

## WHAT THE TEMPLE WAS

The Israelite temple was the centerpiece of the ancient Jewish culture and state. Its origin and function derived from the tabernacle of the Exodus. The tabernacle formed the immeasurably important link, as the holy place, to not only worship but actually unite with God (Exodus 25:8).

Moses was given explicit revelation when he went up on Mount Sinai. He came down with the foundations of worship and life before God. The 10 commandments, the Ark with its Mercy Seat and the tabernacle blueprints, all establishing the required safe place for the Jews to become God's own people (Exodus chapters 25-40).

And, yes, the focus of Israel was the tabernacle. Actually, the central region of the tabernacle. . .at the precise locus of the Ark's Mercy Seat did God commune with His people (Exodus 25:22). Hovering over the body of the people of God as a pillar of cloud and fire. The original Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23).

The tabernacle remained all the while Israel wandered in the wilderness and then for hundreds of years just outside of Jerusalem until Solomon built a "permanent" house for God (I Kings 6:1). The first Jerusalem temple.

Solomon's temple retained its transcendent status as the nexus, the connection, of God to His people, Israel. It was not the structure, the actual building, but rather the spiritual essence and presence that qualified Israel as God's special children. This status certified by the priests' ongoing ceremonial spilling of sacrificial blood on the temple's altar (Leviticus 17:6).

But the significance of this blood was uniquely different from all the blood and other sacrifices of all the other religions of mankind. Blood spilled on the Jewish temple's altar was not the giving of a valuable livestock resource to pay an angry or haughty god to be nice to them.

No, this blood, the life blood of the sacrificed animal, represented God's own cleansing of the sin of His people (Leviticus 17:11). A very special cleansing. Not a get out of jail free card removal of sin but an atonement, a paid for kind of cleansing as imaged by the death and bleeding of that which was sacrificed.

Ever since Abraham was able to take Isaac safely home from mount Moriah, the Jews knew the revelation that God, Himself, would provide a special "something"

that would bless all humanity (Genesis 22:18). They knew that God's commands regarding sacrificial worship were embodied by all that the temple represented.

Unfortunately, as with all things mortal, the temple holiness became less and less awesome to Israel. Accordingly, the actual presence of God dwindled and finally disappeared in the face of a nation that had abandoned God. God then abandoned them and they were taken captive to Babylon (II Kings 17:20). The temple, empty of God, was destroyed. God was no longer with, as in the sense of joined as the original Immanuel, to Israel.

In the course of time, God preserved His promise to Abraham and brought a remnant back to Jerusalem where they built another temple (Isaiah 11:11). Tragically, this one no longer contained the actual focus of the spirit of God (Luke 19:46). At best, it served as a reminder of what once was, although no one alive would again sense that awe of the Holy Spirit's presence imbuing that first temple.

God's providence is never detoured or stymied. His decision to continue as Immanuel was now ripe for an awesome upgrade. God's cohabitation was to become personal. This is prophesied in Jeremiah 31 and executed through Jesus in Luke 22.

God, through His prophet, Jeremiah, describes the relationship God had with Israel at the beginning of the Exodus, in the tabernacle, in human terms. God taking them by the hand as a husband—the "one flesh" partnering relationship. Then seeing Israel break that bond in a spiritual divorce.

But now comes God's new covenant which is inborn and existential. Every single individual in the household of God will have His essence as part of their being (I Corinthians 3:16-17). Having any and all of their sin in constant remission. God's immutably perfect personal temple as part of one's conscious, spiritual being.

Although ultimately applied to all God's people through all history, this spiritual temple had to have its existence initiated by the promised unique sacrifice. It is what Christ meant when he declared the new covenant's reality through his blood (Luke 22:20). Him leading us all to the Immanuel status of being, each one, a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 16:19-20).

That's what the temple was. Is now. And will be forever.

