practical aspect of the book is its stress on the importance of sharing meals together. Though this book contains many strengths, virtually nothing is said on the presence of God or the role of prayer in the church. A group of Christians can meet together multiple times a week, share meals together and even read the scriptures together, but if the importance of prayer is not known and exercised then the community will be left spiritually anemic. No vision for the church can be complete without an understanding of the presence of God and how Christians commune with him.

In the book *Pagan Christianity*, Frank Viola and George Barna attempt to give a history of various modern church practices which they contend find their origins in paganism.\(^6\) One of the more convincing arguments they make is in regards to the error the church made because they neglected this doctrine of the temple.\(^7\) The New Testament church had no sacred places, professional clergy, or physical sacrifices. Over time cathedrals were built and considered holy places, a separate and sacred priesthood was established, and the Lord’s Supper became ritualized as a sacrifice of sorts.

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\(^7\) Ibid., 10-17.
I am in agreement with the authors that one of the primary reasons for the revert back to old patterns of worship is that the church didn’t have a proper understanding of the temple. Whether Paganism or Judaism played a larger role in influencing the church’s decisions is beyond the scope of this thesis. Regardless, it is clear that overtime the church restructured its worship to function more like the Old Testament temple worship of Israel than the New Testament worship of the church. While Viola and Barna make some helpful observations in regards to the temple and church history, they do not go into any detail on how this theology of the temple influenced the early Christians worship and community. They do not attempt to explain what is meant by the church as the temple based on its broader redemptive historical context. This thesis aims to fill in these gaps by utilizing a biblical-theological approach to the temple.

Presuppositions and Overview

A presupposition of this thesis is that the New Testament is a continuation of the Old Testament story,\(^8\) which forces us to examine the historical development of the temple and the way that this affected the first century authors and readers understanding of this doctrine.\(^9\) In other words, to accurately understand what the New Testament authors meant in calling the church the temple of God we must trace the idea of the temple throughout the entire Bible. While some benefit may be found in examining the temple practices of other ancient religions, the focus of this thesis will be strictly on the most influential temple developments which were that of people of Israel as depicted in the Old Testament.

\(^8\) Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 29.

Therefore this examination of the temple will begin in Genesis and trace the historical development throughout the Old Testament in its relation to key figures, places, and events. The focus will not be on the specific details of the temple built during the reign of Solomon, but rather the essential elements that are found in the progression of the temple throughout the entire story. These are the elements that are most important in terms of understanding the church as the temple of God. Then we will proceed to the New Testament where both Christ and the church are referred to as the temple of God. The relationship between these two New Testament temples is just as significant as their relationship to the Old Testament. Finally, we will examine the characteristics of this distinct people that believed they were the very dwelling place of God on the earth.
CHAPTER 2
THE UNFOLDING REVELATION OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD IN
THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

In order for one to come to a proper understanding of what is meant by the New Testament church being the temple of God, we must first turn to the Old Testament context from which this term is derived. The New Testament authors did not write in isolation from their distinctive heritage or the beliefs of their time, but rather built upon the solid foundation of revelation that was laid out in the Old Testament scriptures. Hence, any attempt to explain the meaning behind the New Testament church as the temple of God, must first examine the concept of the temple before the coming of Christ and the creation of the new covenant church.

The Temple in Eden

To fully apprehend the biblical idea of temple we must begin our inquiry in the very first pages of Genesis. The temple was not a brand new concept during the days of Solomon or even Moses, but was rather a key element in the creation of man and one that has progressively unfolded throughout the history of humanity. There have been several works produced in recent years that correctly state the first temple or sanctuary in the Bible is indeed the Garden of Eden. Most notably, G.K. Beale has articulated several convincing arguments to demonstrate this point by comparing Eden to the later developments of the
temple in Israel’s history. First, Eden was the distinguished location where Adam experienced the presence of God. The same language used to describe God “walking” in the garden (Gen. 3:8) is later used in referencing God’ presence in the tabernacle (Lev. 26:11-12; 2 Sam. 7:6-7).

Furthermore, this initial point is enhanced by the fact that it was the Israelite priest in particular who experienced God’s presence in the later temples. Likewise, Adam was the first priest in human history and was given a role that corresponded to that of the later priests of Israel. This can be seen in the fact that God placed Adam in the garden “to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). The same words that are translated as “work” and “keep” are elsewhere translated as “serve” and “guard” in fulfilling the priestly functions of either guarding God’s word or serving in his tabernacle (Num. 3:7-8; 1 Chr. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14). It is also fitting that God’s first law is given in the context of the first temple, which we will discuss further as we analyze the tabernacle in greater detail. The Bible repeatedly states that the ability to remain in God’s temple is always contingent upon individuals satisfying the requirements decreed in the laws that God gives (Deut. 28; 1 Kgs. 9:1-10). Adam and Israel both fail to live up to their responsibilities in the covenant and as a result are driven away from the presence of God. These similarities are no coincidence, but rather lay the clear foundation for Adam being the original priest who served in the archetypal temple of God.

The remaining similarities of the Garden of Eden and later Israelite temples are less convincing on their own, but when added to the previous arguments add tremendous weight

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3 Beale, 67.
to the overall proposal. For example, after Adam failed to obey the law God gave him concerning the tree of which his priestly role was contingent upon, God placed a cherubim in the garden to guard the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). This guarding entailed keeping everything sinful out of the garden and preventing any one from partaking of the tree of life. We see that later in biblical history that Moses was told to have statues of cherubim on each side of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:18-22) and Solomon’s temple had multiple designs including cherubim (1 Kgs. 6:39; 32-35). Cherubim are common element to these most holy dwelling places of God. Solomon’s temple is even described as having characteristics that are related to a garden such as flowers, palm trees, pomegranates and lilies among others (1 Kgs. 6:29; 7:18-22). Eden and the eschatological temple are both located on mountains (Ezek. 28:14; Rev. 21:10) and have rivers that flow out of them (Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1). Lastly, Eden and Israelite temples are both described as containing precious stones (Gen. 2:12; Exod. 25:7; 1 Kgs. 6:20-22). The sum total of these similarities gives sufficient scriptural evidence to support this claim.

One Jewish scholar came to the same conclusion that the Garden of Eden was the archetype temple not through textual analysis, but by applying visualization. She concludes that the similarities of the Garden of Eden with the tabernacle, temple and other Near Eastern sanctuaries is “striking” and should be apparent to any reader of the Bible. Thus, it can be confidently asserted that the first temple of God is not that of Moses or Solomon, but that of Adam as established by God in the Garden of Eden. It is this temple that in many ways lays a foundation for the temples that follow.

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5 Ibid., 74.
The Temple and the Cultural Mandate

This understanding of the Garden of Eden as a temple sheds an important light on that which is commonly referred to as the cultural mandate. In Genesis 1:28, God blesses the man and woman and gives them the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion . . . .” This command has often been simply interpreted in a narrow physical sense of humanity spreading through the earth, building cities, creating culture, etc. However, our study of Eden as a temple so far exemplifies that there is a very important spiritual aspect to this mandate as well. John Frame has rightly asserted that God’s original plan was to fill the earth with true worshippers that would be his image bearers as he filled earth with his presence.  

Likewise, Walton suggests that as Adam and Eve fulfilled their task of filling the earth, subduing and having dominion they would at the same time be extending the “sacred space” of the garden. God’s intention from the very beginning of creation was to fill the entire earth with his glorious presence.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve failed at their task and instead of spreading his presence throughout the earth they spread sin throughout the earth. With the introduction of sin into the world, the original cultural mandate was adapted and the fulfillment of that mandate changed. Before the fall, Adam would have fulfilled his task by exercising his sovereignty as he expanded the garden in mastery over all the creatures and through the cultivation of the entire earth. After the fall, the original intended fulfilment is still in place, but now it has been expanded. All subsequent versions of this commission will now have

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8 Beale, 113.
new elements that deal with the problem of sin in the world. Ultimately, all of these elements will connect back to the necessity of a renewed group of humanity ruling over the spiritual and human forces in opposition to it. This reigning takes on different forms at different stages of redemptive history and even multiple forms simultaneously. For example, the people of Israel will “subdue the land” by driving out their enemies that are living in the promise land (Num. 32:21-22) and yet they also fulfil this task by being a blessing to all nations of the earth (Gen. 22:18). This ruling over their enemies will at times be done as they overcome those who oppose them physically. Primarily it will be done through the blessing of Abraham’s offspring that shines the light of God’s presence and gives salvation from sin to all nations. In the post fall world, the renewed remnant of humanity will serve as witnesses to this light of God’s presence among the rest of humanity that still dwells in darkness. Hence, the fulfillment of this task now includes the vision of all humanity living on the earth to be renewed and dwelling in the light of God’s glorious presence. In connection to this, we shall see that God promises to go with his people as they fulfil the original commission. It is God’s promise to go with his people that gave the assurance that one day the commission will be fulfilled and the earth will be filled with his presence.

Noah and the Patriarchs

After the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity continued on a downward moral spiral which eventually led to the near utter destruction of all mankind. The nature of man became so corrupted that “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This is a great contrast to the original plan to extend the sacred temple of the garden throughout the earth. So at this point in history, God now planned to blot out man from the earth completely. However, instead of destroying humanity altogether there was a
man named Noah found favor with him (6:8) and would become a distinguished priest to God in a manner very similar to that of Adam. Due to the corruption on the earth, God sent a flood that covered the entire earth and killed every person, animal and bird that was not in the ark that God previously had Noah build. Noah, his family and two of every kind of beast were kept safe in the ark and after the disaster were to repopulate the earth. Serving as a priest like figure, Noah offers sacrifices on the mountain of Ararat that we are told were pleasing to the Lord (9:4; 20-21). It was through Noah and his family that God recreated the world so to speak and once again gave his command to fill the earth with his presence (9:1). Noah and descendants, like Adam before, were to be fruitful and multiply with the definite purpose of filling the earth with image bearing worshipers that would expand the temple of God’s presence throughout the whole cosmos.

However, the fulfillment of the command was once again interrupted by sin and it was not worshipful men that spread across the earth, but men in rebellion to the Lord that were forced to disperse. The account of the Tower of Babel tells us that people had stopped filling the earth at this stage in history and instead had settled at Shinar (11:2). Genesis 11:4 states that the very reason the men built the city and tower was so that they could make a name for themselves and not be dispersed throughout the earth. This is the first time in the Bible that we see mankind blatantly rebelling against this specific law of God to fill the earth. They were intended to spread out over the earth to the glory of God, but instead they have stayed in one place in an attempt to glorify themselves.

The next major scene in the development of the temple is found in the life of Abraham and God’s long interaction with his family line. Most notably, the commission originally given to Adam is repeated but in a different form to Abraham, an important change
in the development of the story. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore . . . and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17-18).

The major change we see in God’s interaction with Abraham is that the multiplying to fill the earth is now something God promises to do. Previously, Adam and Noah had both received commands to multiply, but here we find that God is the one who is taking the responsibility to multiply a godly offspring throughout the earth so that all families of the earth shall be blessed (12:3). We shall later see in this study that the true offspring to carry this promise out will be none other than Jesus Christ and it is in him that all nations of the earth are truly blessed (Gal. 3:16). It will be through Jesus that the dwelling of God comes down to the earth, fills the church and eventually fills the heavens and the earth.

Connected to the commission God gave Abraham, we see that the patriarchs also had temple like characteristics in their interactions with God. Beale again summarizes this connection well by noting several elements that show a distinct connection between the patriarchs at the time of the restated commission and the later tabernacle or temples of Israel.\(^9\) We find that all these encounters consist of God appearing to them and they “pitch a tent,” which literally means they pitch a tabernacle. Furthermore, they all occur on a mountain and often take place at Bethel. Lastly, the patriarchs built altars and worshipped the Lord during each of their encounters. It appears then that the restated commission to Abraham (12:2; 17:2; 22:18), Isaac (26:3-4, 24-25) and Jacob (28:3-4; 35:11-12) all result in what appear to be the creation of small temple like places of worship. Leuphold agrees that these places can be considered a “sacred spot, a sanctuary” but does not want to refer to them

\(^9\) Beale, 96.
as a temple. However, this hesitation is without warrant due to the progression we have seen thus far from the Garden to now and all that will proceed after. Despite not having any physical structures other than the altars built for sacrifices, we see the emergence of small scale temples that resemble the original temple of Eden.

**Israel, Mount Sinai and the Tabernacle**

In the book of Exodus, we find another progression in the development of this temple idea in Israel’s encounter with the Lord at Mount Sinai and in the subsequent creation of the tabernacle. In regards to Israel’s Mount Sinai encounter, we see many similarities when compared to the experiences of the patriarchs that we have already examined briefly. Most notably we see that this is another unique place of God’s presence that takes place on a mountain, which is referred to as the “mountain of God” (Exod. 18:5). Like Adam before, Moses now plays the role of a priestly type office as he is the only man allowed to enter the place where God’s presence dwells most fully (24:2).

However, despite the similarities we also see the introduction of several new concepts that set the stage for the development of the tabernacle and Solomon’s later temple. For example, in the Sinai encounter there is the first clear division of three separate areas with varying degrees of holiness. Moses alone was allowed into the holiest area where God’s presence was most fully experienced as we have already stated (24:2). But then we also see that the priest and elders were allowed to come part way up the mountain (24:1) and the rest of the Israelites were required to stay at the bottom of the mountain and not even touch it lest they die (19:12). This is the first time in the Bible that these three levels of separation occurs,

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but it will clearly be repeated in the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the outer courts of
the tabernacle and temple. It has also been claimed that Eden itself exemplified this notion in
that it had the three levels varying in degrees of God’s presence in the earth, the Garden of
Eden, and the heavens.\textsuperscript{12}

Additionally, we see that the sacrifices take place on altars in the least sacred part of
Sinai where all Israelites could stand (24:5-6), which is equivalent to the location of the altars
being in the later temple’s most outer area. There is also a new connection made in regards to
the law with the temple. Previously, we made the assertion that the first laws given to man
were done so in the context of the temple of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-17).
Yet, there is a further development in that both the Ten Commandments and the ark were
created in the holiest place of the Sinai encounter (Deut. 10:1-4). This too finds correlation in
that these two items were both later placed in the Most Holy Place and can also be seen even
in the primacy of the word of God in the New Testament church. Consequently, the Mount
Sinai encounter serves as a transition between the temples of Eden and the patriarchs with
that of Israel’s tabernacle and temples.

It was in the context of this Mt. Sinai encounter that God showed Moses the “pattern”
of how he should build the tabernacle and all the corresponding items that would reside in it
(Exod. 25:9). The tabernacle is the first occasion by which we see a man made physical
structure for the purpose of God’s special dwelling. All previous locations have been
somewhere in God’s creation and more specifically usually on mountains, but now we have
God directing Moses to have men create a structure for him to reside in. The building of the
tabernacle ushers in a unique time in history where God chose to dwell with the people of
Israel in particular physical locations. The later temples built in Jerusalem were an

\textsuperscript{12} G K. Beale, \textit{The Temple and the Church’s Mission}, 32-35.
immovable sign of God’s presence with his people. The tabernacle served the people of Israel in the days of their wilderness wanderings. Therefore it was created as a permanent structure that was mobile and could move with the people of Israel wherever they went so that God would always “dwell in their midst” (25:8).

In many ways, the tabernacle could be considered a traveling version of the Mt. Sinai experience. The three different areas with differing degrees of holiness were present once again in the structure. In the actual tabernacle, or tent of meeting as it is referred to (33:7) there was the Most Holy Place which contained the ark of the covenant and was the place where God’s presence would dwell most fully (25:10-22). There was also the Holy Place that housed furniture such as the table for the bread of the Presence (25:23-30), the golden lampstand (25:31-40), and the altar of incense (30:1-6). It was in this tent of meeting where Moses in particular would meet with the Lord who would descend in the form of a cloud and speak with Moses (33:9). Similar to Adam, this priestly role in God’s temple also lends to a close relationship with God. We are told that the “the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (33:11). However, not everyone was privileged to have this direct access to fellowship with God in the tent of meeting. For others in the camp, there was the outer court that they could enter, which was the location of the altar of burnt offering (27:1-8) and the bronze basin used for ceremonial washings (30:17-21). This was as close as the vast majority of the people of Israel could get to the presence of the Lord. As mentioned earlier, these different areas find direct correlation in the Mount Sinai encounter with Moses on the top of the mountain, the elders and priests part way up the mountain, and the rest of the people at the very bottom.
While it is certain that specific individuals had greater experiences in the presence of God than others, it is equally certain that it was the presence of God that defined the community as a whole and led them throughout their wanderings. When Moses was meeting with the Lord before setting out, he emphatically stated that if God’s presence did not go with them they did not want to go at all (33:15). Furthermore, Moses goes on to say that the very thing that makes them a distinct people is that God goes with them (33:16). Durham believes that the main thing that unifies the entire book of Exodus is the “theology of Yahweh present with and in the midst of his people Israel.”

It is the dwelling of God amongst the people of Israel that makes them unique from all other peoples of the earth. This alone is what can give them success in their wanderings and future settlement. This gives all the more significance to the tabernacle or temple since it is its function to mediate the presence of God to his people. God answered Moses requests and his presence went with them as they journeyed and directed them where to go. His presence was designated by a cloud upon the tabernacle by day and fire by night, which could be seen by all the people (40:38). They would set out when the cloud was taken up and they would settle or stay put when it was not taken up (40:37). Thus, the presence of God was the definitive characteristic of the people of Israel that led them throughout the trials of their wilderness excursion and eventually into the promise land.

The Temples of Israel in Jerusalem

The climax of the dwelling of God with the people of Israel comes in the completion of the first physical temple during the reign of Solomon. David desired to build a permanent


house for God to dwell in Jerusalem, but God denied him this request due to David shedding much blood in the wars he had fought (1 Chron. 28:3). Instead God chose Solomon his son to build the temple (28:6), but David’s influence upon the construction cannot be overstated. He gave Solomon a strong charge to follow after and obey the Lord, by once again linking obedience to temple blessing and disobedience to being forsaken (28:9-10). David passed on detailed plans to Solomon that were given to him from the Lord (28:19). Similar to Moses, these plans consisted of everything from the actual physical structure to the items that were to be placed within the temple (28:11-19). In addition to planning, David also prepared for the creation of the temple by supplying gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and precious stones for this holy house (22:5; 29:1-3).

Solomon carried out the plans of David and the temple was finished during his reign (2 Chron. 5:1). The finale of this great accomplishment occurred when the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem and placed “in the Most Holy Place, under the wings of the cherubim” (5:7). There was a great multitude celebrating this achievement with music and more sacrifices than could be counted (5:6). As in the temples before, God’s word finds a central location in the most holy area as the only items in the ark were the two tablets that Moses had placed in it (5:10). In Solomon’s dedication prayer, we find that even though God’s temple is physically in Jerusalem, the intention is for all the peoples of the earth to know the name of the Lord and fear him (6:33). While God’s special dwelling place at this stage in history was particularly in the physical temple, his aim was still to fill the earth with image bearing worshippers.

There is a clear transfer of God’s dwelling solely in the tabernacle to his dwelling in the temple made by Solomon which is demonstrated by the new house of the Lord being
filled with a cloud (5:13). This presence was so strong that the priests were not even able to stand because “the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” (5:14). This echoes back to the statement made in Exodus 40:34 in regards to the cloud covering the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filling it so much that Moses could not enter. These corresponding statements show both a transition of God’s dwelling from the tabernacle to the newly built temple and also a connection between the presence of God and his glory which will be discussed at a later point.

Solomon failed at keeping his part of the covenant as did the majority of kings after him and so the people of Israel went into exile and the temple was destroyed. Even though the people had no temple in the sense of a physical structure, the Lord himself is said to have been a “sanctuary to them” in the places that they were scattered to (Ezek. 11:16). In reference to this text, Edmund Clowney commented:

Proud Israel was left a sanctuary without the Glory, but humbled Israel found a sanctuary in the Glory . . . . The indestructible temple is the presence of God in glory with his people.”

While God chose to dwell in the temple, his presence was not limited to or constricted in any way to the temple itself. Agreeably, Allen states that while the presence of God before the exile required “religious props” and the sacrifices of the temple, the presence of God was still available to the exiles “apart from the institution of the temple.” So even with the tragic destruction of the temple, the faithful remnant of God’s people still find a temple of God that is with them in their exile. When the people returned to Jerusalem from exile they rebuilt the temple, its glory did not compare with that of Solomon’s temple in its physical appearance

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nor in its manifestation of God’s dwelling presence. Israel’s repeated failures to obey God’s commands and keep his covenant demonstrate that the many prophecies about the temple did not refer to either of their temples. Instead, they referred to a future temple that would be fulfilled in Christ, the church and fully in the new heavens and earth at the end of time.

**Significant Aspects of the Old Testament Temples**

There are many important aspects of the Old Testament temples that will assist in our understanding of the New Testament temples. First and perhaps most obvious, since the creation of the world God has chosen to dwell in a distinctive way with a specific people and/or location. The Bible teaches elsewhere that God is omnipresent in that he is not absent in any part of his creation and he is not more present in one area more than any other.17 Grudem helps clarify this in his definition of omnipresence by stating “God does not have size or spatial dimensions and is present at every point of space with his whole being, yet God acts differently in different places.”18 The qualification that Grudem makes at the end of his definition keeps one from misunderstanding God’s omnipresence to mean that his presence is of an equal measure throughout creation in an unchanging way. In Jeremiah 23:24, God, by the way of asking a question, indirectly states that he fills “heaven and earth.” David states that God is with him whether he goes to heaven, Sheol, or the “uttermost parts of the sea” (Ps. 139:7-10). In essence, it is impossible to escape from the presence of God.

Yet, God filled both the tabernacle and the temple with his presence in a different way than the rest of creation. In those places, his glory was more manifested and had a powerful result among people. This “glory” is likely the definitive characteristic of what we


have referred to as the temple, dwelling place, or special presence of God. Whether it be Moses’ glowing face that terrified the Israelites (Exod. 34:30) or the fact that the priests couldn’t even stand up (2 Chron. 5:14), God’s presence had a powerful affect on his people that made clear to them that they were in the company of a glorious and holy God. In both previously cited scenarios, it is the “glory of the Lord” filling these locations that is at the cause and focal point of the accounts. God’s glory may be defined as the “created” splendor that accompanies God’s revelation of himself. The brightness, splendor, clouds, fire, etc. that often accompany these special occasions are meant to be visible manifestations that display the excellence, greatness, and wonders of God that cannot be seen by man. In the temples of God, there are always clear expressions of his glory. So while there is no place in all of creation where God is not present, God chooses to interact with certain people and places at different times in extraordinary ways by filling them with more of his glorious presence. Despite the fact that God’s temple has always been with a specific people or place, the intention from the very beginning was to spread this temple throughout the entire cosmos. The command to Adam and Eve, which was later repeated to Noah and others, was to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” (Gen. 1:28). We looked at this in detail previously, but this truth must be kept at the forefront as we later examine God’s presence in Christ and the church. Once again we will see God dwell with a particular people in a glorious manner similar to that of Eden or Israel’s tabernacle, but the intention is going to be to fill the entire world with that presence. This is evident in the mission given to the church and also the final picture of the church with the Lord in the book of Revelation, which we will examine at a later point.

\[19\] Ibid., 220.
Another important element in the temples of the Old Testament is that there are certain things that prohibit one from being acceptable in the temple of God, namely sin. Once again, Adam was banished from the temple of the Garden of Eden due to eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:24) and Israel was sent into exile because of their sin (2 Chron. 36:15-21). Sin was the cause of these major consequences, but in reality even the smallest degree of sin expels one from the presence of God. Johnson depicts this dilemma that sin causes with the temple of God:

The will of God was to tabernacle with his people. But the presence of God amidst a people intent on hiding, rebelling, and fleeing his presence can mean nothing but death for that people. . . .

In order for the people of God to be able to dwell in God’s presence for all eternity something first had to be done to remove the sins that stood in the way of this goal.

The sacrifices required under the Mosaic Law plainly exhibit that there can be no dwelling in God’s presence for sinful man apart from some kind of atonement for their sins. Even sins that were committed unintentionally were such an affront to God that they required the blood of an animal (Lev. 4:27-28). In Leviticus 16 we are given the Lord’s instructions to Moses in regards to the offering that is to be made on the Day of Atonement, which is necessary because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel and all their transgression and sins (16:16). Aaron first offered a bull to make atonement for himself and his household (16:6), but then we read instructions for the process of atoning for the whole congregation by using two goats (16:7). Aaron cast lots over the two goats of which one is said to be used as a sin offering to the Lord and the other goat shall be kept alive and after Israel’s sins have been confessed over it, sent away to show that the Lord has removed the people’s sins from them.

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There can be no temple amongst a sinful people without some kind of atonement for their sins.
CHAPTER 3
THE REVELATION OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

In the New Testament we have the introduction of an important new development in the temple of God. Up to this point in the Bible, the temple was reserved to some specific location. This has taken place in a garden, on a mountain, in a tabernacle and in the architectural temples of Israel. Now we have the temple of God in a human body. Of course, this is not just any man but God incarnate in human flesh. This chapter will expound the first major development in the New Testament in regards to the biblical idea of temple, which is the dwelling of God in Jesus Christ.

Christ as the Last Adam and the True Israel

First, it is important to recognize that the New Testament identifies Jesus as having a connection to both Adam and Israel who have gone before him. The most significant aspect to this connection is that Jesus succeeded at all the things Adam and Israel failed to do. Due to their disobedience and rebellion against God, Adam and the people of Israel never expanded God’s presence throughout the earth. All the commands and promises given to Adam, Noah, the patriarchs and the prophets of the Old Testament find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The significance is found in the fact that God’s temple presence among his people was dependent on their obedience. As the representative for his people, Christ in his complete obedience secured their covenant right to God’s presence. Just as the coming of
Christ marked the beginning of a new humanity, it also brought with it a new corresponding temple.

There is a clear link made from the very beginning of the gospels to the Old Testament context. The gospel of Matthew begins with the “book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” which traces Jesus’ line back to the beginning of the people of Israel in Abraham (Matt. 1:1-16). The gospel of Luke goes one step further and traces back Jesus’ lineage to Adam, “the son of God” (Lk. 3:23-37). While the coming of Christ clearly finds its context in the long history of the people Israel, it is at the same the beginning of something new. Mark’s gospel starts with the words “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk. 1:1). The good news of Jesus will take the commands and promises made to Adam Israel to the next level in redemptive history.

Jesus is referred to as the second or last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) because he is the beginning of the new creation.¹ As Ladd stated, “he is the last Adam because by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation he has become a ‘life giving spirit,’ the fountainhead of the people of God in the new age.”² In Adam all people die and are cast out of God’s presence, but in Christ all his people are made alive (15:22). It is through the atoning work of Jesus that sinful people are reconciled to a holy God and given new life so that they can live in his presence and fulfill his mission.³ In essence, God is creating a new humanity through Jesus to undo the damage done by Adam’s transgression and accomplish the purposes he always set out to achieve.

The failures of Adam to expand the garden and in doing so expand the presence of God throughout the earth will arrive in its fullness. The victory of Christ will create a new remnant among humanity that will accomplish God’s temple purposes for the universe. In Romans, Paul argues that if by “one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (5:17). Through the failure of Adam, all men were made to fail due to the fact that they were all made sinners. Failure to enjoy and spread God’s temple presence was a direct result of the sin that entered the earth and reigned over all men, eventually culminating in death. To resolve this problem, God has established a way for those justly condemned to be made righteousness through his grace, which causes them to reign in life (5:21). The failure of Adam in the garden would be the pattern for the failure of all who came after him. The victory of Jesus, the last Adam, would also become the beginning of his church’s success and the guarantee of the final completion to spread God’s presence throughout all creation.

Jesus was also the true Israel in that he was the “embodiment of faithful Israel” and a “remnant of one.”⁴ Out of all Israelites that ever lived, Jesus alone was the one who would meet all the demands of the law. One clear example of this can be seen in the comparison of the temptation of Jesus for forty days and nights with that of the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years. After forty days without food, Jesus was tempted by the devil himself to turn stones into bread (Matt. 4:3), doubt or be made to prove who he was (4:6), and finally worship the devil as a means to gaining the world (4:8). Beale has pointed out that the responses that Jesus makes to Satan are taken from responses made by Moses to Israel when

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they failed in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3 in Matt. 4:4; Deut. 6:6 in Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:13 in Matt 4:10).\textsuperscript{5} There is a very intentional connection made between these two stories to show that while Israel failed their test in the wilderness, Jesus who was the true Israel did not fail his. Throughout the rest of their history, the people of Israel would fail again and again to resist the devil’s temptation and live in obedience to God. On the contrary, Jesus would continue steadfast throughout the rest of his life and continuously live in obedience to the God of Israel.

In addition to resisting the temptation of the devil by his persistent obedience, Jesus also conquered in the manner that Adam and Israel ought to have done. Adam failed at conquering the serpent in the garden and Israel failed at conquering the promise land. Both of these failures inevitably led to the compromise of God’s temple and the failure to accomplish the temple expansion purpose. God had promised to be with Israel as they conquered the land, but due to their failure to live up to their responsibilities of the covenant they failed in their fight and were left without the presence of God. This is ultimately what led to the demise of their kingdom. Jesus came preaching the “good news of the kingdom of God” (Lk. 8:1, 16:16) and spoke constantly of the nature of his kingdom that is “not of this world” (Jn. 18:36). Christ’s kingdom would be one that conquers evil in the way that the kingdom of Israel ought to have.

The wilderness temptation of Christ was the beginning of his conquering of the devil, which continued throughout his life as he made war on the evil forces in the world by casting out demons, healing the sick, and setting free those who were captive to sin. This conquering of the earth and the establishment of his kingdom would find its culmination in his victorious death and resurrection. Middleton notes that “through the life, teaching, death, and

\textsuperscript{5} Beale, \textit{The Temple and the Church’s Mission}, 172.
resurrection of Jesus, God has done battle with, and vanquished, the powers of evil and death that have held humanity and the world in bondage.”\(^6\) Again, Jesus conquered the powers of evil in every way that Adam and Israel ought to have done. His battle with evil goes one step further even in that it vanquishes the evil that was let into the world through Adam’s transgression.

**Christ as the Temple of God**

Just as Jesus is the New Testament fulfillment of both Adam and Israel, he is also the fulfillment of the temple itself. One of the first major confrontations that Jesus has with the Jews takes place in the temple during Passover:

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (Jn. 2:13-22)

The temple that this took place in was neither the temple built by Solomon nor the one built by the returned exiles. The temple was built by Herod the Great and was main attraction to Jerusalem during the life of Jesus. Due to the long journey that many would have to make to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem, there were people who sold the animals for the necessary sacrifices such as oxen, sheep, and pigeons (2:14). Jesus chases out with a whip the animals

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and money-changers while at the same time turning over their tables. The account shows perhaps the greatest display of anger in Jesus out of all the stories recorded in the gospels about his earthly life. We must answer the question as to why this scenario created such anger in the Lord.

While there is likely more than one answer to this question, the most important one is that this business was actually disrupting the worship of God by serving as distraction and inhibiting those that came to be in his presence. The temple is not just a building for business to take place, but it is Jesus’ “Father’s house” which was never intended to be a “house of trade” (2:16). Instead, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7 saying “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mk. 11:17). The core issue is that the selling, buying, and money changing were taking place inside the temple in the only section that gentiles were allowed into. Many gentiles would have traveled long distances to come into God’s presence in the temple, but would have left dissatisfied by the great distractions that prevented them from truly encountering the Lord. The temple was meant to be a blessing to the nations where they could come for prayer, but it was no longer serving this purpose effectively. The Jews could have gone in from the outer court away from the noise, but not the nations they were meant to bless. So Jesus consumed with zeal for his Father’s house expressed his disapproval by at least temporarily stopping the operation altogether.

It is in this context that we find the first occasion where Jesus refers to his own body as a temple (Jn. 2:19). The Jews quickly demand a sign from him to show by what authority he has the right to do these sorts of things. Rather than give a direct sign, Jesus gives them a perplexing answer to “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). The Jews take this line in the most literal sense possible and state that since it has taken forty six years.

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7 Beale, God Dwells Among Us, 79.
years to build the temple, it would be absurd for Jesus to raise it back up in only three days (2:20). John then tells us that what Jesus was really referring to was the “temple of his body” (2:21). One scholar has stated:

The Fourth Evangelist portrays this event in order to bring out its meaning for his community. Jesus is now the dwelling place of God. The glory once visible in Israel's tabernacle and temple can now be seen in Jesus.\(^8\)

The human body of Jesus was a temple in the same sense that the temples we have examined thus far were. He was the dwelling place of God on earth that exhibited the glory of God in an even greater measure than any architectural temple had ever done.

This interaction is an elaboration on a previous statement made at the very beginning of the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as the Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.\(^9\)

The Word that is being referenced is clearly the Lord Jesus who always was God along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This language John uses immediately evokes the remembrance of the language in the Genesis account of the creation of the world. As we shall see, the coming of Jesus was the beginning of the new creation. At this point, it is most important to note the word used to describe that Jesus “dwelt” among us is the same word for tabernacle. Jesus tabernacled among us on the earth and his glory was beheld by all. Beale explains the astounding implication that “the special revelatory presence of God, formerly contained in the holy of holies of the tabernacle and temple, has now burst forth into the


\(^9\) Jn. 1:1, 14.
world in the form of the incarnate God, Jesus Christ.”\(^{10}\) The incredible presence that filled
the holy of holies where only the high priest could enter once a year now filled a single man
incessantly. Likewise, just as the tabernacle displayed the glory of God to the people of Israel
during their wilderness wanderings, the tabernacle of Christ now displayed the glory of God
even more clearly to the entire world during his incarnation. Milne has summarized this idea
by stating that John viewed the entire ministry of Jesus as a “tabernacling” by which the
disciples were able to behold his glory over and over again.\(^{11}\)

In John 1:51, Jesus tells Nathaniel that he “will see heaven opened, and the angels of
God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” Jesus is intentionally alluding to Jacob’s
temple like encounter with God at Bethel where there was a stairway to heaven that angels
ascended and descended upon (Gen. 28:12). The vision indicated that the small sanctuary
built by Jacob was a link between heaven and earth just as the later temples of Jerusalem
would be.\(^{12}\) Jesus is now asserting that he is presence of God on earth who is the real link
between heaven and earth. His presence on earth displaces the temple as the place where
people go to meet with God. Instead, they must come to him in faith and worship him in
“spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24) wherever they find themselves on the earth.

Jesus’s interaction with the Samaritan women at the well confirms this. The woman
introduces a common debate between Jews and Samaritans as to where the true place of
worship is. Is it on a mountain in Samaria or in Jerusalem? Before the coming of Christ the
answer would have surely been that it is in Jerusalem. Jesus prefaces his answer with the

\(^{10}\) Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 195.

\(^{11}\) Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester,

\(^{12}\) Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 195.
phrase “believe me” (4:21) because the answer he gives would have been quite startling to woman and subsequent hearers. Jesus proclaims that “the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:21, 23). Worship is no longer regulated to a specific physical location, but instead it is found in a specific person. The “how” and the “what” of worship matter immensely as it must be done “in spirit and truth,” but the “where” is something that has been made insignificant. The temple as a place for worship became obsolete with the coming of Christ and would one day disappear completely from the earth.

Destruction of the Old Temple and the Establishment of the New

Jesus foretold the destruction of the physical temple in multiple passages. In Mark 13 his disciples are admiring the “wonderful buildings” of the temple and seem to still miss the significance of who he is in the middle of it (13:1). Jesus’ response is that “there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (13:2). Jesus then goes on to foretell the terrible tribulations that will accompany the day when the temple is destroyed. In the end, Jerusalem will be “trampled underfoot” and utterly ruined by gentiles, which would include the temple (Lk. 21:24). Another passage that predicts the destruction of the temple is the visual parable of Jesus cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22; Mk. 11:12-14, 20-24.). The fig tree has leaves, but does not have any fruit on it so Jesus curses the tree causing it to wither. In the same way, Israel has an appearance of life with its external religion just like the leaves, but it does not have any real spiritual vitality or fruit. As the tree was cursed and as a

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result withered, Israel and its temple will be rejected by God and left to wither for a time. The physical temple was utterly rejected and the spiritual temple of Christ established.

While the physical temple was destroyed in AD 70, the temple was destroyed spiritually many years before that at death and resurrection of Jesus. At the time of his crucifixion Jesus was mocked those passing by who said “you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself!” (27:40). The people who said these things did not realize that it was by his death on the cross that he was actually destroying the old temple and establishing the new. One scholar has made an important observation:

> Jesus came not to destroy Judaism, but to bring it to its destined goal in the eschatological order of worship in the new creation, initiated through and in his deed and presence as the crucified and resurrected Lord. The new temple is precisely the crucified and risen Son of God.

While Jesus ended the function of the old temple as a place to mediate the presence of God, he was also fulfilling that which the temple was always intended to accomplish. Jesus is the temple of the new creation from which the presence of God will expand throughout the heavens and the earth.

When Jesus died on the cross we are told in Matthew 27:51-52 of an astonishing event that took place:

> The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

R.T. France has asserted that the tearing of the temple curtain primarily is a symbol that through Jesus’ death there is now open access to God and at the same time it is a

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foreshadowing of the destruction that will come in AD 70.\textsuperscript{16} God has made a way for his people to be reconciled to him and this newly bought reconciliation excludes the temple and all that it represented. The words that follow the description of the torn curtain show that this meaning goes beyond just the physical destruction of the temple and includes the destruction so to speak of the entire old cosmos. The earth shakes and rocks are breaking, while even some that previously died are raised. The death of Jesus on the cross was death of the former temple and the old ways of the world. In Jesus’ resurrection we see the beginning of the “new temple and new cosmos, a new creation.”\textsuperscript{17} God’s glorious presence, no longer restricted to the temple, is now available to every person on earth exactly where they are through the person and work of Jesus.

**Christ is Greater than the Previous Temples**

With the culmination of all these things it is no surprise then that Jesus says that he is greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6). He asserts this plainly to the Pharisees after they accuse his disciples of breaking a Sabbath law by plucking heads of grain to eat (12:1-2). Jesus’ response to the Pharisees is a bit surprising as he does not attempt to minimize what the disciples are doing by arguing over the specifics of the law. Instead, he cites the Old Testament examples of David and the temple priests:

He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what


\textsuperscript{17} Beale, *God Dwells Among Us*, 93.
this means, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.¹⁸

Jesus does not get into an argument over what actually constitutes work; instead he shows that the Law should be interpreted with a “hermeneutic of mercy,” by which he then proves was precedent even in the life of David.¹⁹ It is not the Law that Jesus is disagreeing with, but the Pharisees own interpretation of the Law and the traditions they subscribed to. The example Jesus gives from the life of David is a scenario that is quite extreme in that it would seemingly merit God’s great wrath against David. This would have been a serious offense against Lord and one committed in the place on earth that his presence was most known. However, a breach in this law was acceptable seemingly due to the emergency situation and David’s great needs at that time. Similarly, Jesus points out that the Law itself makes an exception for the priests that serve in the temple to work by doing their necessary activities on the Sabbath.²⁰ Jesus is showing that not only do the Pharisees misinterpret the Law, but also that he is lord of the Sabbath (12:8).

This lordship over the Sabbath is enhanced when you consider its relationship to Jesus’ claim that “something greater than the temple is here,” namely himself (12:6). Jesus gives the example of David whose lack of conformity to the law took place in the temple with one of the most sacred items in it which was the “bread of the Presence” (12:4). Similarly, the priests also worked on the Sabbath in the temple but were “guiltless” (12:5). Jesus is concluding here that if the Pharisees really understood who it was that was among them, then what the disciples were doing would be even worst than they imagined if their

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¹⁸ Matt. 12:4-8.


interpretation of scripture was correct. Jesus gave two great examples of scenarios in the Old Testament that didn’t fit into the traditional understanding of the Sabbath that the Pharisees held. The example of David especially would have been one that was condemnable upon death to them had they been alive at that time. Jesus states that he is even greater and holier than the earthly temple that David did this in. He is the Holy of Holies incarnate so to speak and the disciples are doing this very thing in his presence. Instead of it being an occasion that brings down wrath, it becomes an occasion to explain the mercy of God. If the Pharisees knew that it was the temple of God in Christ that they were interacting with, they would have known that he was the lord of the Sabbath who should be worshipped.

Another reason that Christ is greater than the temple of Israel can be seen in his relationships with those that would have formerly been banned from the temple. We are told that the “blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them” (Matt. 21:14). Jesus heals those in the temple that previously would have been kept from temple worship because of their deformity or uncleanness. Jesus is so much greater than the previous temple because he not only welcomes them, but he also has the ability to make them well and fit for worship. In Isaiah 56:3-8, the prophet speaks of a day when eunuchs, outcasts, and gentiles will be free to worship in the “house” of the Lord. This finds fulfillment in the better temple of Christ who makes a way for all people to enter the presence of God.

Christ, the Temple and the Great Commission

Finally, we see that the Great Commission is connected to the previous commissions given to Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs. Just as they were given the task of expanding God’s temple presence throughout the earth, the risen Christ gave his disciples the same task in Matthew 28:18-20:
And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus commands his followers to go throughout the entire earth and make disciples in every nation that will worship him and observe all that he has commanded. Two things in this passage assure the disciples that they have all they need to accomplish this task. The first is that “all authority” in the entire world has been given to Jesus (28:18). He is the rightful ruler of the universe who has all the power necessary to accomplish his purposes in the world. The second is connected to this in that he tells the disciples “I am with you always . . .” (28:20). It is the presence of Jesus with them that is the guarantee that this mission will be accomplished.

It was the promised presence to Israel that guaranteed they would conquer those that were living in the promise land, but their own sin and unrighteousness kept it from coming to pass. In Christ, we have an even greater promise than the one previously given to Israel. This is because not only did Christ guarantee his presence, but he also secured the righteousness of his people as we examined earlier. The church will not fail, despite her sin, as Israel did because the promise is not contingent upon her own success in obeying the commandments of God. It is entirely based upon the work of Jesus. There are no obstacles that stand in the way of Christ succeeding in his mission to expand the temple presence of God throughout the heavens and the earth.

There is a remarkable similarity between the Great Commission and the commission of Cyrus to build the temple in 2 Chronicles 36:23:21

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21 Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission, 95.
Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.”

There are three main things in this passage that find a direct correlation in the Great Commission. First, Cyrus claims that God has given him “all the kingdoms of the earth,” which resembles all authority being given to Christ. Second, those people that belong to the Lord are told to “go up,” just as Christ told his people to “go.” Thirdly, Cyrus says “the LORD his God be with him,” which once again resembles Jesus’ promise to be with his disciples. The comparison of these two texts suggests that the Great Commission is the true fulfillment of what Cyrus intended and that the commission includes a clear element of temple building. The house of God is no longer a building in Jerusalem, so the specific details of the command have changed. However, there is a clear connection between authority, the presence of the Lord, and being sent on a mission to build or expand the temple of God. The Great Commission is a recommission of that which was given to Adam, Noah, the Patriarchs and the nation of Israel.

The death and resurrection of Christ and the subsequent commands given in the Great Commission lead to another aspect of the temple in the New Testament, which is found in the church. We will cover this subject extensively in the next chapter, but for now we must state that Christ is also referred to as the “cornerstone” of the temple. In Matthew 21:42, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23 by saying “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.” When Jesus refers to himself as the cornerstone, there is little doubt that he has in mind the cornerstone of a
temple. Ephesians 2:20-21 confirms this when it asserts that the New Testament church is a “holy temple in the Lord” and “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” During his life on the earth the Lord Jesus was the temple of God tabernacling among men. His purpose was to create a new people for God that would be his dwelling place on the earth and a blessing to the nations. In this new community called the church, Jesus is the cornerstone upon which the rest of the temple is built.

Keener also notes that by claiming to be the cornerstone, Jesus was challenging the current “builders” or the temple authorities at that time. This is apparent from the context of the parable of the wicked tenants. In telling the parable about the tenants who treated the master of the house so poorly along with all his servants and even his son, Jesus was indicting Israel for their own rebellion against the Lord. They too had rejected his servants the prophets whom he sent and even his own Son. Jesus concludes the encounter by stating that “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits” (Matt. 21:43). The kingdom of God and the temple associated to that temple transferred from the people of Israel to the New Testament church.

The Old Testament anticipated this time when God would ultimately dwell with his people. The language and descriptions of this dwelling were fitting for the people of Israel, but in many ways gave a vague picture as to what the real fulfillment would look like. The Old Testament authors understanding of what they were writing was not as “comprehensive as the simultaneous divine intentions, which become progressively unpacked as the history of

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23 Keener, 321.
revelation progresses until they reach climax in Christ.”24 This is often referred to as the prophecies containing an extended meaning. Many of the Old Testament prophecies that spoke of the latter day temple describe it in terms or the language of a physical temple (Ezek. 40-48). However, these were meant to teach something about the nature of the non-architectural temple that was to come, not a physical structure. This is not to imply that there is ever a change to the original meaning of the text, but rather there is an unfolding revelation of the greater meaning or fulfillment that God originally intended which typically finds realization in Christ. In fact, Jesus claimed that the entire Old Testament testified to and spoke concerning himself (Lk. 24:25-27; Jn 5:39-40). So in order to find the true “goal and meaning” of the temple we must look to Christ.25 It is in the person of Jesus Christ that the many Old Testament temple prophecies find their fulfillment.

Hence, we find in Christ a temple, a temple builder and the cornerstone of the new temple in the church. Christ succeeded in all the ways that his predecessors should have, but failed to do so. Through his life, death and resurrection he established his church as the new temple of God which will accomplish his purposes of expanding the presence of God throughout the entire earth.

24 Beale, The Temple and the Church’s Mission, 379.

CHAPTER 4
THE REVELATION OF THE TEMPLE OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The next significant development in the New Testament concept of the temple of God is found in the church of Jesus Christ. From his incarnation to the time of his ascension, Jesus was the temple of God on earth. However, with his bodily departure from the earth the church has become the new dwelling place of God. It is now the spiritual presence of Jesus living in and among the church through the Holy Spirit that will lead to the eventual completion of God’s plan to fill the entire cosmos with his presence. Just as it was God’s tabernacling presence that made Israel a “distinct” people (Ex. 33:16), so it is now for the church. Yet, while God dwelt with Israel through the structures of the tabernacle and temple, the New Testament church has no physical structures for the purpose of mediating his presence. The church itself is a spiritual temple of the Lord that his presence fills wherever it gathers on the earth.

New Temple Beginnings in the Book of Acts

The church became the temple of God at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the church,1 which was accompanied with the sign of tongues:

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1 There is also an account in John 20:22 where Jesus “breathed” on his disciples and “said to them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” The disciples were indwelt, to a degree, by the Spirit prior to even the ascension of Christ. However, this was a preview or foretaste of the greater outpouring of the Spirit that was to occur at Pentecost and carry on throughout the ages. The Old Testament saints were also indwelt by the Holy Spirit to a lesser degree. Certain figures are said have God’s Spirit in them, such as Joshua (Num. 27:18) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 2:2). The Spirit also came on people temporarily to empower them for a specific service or task (Ex.
When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.\(^2\)

This experience was seen by the multitude that was in Jerusalem at the time for the festival. The miracle that took place was that each person was able to understand what the believers were speaking in their own native tongue. Beale points out that Pentecost is best understood in the “redemptive-historical context of the whole Bible.”\(^3\) As easily overlooked or assumed aspect of this account is that the many people visiting the city spoke different languages (2:8). In this situation, the sign of tongues is a breaking of barriers or even a temporary solution to the division caused by people speaking many different languages. This echoes to the account of the tower of Babel that we analyzed previously in our study of the Old Testament. The list of nations in Acts 2:9-11 is an abbreviated form of the list that is described at length in Genesis 10.

At the tower of Babel, humanity defied God’s command to fill the earth and instead sought to unite against God in one place. God answered in judgment against them causing their language to be confused so they couldn’t understand each other. This led to their dispersion throughout the earth, but it was not a willful and certainly not worshipful spreading. Pentecost is the reversal of Babel so to speak, where we see numerous nations all comprehending what is being said at the same time. What was confused at Babel, is

\(^1\) 31:3). While the Holy Spirit did indwell the Old Testament saints, it was not in the abundance and power that was promised (Joel 2:28-29) and came about at Pentecost.


comprehensible at Pentecost. In fact, there is some confusion that takes place, but it is the 
“bewilderment” (2:6) over the fact that they can all understand what is being said. 
Witherington points out the irony of this as previously the “unintelligibility factor caused by 
many tongues caused the confusion; here the intelligibility factor does so.”4 It is fitting that 
the new temple of God begins with a temporary reuniting of languages that leads to witnesses 
dispersing throughout the earth to bring God’s saving presence to the nations. Pentecost is a 
reversal of Babel and the creation of the new temple of God that will expand throughout the 
earth.

Another notable passage in Acts in regards to the temple is found in chapter 17 in 
Paul’s speech to the men of Athens. Paul had been preaching “Jesus and the resurrection” 
(17:18) in the marketplace, which drew enough attention to have him brought before the 
Areopagus. In his speech to them he essentially states that at this point in history God is not 
to be sought or worshipped in any physical temple. He tells them that:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and 
earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, 
as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and 
breath and everything.5

Marshall suggests that this statement may be an “echo” of Solomon’s prayer during the 
dedication of the temple where he acknowledged the inadequacy of even that temple.6 There 
is no temple on earth that is adequate enough to house the Creator and Lord of all. In the past

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5 Acts 17:24-25.

he took up a temporary residence in the tabernacle and temples of Israel, but now he is present in the temple that is the New Testament church.

As Paul’s continues in his speech, he gives a summary so to speak of what the fulfillment of the Adamic commission looks like in a “post-fall world in relation to temple building”.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for… The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

Mankind was dispersed across the earth for the purpose that they “should seek God” and “feel their way toward him” and even “find him.” Witherington suggests again that this too likely has a reference to the dispersion from the Tower of Babel. The great importance of this text is that it suggests that the post-fall method of fulfilling the Adamic commission is found in repentance. Based on Paul’s argument, the commission would now be fulfilled if “all men” everywhere repented. This is yet another affirmation that the Great Commission is a reinstatement of the Cultural Mandate. True repentance “never exists except in conjunction with faith” which is the means by which men can be reconciled to God through the resurrected Christ. Even with the physical departure of Christ from the earth, it is still

7 Beale, 230.
9 Witherington, 527.
10 Beale, 231.
only through him that the presence of God will be spread throughout the earth. Faith and repentance done in response to his gospel is the entry way into the New Testament temple.

At the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 there is another reference to the new temple, which is based on a quotation from Amos 9:11-12. James recounts that prophecy that “after this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old” (Acts 15:16-18). The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the fulfilment of this prophecy, especially that God will “rebuild the tent of David.” Jesus is now the tabernacle that all people, Jews and Gentiles, may come to worship through. Another reason that Christ is greater than the physical temples of Israel is all who come to him in faith have “cleansed their hearts by faith” (15:9). There are no ceremonial laws that define the Gentiles or certain Israelites as unclean and in so doing bar them from worship. All have been made clean in Christ and can worship at any time in any place.

Shortly after quoting the prophecy from Amos, James goes on to say that the Gentile believers should “abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (15:20). At first glance, these four requirements seem quite strange in light of overall decision that the Gentiles are not required to keep the Mosaic laws. However, the reason James mentions these specific four elements is likely due to the “social setting” that they would commonly be performed together at, which

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12 Beale, 233.
would be some kind of pagan temple feast.\textsuperscript{13} While each of these things would likely be discouraged, it is the false worship behind them that is the crux of the issue.

These same things were prohibited in the Old Testament for both the Israelite and the sojourner among them (Lev. 17:8-14, 18:6-26). Beale summarizes James commands in relation to the Old Testament context:

Just as Gentile ‘aliens’ in Israel were to worship at the tabernacle while abstaining from idolatry, so Gentile worshippers in the church were to worship at the new tabernacle while keeping away from idolatry. Just as God’s presence at the tabernacle was the reason to stay away from idol worship, so Christ’s end-time presence as the true tabernacle is the reason for not participating in idol worship.\textsuperscript{14}

In light of this background, James prohibition doesn’t seem as out of place as it might on the surface. The concern is over worshipping only the true God through Christ instead of worshipping idols in pagan temples. This is not enforcing Mosaic laws on the Gentiles, but rather showing that idolatry and worship in Christ’s temple cannot coexist together. The new temple is available to all people from all backgrounds that come to Jesus alone in faith and repentance.

\textbf{The Temple in the Epistles of Paul}

The most explicit statements concerning the church as the new temple of God are found in the epistles of Saint Paul. In 1 Corinthians 3 we have one of the clearest texts on this important concept and transition in the New Testament. In this chapter Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church to correct their understanding of how leadership works in the church and to rebuke their undue allegiance to certain leaders. There was “jealousy and strife” in the church that was at least in part due to the fact that some Christians were saying “I follow

\textsuperscript{13} Witherington, 461.

\textsuperscript{14} Beale, 241.
Paul” and others “I follow Apollos” (1 Cor. 3:3-4). Paul then gives an agricultural metaphor by stating that he and Apollos simply planted seeds and watered, while God is the one who truly gives growth (3:5-6). They will receive a reward for their work, but only God deserves glory in this new community.

There is an important shift in the metaphor when Paul states “You are God’s field, God’s building” (3:9). The building that Paul is beginning to discuss is the temple of God (3:16). He laid the foundation of the temple when he was among them, which is none other than Jesus Christ (3:11). As we have already seen, during his incarnation Jesus was the temple of God on earth and at Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled the church. However, the temple of God is not finished. Paul laid the foundation of the Corinthian church and there is no other foundation than the one that has already been laid (3:11). Despite the completion of the foundation, the temple is still being built through the work of the church. Paul stresses the importance of the church to keep working by building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (3:12). There are broader implications of what this work consists of, but the most obvious based on the context is making disciples. In the agricultural metaphor, Paul discussed the process of disciple making as carried out by himself and Apollos, which was ultimately the work of God. Here, we see that in some measure it is the work of the entire church to build the temple of God by growing the church.

The climax of the passage is when Paul states:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy and you are that temple.  

Garland rightly states that:

15 1 Cor. 3:16-17.
It is a startling declaration to identify the community in Corinth gathered in their cramped, diminutive house churches as the temple of God. Compared to the grand temples in Corinth and the magnificent temple in Jerusalem, they appear rather ramshackle.\textsuperscript{16}

Nonetheless, the phrase “Do you not know” is used ten times in this letter and introduces a topic that should be common knowledge among the church.\textsuperscript{17} From the very beginning the church understood itself to be the new temple of God, which had a direct impact on how they lived and operated as that temple. The essence of this temple in relation to God is that it is the place “that God’s Spirit dwells” (3:16), which naturally gives the church its chief characteristic of holiness. Once again, it is the presence of God among his people that makes them the set apart and distinct people on the earth. This holiness belongs to them by virtue of God dwelling in them, but it must also be a descriptive term in how they live out this temple reality on earth.

Paul also gives a very serious threat to those that would seek to destroy this new temple by saying that God would instead destroy them. Paul is not referring here to true Christians who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, but rather those that are “devoid of God’s Spirit” and “are purposefully ruining, corrupting, and destroying the church.”\textsuperscript{18} There are people who take part in the activities and worship of the church that are not really part of the New Testament temple. This is just another way of saying that the visible church contains people that are not really saved and those that are causing problems in the church, either doctrinally or ethically, are the clearest example of this. The temple language puts a more


serious tenor on this because the sins are a direct attack on the place that God is most fully present. It is comparable to one entering the holy of holies in an attempt to destroy the Old Testament temple of Solomon. God’s holiness is sure to bring judgment on any who attempt such a thing.

One last important aspect from 1 Corinthians is found in a comparison of chapter 3 and 6. In mainstream Christianity the largest emphasis in relation to Christians being the temple of God comes from chapter 6. Once again, Paul begins “do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God” (6:19)? The temple that Paul is referring to in this passage is clearly the body of individual Christians. This is true because the Holy Spirit comes not just generally to the church, but specifically into individual believers. However, when analyzing chapter 3 we must be careful not to make the error of “individualistic interpretation . . . because this passage speaks only of the church, corporately, as the residence of God.”19 The Christians are primarily God’s temple when they are in community, not as isolated individuals.20 This does not detract away from the significance of being individually indwelt with God’s spirit, but rather shows that the nature of this indwelling is meant to be communal. There is a unity in Paul’s interest “in the glorification of God through both the embodied person and the corporate body”21 When the people of God gather together for worship the presence of God is magnified and more fully present as a result. 1 Corinthians shows that the Apostle Paul believed this doctrine

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concerning the spiritual temple of God to be one of the foundational traits of the New Testament church.

Another important passage from the writings of Paul on the topic of the temple is found in 2 Corinthians 6. At the beginning of the epistle Paul gives an important framework for how he understands the relationship between the Old Testament promises and Christ. He says that “all the promises of God find their Yes in him” (2 Cor. 1:20). Kruse comments on this text that the:

Old Testament contains many promises of God concerning the messianic age. Not one of these will fail to find its fulfilment in Christ.²²

The number of promises Christ fulfills are many, but the most obvious that Paul has in mind are those that he is going to address in the remainder of the epistle.²³ He often makes it very plain by citing the promise he has in mind and applying it to an actual situation or topic that he is teaching the Corinthians.

A few chapters later, Paul tells the Christians to not be “unequally yoked with unbelievers” (6:14). He then asks rhetorical questions to draw out the differences between Christians and unbelievers. He contrasts righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, and Christ and Belial (6:14-15). The obvious answer to each of the questions is that they do not have anything in common. The final question and statements are most appropriate to the present topic. Paul asks “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” and then he makes the positive declaration that “we are the temple of the living God” (6:16). The Greek word used here for temple (ναός) does not refer broadly to the overall physical building, but

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²³ Beale, 253.
to the “sanctuary, the most sacred part of the temple.” Paul equates the Most Holy Place of the Old Testament with the church as a spiritual reality. Martin summarizes Paul’s great claim by saying “the Holy of Holies was the dwelling place of the divine presence in the Tabernacle, God has a dwelling place in the new age, namely, the chosen people.”

This adds great weight to Paul’s argument to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. If the Christians are truly the temple of God, then it clearly would be wrong to unite something unclean to it or bring an idol into it. The Old Testament understanding of the temple would set the precedent that only what has been made holy is fit to be in God’s presence and anything else would defile it. Yet we must remember that Paul is discussing being “unequally yoked,” which is referring to relationships that have a certain depth, quality or commitment that is not fitting.

Immediately following Paul’s declaration that “we are the temple of the living God” he references multiple Old Testament promises to prove this point:

I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

Paul combines several different passages (Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 20:34, 37:26-27; 2 Sam. 7:14) to show the variety of promises that find their fulfillment in the New Testament church being the temple. God dwells in their midst and the requirement that inevitably sets on the

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25 Martin, 204.

26 Paul is not advocating that Christians avoid unbelievers or prohibit them from their worship gatherings, which would be contrary to the very purpose the temple is meant to serve.

27 2 Cor. 6:17-18.
people is one of holiness and purity. Christ originally fulfilled these promises and because of his work, the church also partakes in the fulfillment. The church is the beginning of the “eschatological expectation of the temple” which will one day be fully realized.28

In the book of Ephesians, the clearest teaching on the temple takes place in a discussion on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. Paul connects the new temple to the great end of “the bringing together of Jew and Gentile in shared worship of God.”29 He begins by reminding the Gentiles of their spiritual state before the coming of Christ and then discusses the riches that are now theirs. He tells them that they were “separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Essentially, they could not have been at a lower place spiritually than what they were before the coming of Christ. The striking part of this statement shows the unity of the promises of God in the Old and New Testament. Israel’s history, although darkened by sin, was filled with the presence of God and all the blessings that brought. A parallel is made then for the Gentiles between them being apart from Christ and being separated from the people of Israel.30 The Gentiles had considerably limited access to God’s temple presence because they were not part of or among the people of Israel in any spiritually or culturally significant way.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (2:13). Through Christ the Gentiles have been brought near to God where they can know and enjoy his presence. It is no longer through the nation of Israel that the

28 Beale, 256.


Gentiles must seek the Lord, but it is through the savior that was promised to their nation. Christ has made peace between the Gentiles and Jews by making them one and breaking down the “dividing wall” through the cross of Christ (2:14-16). Kruse states the significance of the dividing wall in relation to the temple:

There had always been a middle wall of partition, a dividing wall, between the two. There was a barrier both literally and spiritually. In Jerusalem, between the temple proper and the Court of the Gentiles, there was a stone wall on which there was an inscription in Greek and Latin ‘which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death.’ . . . Christ had now broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, of which that dividing wall in the temple was a symbol.\(^{31}\)

The physical temple was at the heart of the division between Jews and Gentiles before the coming of Christ and with his coming the temple has now become the heart of the unity that exists between Jews and Gentiles. It is through Jesus that both have access “in one Spirit to the Father” (2:18).

Paul then states that the Gentiles are “fellow citizens” and “members of the household of God” (2:19) which begins his more focused teaching on the church as the temple. The notion of household carries a double meaning in this passage. It certainly has the idea of the intimacy in the family relationship that now exists for the Gentiles in their relationship with God and by extension with all other Christians. However, the word “household” that is used in this text can also mean “house” or “temple,” which given the verses that follow, shows that this family relationship takes place in the context of God’s glorious presence among his people.\(^{32}\) The worship of the children of God takes place in this spiritual “house” that Paul


describes. The Gentiles now have the same standing as the Jews in the place of God’s temple with no restrictions or partitions.

We already discussed that in 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul says that Christ is the foundation, but now Paul says that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (2:20). In the New Testament, Christ is first said to be the temple itself, then he is said to be both the foundation and also the cornerstone of the temple. These differences are not signs of inconsistencies, but rather a “different handling” of the same metaphor.\(^{33}\) That is not to say, however, that the meaning is different. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul viewed himself and fellow leaders as builders and in our passage here he views them as stones in the building. Christ is the foundation in the previous passage and the cornerstone in this. In both cases, Christ is at the very center of which everything else is built upon and aligned from. The last thing Paul is trying to do is claim that apostles and prophets replace Christ as the foundation.\(^{34}\)

As Jews and Gentiles are joined together in Christ they “grow into a holy temple in the Lord” and are “built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (2:21-22). These are the most direct verses in Ephesians that speak of the church as the temple and the nature of that temple being the dwelling place of God. Another similarity to 1 Corinthians 3 is found in the fact that the temple is still growing and being built. God dwells in his church, but the intention is for the temple to keep expanding to more and more people until it fills the entire earth, which we have seen has been God’s intention since the beginning of Genesis. It is also intended to grow in its degree of holiness so as to become a more fitting dwelling

\(^{33}\) Foulkes, 86.

\(^{34}\) Foulkes, 87.
place of God and one that magnifies his presence to the world. “Expansion comes from evangelism and growth in spiritual maturity.”

The book of Ephesians is at the center of what it means to be the united people of God in the new covenant.

### The Temple in the Book of Hebrews

The book of Hebrews discusses the topic of the temple more than any other book of the New Testament, which requires our examination to be more focused on the points that relate most directly to the overall thesis. It uses the word “tent” or “tabernacle” rather than temple, but it contains the meaning of all that we have said about the temple as we shall see. The book of Hebrews takes many of the Old Testament people, offices, and places and shows how Christ is greater than all of them. For the sake of brevity, our analysis of Hebrews will focus primarily on two main topics related to the present thesis. First, the heavenly temple is the prototypical or model of which the Old Testament temples and tabernacle were fashioned after. Second, that Christ is greater than the Old Testament priesthood, which gives the church a greater confidence to enter the presence of God than those who lived before them.

The book of Hebrews talks about a tabernacle “not made with hands, that is, not of this creation” (Heb. 9:11) of which the tabernacle that Moses erected was but “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (8:5). The earthly and heavenly contrasts in Hebrews are not

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36 The book of Colossians does not contain a direct reference to the church as the new temple of God, but it does contain an important verse on Christ as the temple that must be addressed. In describing the preemience of Christ, he states that “in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19). The fullness of God dwelled in Christ and this was the reason that he was able to “reconcile to himself all things… by the blood of his cross” (1:20). It is the temple in Christ that makes the temple in the united Jews and Gentiles possible because he has now made them “holy and blameless” (1:22). Christ is the foundation and cornerstone of the temple that is the church by his life, death and resurrection. We can conclude that Paul’s teaching on the New Testament temple is in accord with what has already been stated in the Gospels and Acts.
philosophical or dualistic in nature, but eschatological.\textsuperscript{37} The contrast is meant to show the relationship between that which existed in Israel and that which exists in Christ. The two are not opposed to each other but rather one is a copy or shadow and the other is the real thing. Even though a copy is not the real thing, it gives some idea of what the original is like.\textsuperscript{38} The shadow, despite having some glory, was but a faint picture of the real thing due to the nature of being a shadow. The writer of Hebrews cites Exodus 25:40 to show when Moses built the tabernacle he was told “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain” (8:5). The New Testament temple as realized in Christ and his church is not just the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, but it is also the very thing that the Old Testament tabernacle was patterned after from the beginning.

When Moses led the people of Israel in constructing the tabernacle for God’s presence to dwell in, he was building it based on a heavenly tabernacle that had not yet been fully realized. The rituals of the old temple were pictures and symbols of that which actually took place in the “ultimate reality” of Christ.\textsuperscript{39} Clowney states this important truth when he says “In Christ is realization. It is not so much that Christ fulfills what the temple means; rather Christ is the meaning for which the temple existed.”\textsuperscript{40} It is not that the temple already existed so God sent a savior to operate in similar ways and describe his work in comparable language. Rather, the heavenly temple that already existed would one day be fully realized in


Christ. Israel’s tabernacles were fashioned after and were meant to point towards that greater realization that would take place in Christ.

Closely connected to this idea of the temple is the priesthood of Christ. In fact, the passages we have looked at that discuss the true nature of the temple are all found amidst statements on the priestly work or ministry of Christ (8:1-6; 9:11, 24). Christ is repeatedly referred to as a “high priest” (5:1; 9:11), of which he is shown to be greater than all of Israel’s high priest. The earthly high priest had to offer sacrifices repeatedly, year after year, but Christ only had to offer one sacrifice (9:25-28). The former high priests could only enter the Most Holy Place once a year (9:7), but Christ has entered the greater holy place at the right hand of God in heaven forever (9:12, 24). The chief characteristic of a priest is “one who brings men near to God, who leads them into the presence of God.”

Christ has entered into heaven and now appears on our behalf in the presence of God (9:24). It is his priesthood that brings men to God and in doing so makes the church a holy dwelling place for God.

More than any other section of the New Testament, Hebrews discusses how the work of Christ in his death and resurrection relates to the new temple and the Old Testament temple that was patterned after it. Perhaps the most obvious relationship is that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were all patterned after and pointed towards the sacrifice that Christ would make. His priesthood is unique in that he is both the priest and the sacrifice. It was not with the “the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood” (9:12) that he secured the eternal redemption of his people. The temporary nature of the previous sacrifices

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was a shadow of the sacrifice of Christ that was “perfect in nature and eternal in effect.”

The efficacy of this sacrifice is found in the great worth of the one that was sacrificed. “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10:4), but the blood of Christ brings forgiveness of sins (9:22), purification of conscience (9:14), and salvation (9:28). It is this priesthood of Christ in both his sacrificial death and present intercession that gives Christians “confidence to enter the holy places” (10:19). He is the “great high priest over the house of God” that gives them faith to draw near to God (10:21-22). In the book of Hebrews Christ is shown to be greater than the temple, the priesthood and all the sacrifices of the Old Testament in every way possible. It is through the atoning work of Christ in his death and resurrection that the church gains access into the presence of God and can draw near in full assurance.

Thus we see that the New Testament speaks of the church as the new temple of God using a variety of language and applies this doctrine to the situations of specific Christians. The variety does not produce disunity, but rather a more complete picture of what the new dwelling place of God looks like and what it is founded upon, namely Christ. This new temple began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church in a greater measure than any previous point in redemptive history. It was this new understanding of the temple that welcomed Gentiles into aspects of worship that were previously limited to only the Jews. It united these two groups of people that were once segregated. Paul used this temple theology as a foundation to his teaching on important topics like holiness, worship, relationships, leadership, etc. This new temple was made possible because of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, which the Old Testament pointed towards in its various temple.

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practices and roles. The church is the New Testament spiritual temple of God that will carry out the mission to expand his presence to more and more people until it fills the entire cosmos.
The early Christians identified themselves as the temple of God, which had a profound impact on the way they worshipped and functioned as a religious community. The church was not primarily a physical structure, but a spiritual structure made of individual Christians that together formed the dwelling place of God. The worship of Judaism and other ancient religions were centered on a specific physical building such as a temple or synagogue, but Christianity was largely defined around a community of believers. Likewise, a professional or separate priesthood was central to the function and sustainment of ancient religions, but the church did not have any such class of people. In fact, it believed in the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5). A sacrificial system was paramount to the worship of Judaism and paganism, but the early church did not offer any sacrifices in their times of worship. Although, celebrating a sacrifice that was made once and for all by Christ was at the very center. Christ was the ultimate temple, priest, and sacrifice of which all the Old Testament was patterned after. The significance of this change can not be overstated in its implications for the worship of God’s people. Frank Viola has asserted:

Christianity was the first non-temple-based religion ever to emerge. In the minds of the early Christians, the people—not the architecture—constituted a sacred space.¹

It is the worship and community life of this sacred people that will be examined in this chapter.

The New Temple as Ekklesia

It is beneficial to examine how the word “church,” or ekklesia, is used in the New Testament as it refers to the assembling of the saints. It is used in a variety of ways but most relevant to our discussion here is how the Apostle Paul uses it in relation to the communities he is addressing. The emphasis on community in the early church is in many ways lost in our individualist age. When someone came to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, they were automatically included in this new community called the church. Christianity is not merely a personal relationship with Jesus, but also carries with it a great emphasis on a new social or communal dimension that is simultaneously created when one puts their faith in Jesus.

Robert Banks states that Paul’s use of ekklesia typically refers to “a regular, local gathering before God.” In his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica he begins his greeting “To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). The term ekklesia was not a new term created by Paul or the early church. Paul uses the term in the same manner that it would have been used to describe the assembling of Greeks or Jews. However, he does so in a way that clearly separates the gatherings of the Christians from the political councils, synagogues or any other gatherings that took place in the city by stating that it is in the name of “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The church meets in the name of the Lord which shows that it is under his authority, revolved around his word, and done so in his presence.

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3 Ibid., 36.
Later in the letter, Paul commands the letter to be read to all the Christians and also that the readers should “greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” (5:26-27). This furthers the idea that Paul has in mind an actual gathering of Christians or that the Christian church can be thought of as a “regularly-gathering community.”\(^4\) In another letter Paul refers to the church in the plural as the “churches of God” (1 Thess. 1:4) and the “churches of Judea” (Gal 1:22). This suggests that Paul has in view an actual gathering of people. The new temple is precisely that when it gathers before God for the purpose of worship. The *ekklesia* of the New Testament is largely characterized by this gathering that took place in homes.

**The Place of Worship**

The early church did not have any buildings that constituted a temple or performed the function of a dedicated space solely for worship. There was no attempt to build a Christian equivalent of the synagogue or to Christianize the existing structures. Paul spent much time in the Jewish synagogues attempting to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:20, 13:5), but this never led to the development of Christian synagogues. It is possible that it was due to the lack of total success in conversion, but the fact remains unchanged. The worship of the early church took place not in spectacular temples or dedicated synagogues, but in the common place of ordinary homes. Paul frequently refers to churches meeting in houses, which are typically found among his greetings: “Greet also the church in their house” (Rom. 16:5). “Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord” (1 Cor. 16:19). “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house” (Col. 4:15). “To Philemon . . . and the church in your house” (Philem. 1:1-2). The only time Paul refers to a place in

\(^4\) Ibid., 36.
association with the church meeting place it is always a house. There is never a command to
meet in homes, but it was the norm at this point in history.

Snyder has stated that “There is no literary evidence nor archaeological indication
that any such home was converted into an extant church building. Nor is there any extant
church that certainly was built prior to Constantine.”\(^5\) The overall consensus is that the vast
majority of church gatherings took place in the houses of believers until the third or fourth
century. There is some disagreement with aspects of Snyder’s claim among scholarship. For
example, Adams agrees in the primacy of the home as the meeting place of early Christians
but denies the claim that they were the exclusive meeting place.\(^6\) He shows the implausibility
that 120 people were able to meet in a domestic house on the day of Pentecost.\(^7\) He also
argues for an earlier date on the converting of houses to church buildings by citing the
Christian building at Dura Europos, in modern day Syria, which evidence points to being
converted sometime between 232 and 233.\(^8\) Regardless of exact dates and alternative
possibilities, there is little doubt that the home was the gathering place of the majority of
early Christian gatherings.

In the 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) century work *The Octavius of Minucius Felix*, we have a recorded
accusation against Christians that they have “no altars, no temples.”\(^9\) As we mentioned
previously, the norm of ancient religions revolved around temples, priests and sacrifices. It

\(^{5}\) Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*

\(^{6}\) Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (London:
Bloomsbury, 2015), 10.

\(^{7}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{8}\) Ibid., 95.

was this deviation from the norm that led even to accusations by some that the Christians were even atheists. The home did not seem sacred enough as a place for worship to the ancient mind. Likewise, the earlier writing of the *Epistle of Barnabas* confirms that there was no longer a physical temple, but now a “spiritual temple built for the Lord.”

One clarification that should be made is that there is nowhere in scripture a command for people to meet in homes. Jesus told the woman at the well that the “hour is now here” when the worshipers of God will not worship in a specific location, but instead worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:21-22). It would be a great error to identify the home as a new temple or synagogue of sorts. New Testament worship places its great emphasis on the how and what of worship, not the where. The early church was not concerned about the place of worship, because it understood the people, not a place, to be the dwelling place of God.

The Temple and the Supper

While physical location was not a main concern for worship, there were certainly still benefits to the church meeting in homes. Bradley Blue has stated:

> The early believers met in houses not by default alone, but deliberately because the house setting provided the facilities which were of paramount importance for the gathering. For example, the culinary appurtenances necessary for the meal.

The meal that we will examine in a moment would need a place for preparation which the home could provide for. The home also gave the believers the ability to have their gatherings more private and out of the public eye, which likely helped it be tolerated longer in places

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like Rome. The home was not the required place for gathering, but it certainly served as the ideal location due to the nature of the gatherings and the cultural context.

One of the primary things that the early church did together when they gathered was share a meal together. This was not done at random or simply out of necessity but rather was a profound “physical expression to its fellowship.”

Meals were extremely significant in the times of the early church which can even be seen in the accusations Jesus received for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Matt. 9:11). This “table fellowship” during the first century was extremely significant to cultures in the Mediterranean basin because of what it symbolized. The sharing of meals together was far more than just a time to obtain one’s necessary nourishment, but rather a ceremony of sorts that depicted the overall nature of the relationship. This type of fellowship was a symbol of friendship and intimacy with one another. Being a fragmented society, people only ate with those in the same social class and those with the same ethnicity as their own. When guests were invited to join the household in a meal, this social discrimination was further evident in that they would be seated in such a way to show the social status of each guest in comparison to one another. The norm of the day was to only eat and socialize with those that were “social, religious, and economic equals.”

The very act of sharing a meal together was a symbol of friendship and relational depth, which is quite profound considering the diversity of people that made up the early church. People that once did not associate together at all due to social, economic or religious

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12 Banks, 83.


14 Ibid., 796.
barriers were now fellowshipping together over a meal. Another aspect that would have been especially surprising to a first century outsider would have been the lack of status driven seating arrangements.\textsuperscript{15} James harshly rebuked the church for this very thing in his letter by saying, “if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts” (Jms. 2:3-4)? The new temple is not made up of stones that vary in their worth based on their status in the world. Rather, this new community breaks down the barriers that once divided people.

The New Testament does not speak on the nature of the meal in great detail, or even the gatherings in general for that matter, but we do get a basic understanding as to what it would have looked like. Jude gives a very brief indication of the nature of these meals when he refers to them as “love feasts” (Jude 1:12). In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul discusses the Lord’s Supper and the issues that were going on in the Corinthian church surrounding this meal. Some were overindulging to the point of even getting drunk, while others were going hungry as a result of the others overindulgence (11:21). In the midst of his correction of the Corinthian church we get some clues about the meal. The phrase “when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat” seems imply that a typical part of this coming together consisted of the meal.

The Lord’s Supper, as indicated by the Greek word “deipnon” (“supper”), was not a “token meal or part of a meal” but simply the meal itself.\textsuperscript{16} It refers to the evening meal near


\textsuperscript{16} Banks, \textit{Paul’s Idea of Community}, 84.
the end of the day, which one generally invited guests to. Paul’s correction to the Corinthians to “eat at home” if they are hungry is not an indication that Lord’s Supper was separate from the regular meal. Rather, he was rebuking the abuses that were occurring around the normal meal in Corinth. The customary meal in Jewish homes consisted of breaking bread as a way commencing the meal and the taking of the cup of wine as the conclusion.\(^\text{17}\) It was standard practice that the bread and the wine would each have a separate blessing.\(^\text{18}\) The obvious difference in the Christian meal would have been in regards to the prayers and blessings that took place during both and the significant event that this meal was now attached to. An example of the words used during the meal is likely found in the verses of Paul in this same passage:

> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

The Lord’s Supper was a normal meal that was patterned after the Last Supper of Jesus. In particular it recounted the events of the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples and served as a remembrance of Jesus’ death on their behalf. Eating the bread and drinking the wine served as a proclamation of what Jesus had done and at the same time pointed forward to his second coming.

The reference to the covenant shows the benefits that the believers have as a result of the death of Jesus, which is a relationship with God and each other. The bread and wine serve

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 84.

as bookends so to speak for the fellowship that takes place during the meal in between.

Banks comments on this text that the events in between the taking of the bread at the beginning and the wine at the end “now become all the more appropriate, for between them lies the experience of that new relationship in the course of the meal . . . it is as the members of the community eat and drink together that their unity comes to visible expression.”

Central to the worship of this “temple-less” religion was the fellowship that occurred around the Lord’s Supper in the ordinary homes of believers.

The Temple and Prayer

One of the major indictments of Jesus against the temple that stood in his day was that it was meant to be a “house of prayer for all the nations” but the Jews had made it a “den of robbers” (Mk. 11:17). Unlike the physical temple in Jesus’ time, the new temple that was the church was largely characterized by prayer in its beginning. Beale articulates the relationship of the new temple and prayer when he says, “the role of prayer is enhanced for Christians who now are identified with Jesus through the Spirit as part of the end-time temple . . . all believers are priests and they function as priests by offering up prayers in the sphere of the spiritual temple.”

Throughout the book of Acts we see a church that is deeply committed to prayer. After the ascension of Christ the disciples “with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). After thousands of people were converted at Pentecost, they devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles, fellowship with one another, eating meals together, and prayer (2:42). Prayer was not an after thought for meal

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19 Banks, Paul’s Idea of Community, 86.

times or at the beginning and end of a sermon, but something that the entire church devoted itself to carrying out the priestly function.

This theme of prayer continues throughout the book of Acts as the norm for the church. The church prays for boldness when the political leaders command that they no longer speak about Jesus (4:23-31). Peter and the apostles appointed seven men to serve in the daily food distribution so that they could instead devote themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the word” (6:4). When Peter was put in prison, the writer states that “earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church” (12:5). Even at the time that he was later set free by the angel we are told that “many were gathered together and were praying” at the house of Mary (12:12). Before making major decisions or appointing leaders the church would pray (13:3, 14:23). Prayer is especially made in times of difficulty as when Paul and Silas are in prison (16:25) or later at Paul’s threat of being ship wrecked (27:29). One cannot read the book of Acts without being struck by how much the church prayed, which is in accord with the temple identity discussed thus far.

The Epistles continue where Acts left off and show forth that the church ought to be characterized by prayer.\(^{21}\) James says to “pray for one another” because the “prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (Jms. 5:16). He elaborates that prayer should be made in all the various times of life such as suffering, sickness and even cheerfulness (5:13-14). Peter was concerned that husbands and wives live in such a way so that their “prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). He goes on to say that all of life should be lived in a “self-controlled and sober-minded” way so that it does not inhibit their prayers (4:7). The Apostle Paul speaks on the topic prayer more than any other New Testament

\(^{21}\) The New Testament also depicts the prayers of the church as a type of offering or sacrifice in this new temple. The Apostle John states multiple times that the “prayers of the saints” are an “incense” to the Lord (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-5), which echoes the altar of incense in the Old Testament (Ex. 30:1).
author. He often talks about his own prayers (Col. 1:3; Phil. 1:4), but is also concerned with
the prayer life of the church. He wrote about his desire “that in ever place the men should
pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim. 2:8). He tells the church to “be
constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12), “continue steadfastly in prayer” (Col. 4:2), and to “pray
without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). The early church was a place where prayer was prized and
viewed as something that could not be lived without. The effectiveness of its ministry and
expansion throughout the earth was dependent on the prayers of its people. The New
Testament church fulfilled the prayer role of the temple by being a people deeply committed
to prayer.

The Temple and Righteous Living

As we examined in our study of the Old Testament temple, one of the requirements to
draw near to the temple of God is that one must be righteous or holy before God. Referencing
Leviticus 11:44, the Apostle Peter stated that “as he who called you is holy, you also be holy
in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15-16). It
is only the pure in heart that “shall see God” (Matt. 5:8) and there is a “holiness without
which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). The dwelling place of God required holiness
on the part of all who would draw near. It is not through the individuals own righteousness
that they are able to draw near to God, but rather through the free gift of righteousness that he
gives his people (Rom. 5:17). Yet, even as justified believers it is necessary for Christians to
practice holiness for them to have an ongoing sense of the presence of God. Jesus told his
early disciples “whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart
from me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Part of that abiding consisted of keeping his
commandments (15:10). Thus the church was greatly concerned with the righteousness and holiness of its members.

In the *Epistle to Diognetus*, which is largely believed to be an early Christian apologetic work dating around the second century, we have a most commendable description of the early church. It appears to be the writing of a Christian to a person in a high social position explaining the nature of Christianity and why they and their religion differ so much from the others around them. The author paints a picture of the Christians that is very much in accord with the holiness they sought after:

> For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind . . . . They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives . . . . They obey the established laws, and they surpass the laws in their own lives. They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are ignored, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are endued with life . . . . They are evil spoken of, and yet they are vindicated. They are reviled, and they bless; they are insulted, and they respect. Doing good they are punished as evil-doers; being punished they rejoice, as if they were thereby quickened by life.\(^{22}\)

The picture is painted here of Christians that are good citizens and loving neighbors regardless of how they are treated. They have laws that they live by that surpass those of the state and their morals differ so much from the surrounding culture that they are even attractive. They share the common meal together, but have a unique devotion to a biblically grounded view of marriage and children. The claims that they love even their enemies and bless those who revile or punish them echo Jesus’ teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:11; 5:38-42; 5:43-45). Thus it was the righteous

and holy living of the early church as the temple of God that was an apologetic to those it witnessed to.

The Temple and Expansion

Lastly, the early church understood that its mission was to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19), which would expand the presence of God to more and more people throughout the earth. This expansion would only take place through the sacrifices made by the people of God, which find very clear examples of in the New Testament. The book of Acts also shows that part of the purpose of the central authority of the Jerusalem church was to exercise oversight over the Gentile mission. The early Christians in Jerusalem sacrificed their own lives for the sake of this mission as seen in the deaths of both Stephen and James (Acts 7:60; 12:2). As the spiritual temple spread from Jerusalem to other regions, it would be accompanied with these same types for sufferings.

Another example of this is in the great labors of the Apostle Paul throughout his missionary journeys and preaching of the gospel under great persecution. Paul appeals to his readers to offer themselves as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). He speaks of the extent of his ministry in the language of sacrifice when he says “even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith” (Phil. 2:17) and “I am already being poured out as a drink offering” (2 Tim. 4:6). Paul even goes as far to say that the sufferings he experiences in his body “fill up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24). Paul is not referring to anything lacking in

Christ’s work on behalf of his people to secure their salvation. Rather, he is referring to the afflictions that still must be endured for the mission to the Gentile nations to be completed. The ministry that Paul and other leaders undertook required great sacrifice on their part.

However, this mission was not only advanced by the sacrifices of apostles and missionaries, but also in the sacrifices of normal Christians as they prayed for the success of the mission, invited outsiders to their household gatherings and through their financial support of missionaries. Beale states that the “mark of the true church is an expanding witness to the presence of God: first to our families, then to others in the church, then to our neighborhood, then to our city, then the country and ultimately the whole earth.”

24 The presence of God was powerfully exhibited in the early church and it is this mark that led to the rapid expansion of the spiritual temple of God throughout ancient world.

The Final End-Time Temple

Our study has examined the historical development of the temple from the time of Genesis up to the first-century era of the early Christian church. However, the Bible also depicts the future of the temple in its final pages. Revelation 21:1-22:5 gives a description of the final events in history, which includes “a new heaven and a new earth” and a “new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven” (Rev. 21:1-2). The surprising aspect is that the new heaven and earth is only described in its connection to this city which has both temple and

24 Beale, 401.
Much like Solomon’s temple, there is mention of precious stones that are the foundations of the wall of the city (21:18-21). It is also said that “its length and width and height are equal” (21:16), just as the inner sanctuary of Solomon’s temple was equal in length, width, and height (1 Kgs. 6:20). Another similarity is that no unclean person or thing is ever allowed to enter into this city-temple (Rev. 21:27). In terms of garden qualities, we read about the tree of life that is for the healing of the nations (22:2) and the river of life that flows from the throne of God (22:1). This city-temple is equated to being the same thing as the new heaven and earth.

In Revelation 21:22, the Apostle John states that he “saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” There is no need for a physical temple in the new heavens and earth because the presence of God that previously only dwelled in specific places of creation and later in his people the church has now been expanded throughout the entire creation. Beale summarizes this point by stating “the Revelation 21 vision is best understood as picturing the final end-time temple that will fill the entire cosmos.”

The final picture in the Bible shows the fulfillment of what God purposed to do from the very beginning, namely to fill the entire cosmos with his glorious presence.

Thus with their identity as the spiritual temple of God, the early church lived and worshipped in ways that were radically different from their ancient counterparts. They had no designated place of worship to call a temple, so they instead met in the homes of ordinary believers. They had no professional priesthood but instead viewed every member of the community as a priest to carry out the work of God. Sacrifices were no longer necessary.

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26 Ibid., 25.
because their God was sacrificed on their behalf to bring reconciliation. They remembered this sacrifice as they gathered for a meal that was the Lord’s Supper with one another consistently. The breaking of bread and the beginning and the taking of wine at the end pointed back to the body and blood of Jesus. It cannot be overstated how much the early Christians were devoted to prayer and that they expected God to do great things in response to their prayers. Finally, as they were propelled by prayer they sacrificed their own lives and comforts for the sake of the mission that the Lord Jesus gave them, which was really the mission from the first pages of Genesis. The new community expanded the spiritual temple of God throughout the earth by making disciples of all nations. It was their identity as this spiritual temple that gave a profound shape to the community itself. It is this temple that will continue until the final temple is established that completely fills the heavens and the earth.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the great temple theme of the Bible begins in the very first pages of Genesis and can be traced throughout the entire book. The Garden of Eden served as an archetypal temple of which all later temples were developed. Yet, at the same time all the earthly temples were patterned after the heavenly temple that existed before them. There was a spiritual dimension to the Cultural Mandate, a command to fill the entire earth with the presence of God. As mankind expanded throughout the earth, they would serve as his image bearers and enjoy his temple presence wherever they went. Unfortunately, with the introduction of sin into the world, the temple presence of God in the Garden of Eden was lost. Nevertheless, God was still committed to carrying out his plan to spread his presence. The patriarchs and the people of Israel had several encounters with God by which he made his presence known to them. They too were given the task of filling the earth with his presence, but they failed in a manner similar to Adam and Eve.

The decisive event in regards to the temple expansion is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While he was on the earth, he was the tabernacling presence of God among his people. The Most Holy Place of the Old Testament resided fully in the person of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christ succeeded in all the ways that Adam and Israel failed by his life of perfect obedience. It was his death on the cross that made the temple participation of his people possible. After the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit filled the church which
set them apart as the new dwelling place of God on the earth. The mission to fill the earth with the presence of God was reinstated in the Great Commission and accomplished by making disciples of all nations. The early church carried out that mission in the power of the Holy Spirit and worshipped in a way that was distinct from all other ancient religions. The church has continued to carry out that mission throughout the ages and will so until the end of time.

Reflections for the Modern Church

The modern church would greatly benefit from a renewed understanding that it is the special dwelling place of God on the earth. Perhaps the two areas of the church that would be most improved are its worship and community life. Too often the worship of the modern church is trapped in the snares of formality and casualness. A.W. Tozer stated that the Old Testament tabernacle beautifully illustrated the journey of a person that goes from the world of sin into the very presence of God.\(^1\) He shows the great privilege that the Christian has today by comparing it to the worship of an ancient Israelite:

Though the worshipper had enjoyed so much, still he had not yet entered the presence of God. Another veil separated from the Holy of Holies, where above the mercy seat dwelt the very God Himself in awful and glorious manifestation. While the tabernacle stood, only the high priest could enter there, and that but once a year, with blood which he offered for his sins and the sins of the people. It was this last veil which was rent when our Lord gave up the ghost on Calvary, and the sacred writer explains that this rending of the veil opened the way for every worshipper in the world to come by the new and living way straight into the divine Presence.\(^2\)

Christians have the distinct privilege of direct access into the glorious presence of God that once was contained to the Most Holy Place of Israel’s tabernacle. When the church gathers

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\(^2\) Ibid., 36.
for worship and prayer, it is not merely a social gathering of its members. God is in their midst. This presence of God among his people was the defining characteristic of the nation of Israel (Ex. 33:16). How much more should the church be defined by this characteristic, since it has access into his presence that was only partially known to the Israelites? It is as Christians come into the presence of God that they “with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). It is the presence of God in the midst of his spiritual temple that must be regained.

Likewise, the church must also recapture the aspects of community life that proceeded from this temple theology. The church was the temple of God most profoundly or visibly when they gathered together. The individualistic age that we live in places an unhealthy emphasis on the needs and desires of the individual, which has passed over into the teaching of the church. There is much emphasis on personal devotions with the Lord, but there is a communal element to the Christian faith that is greatly lacking to the majority of modern Christians. As we have seen, it doesn’t matter where this community meets but it should be defined by prayer, fellowship, sharing meals together and devotion to the Bible (Acts 2:42). Much of this takes place in Sunday morning worship services, but there is also a need for it to expand over into lives and homes of ordinary believers. In the past century, the concept of meeting in small groups has become popular. This is a great avenue to incorporate the defining characteristics of the New Testament temple as it provides an opportunity for more people to participate. When the modern church regains its identity as the spiritual temple and dwelling place of God, it will simultaneously grow in its worship and community life which will be a powerful witness to the world it ministers to.
There is also a great need for the modern church to regain the holiness that was sought after in the early church. There is a “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14) and this is the very reason that so many churches appear to be void of the Spirit of God altogether. The lack of holiness is displayed in a variety of ways but one of the most obvious is how indistinguishable the majority of Christians are from their unbelieving neighbors, coworkers and friends. Christians today are no longer characterized by the distinctive marks that we previously analyzed in the *Epistle to Diognetus*. The world was once surprised at the radically self-giving, loving and upright lives that Christians lived, but this is not the case in our era. Instead, Christians are nearly identical to the broader culture in regards to their morals, lifestyle, character, and giving. “God’s temple is holy and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:17) is a truth that must be recaptured among the church today if it is going to authentically encounter the presence of God and simultaneously minister to the dying world around it.

Perhaps most importantly, the church needs to regain the value it once placed on prayer in both individual lives and corporate gatherings. Throughout the book of Acts the church gathered together for the purpose of prayer and as a result they saw unfathomable things happen. It was not an afterthought to be worked around more important tasks, but rather it was the most important work that fueled every good thing that happened in the church. The church today is in great need of seeing the power of God once again at work and the only way this will occur is through the prayers of his people. E.M. Bounds summarized this great need well when he said “What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the
Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer.” The church today is constantly trying to accomplish its mission by looking more like the world in its methodology. However, the church does not need worldly methods, but people who are changed by the Spirit of God through communing with him in extended times of prayer. It is this type of person that will have the greatest impact on the world and it is a church made up of such people that will fulfill the mission to expand the spiritual temple of God.

Final Thoughts

Thus the temple of God is not a minor doctrine relegated to the areas of lesser importance in Christian theology. Instead, it is an all encompassing theme that beings in the first chapters of Genesis and ends in the last pages of Revelation. In between is the story that has been examined throughout this thesis, which progressively unfolded throughout the entire Bible, giving it a richer and more expansive meaning. More specifically, it was this identity of the New Testament church as the spiritual temple of God that brought about many of the great characteristics that distinguished it from all other religions. The church as the spiritual temple of God will continue to spread his presence throughout the earth until the day that its mission is complete.

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