

The Temple of God

How to Read the Bible

Getting the Big Picture

- Learning to read various parts of the Bible with a BIG picture view in mind is the discipline called biblical theology
- Definition: Biblical theology is the interpretation of Scripture, when the reader asks questions about God along the temporal historical flow of the Bible's storyline
- There are approximately 20 major themes, with many sub-themes, that connect the entire Bible together into a single storyline
- Example: How does the theme of the "temple" unfold itself in the Bible's storyline?
- The aim of BT is to trace the development of a theme through the Scripture's storyline, and to determine the unique contribution of a particular book (e.g., Exodus) to the whole of Scripture

Reading the Bible in Context

- Once we understand that the books of the Bible are parsed out in a storyline, we can explain how they fit uniquely in the storyline
- The task of the reader is to read a particular passage in context—i.e., what comes before and after the passage
- We must follow the flow of the text, making theological connections from one paragraph to another, and from one book to another

Introduction

- The “temple” theme spans the Bible and functions as the place, where God is present with his people in a unique way
- Temple manifestations include the Garden of Eden, the tabernacle, the Jerusalem temple, Jesus Christ, the church and the new Jerusalem in that they share the outworking of God’s redemption of humanity
- God created the earth in order to dwell with those he created. He created Adam and Eve and commissioned them to multiply to found a holy city
- Their rebellion against God delays (with tragic consequences) the effort, but God will bring his plan of salvation to completion with the new Jerusalem
- The concept of temple figures prominently throughout the whole process

The Garden of Eden

- While not a structure, the Garden of Eden served as a divine sanctuary in that Adam was to “serve it and guard it” (Gen 2:15), just as the Levites and priests were to serve and guard the tabernacle sanctuary (Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:4-7)
- As a result of their sin, the couple was expelled from the garden as the Cherubim took over guarding the garden’s entrance (3:24)
- An important consequence of their exile from Eden is their loss of intimacy with God and the forfeiture of their service to God
- From Adam and Eve’s expulsion to Israel’s exodus from Egypt, no earthly sanctuary existed
- During the time of the patriarchs, altars were erected as temporary “sanctuaries,” anticipating a time when God will dwell with his people (22:1-19)

The Tabernacle

- After delivering the Israelites from bondage, God enters into a covenant relationship with them at Mount Sinai
- This paved the way for constructing a portable sanctuary, where God resides among his people
- The tabernacle is made with gold and colored fabrics to reflect the majesty of God. It is known as the “tent of meeting” because Moses conversed with God there (Ex 27:21; 28:43)
- The tabernacle was also called the “sanctuary” or holy place, because God’s holy presence made it holy
- Only the high priest was allowed to enter the inner room—the Most Holy place—once a year on the Day of Atonement

The Jerusalem Temple

- Eventually the tabernacle was replaced by a magnificent temple, built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. God's glory filled the sanctuary (1 Kgs 8:10-11; 2 Chron 7:1-2)
- Due to God's special relationship with King David, the Davidic dynasty is closely associated with future developments regarding God's earthly temple
- For centuries to follow, the Jerusalem temple became the location for worshiping God (Ps 84:1-4)
- God's presence within the temple distinguished Jerusalem from all other cities—"The City of God"
- The temple was destroyed in 587-586 BC by the Babylonians, as a form of punishment by God for the corruptions of Israel

The Jerusalem Temple

- Ezekiel gives attention to how God abandons his dwelling place (Eze 9:3; 11:16) due to the sin of his people
- ¹⁶“Therefore say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet for a little while I have been a sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone’ (Eze 11:16)
- However, Ezekiel also looks forward to a time when God will live in a transformed city (Eze 40-48)
- The temple was rebuilt in 539 BC, when the Persians defeated the Babylonians
- The rebuilt temple fell short of expectations, as people looked forward to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy

Jesus Christ

- As heir to the Davidic kingdom, Jesus' coming inaugurated a new stage in the outworking of God's redemptive plan (Matt 1:1)
- When John writes, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14), he compares Jesus' body to the OT tabernacle (Ex 33-34)
- The word for "dwelt" (Jn 1:14) is the same verb form of the word for "tabernacle" in the LXX, meaning Jesus "tabernacled among us."
- When Jesus remarks, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days," John interprets this as referring to Jesus' body (Jn 2:19-21)
- Jesus is the true meeting place between God and his people (Jn 14:6)
- The idea that Jesus' body was a temple fits well with the belief that "in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9)

The Church

- Believers in Christ constitute the “body” of Christ and becomes the new temple of God, extending God’s presence throughout the earth (1 Cor 3:16-17)
- ¹⁶Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. (1 Cor 3:16-17)
- Beginning with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God’s dwelling place on earth becomes a multi-ethnic community of people
- The church is the temple of God, when people gather together

The Church

- The Jerusalem temple is replaced by a very different kind of divine sanctuary made of living stones (1 Pt 2:4-5), with Jesus as the cornerstone of this temple (Eph 2:20-21)
- ⁴As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pt 2:4-5)
- ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 2:20-21)

The Church

- The majority of NT references to the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers refer to believers corporately as God's temple (1 Cor 3:16)
- ¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? (1 Cor 3:16)
- In 1 Cor 6:19-20, Paul refers to individual believers as the temple of God
- ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own: ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20)

The New Jerusalem

- While the creation of the church is important in expanding God's kingdom on earth, fulfilling God's plans for the whole earth involves creating the new Jerusalem (Rev 21-22)
- The new Jerusalem brings to fulfilment what began in Eden, because both share common features like the "tree of life" (Gen 2:9; cf. Rev 22:2-3)
- John's vision reveals a city of enormous dimensions that is shaped as a golden cube, reminiscent of the Most Holy Place within Jerusalem temple, also shaped as a cube and plated with gold
- John explicitly says there is no temple within the city, and points out that "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev 21:22)
- This suggests that the whole city is a Most Holy Place, where there is no barriers exist between God and humanity
- As royal priests, we will be able to see God's face (Rev 22:4-5)

Conclusion

- Biblical theology helps us to bind together the theme of temple through the different phases of redemptive history from the Garden of Eden to the anticipated creation of the New Jerusalem
- While the form of the temple changes dramatically as God's presence and glory gradually fill the whole earth, a consistent pattern runs throughout the Bible, creating a sense of unity
- The failure to make theological connections causes the reader to treat these phases as stand-alone passages, thus arriving at narrow interpretations and misapplying the message of the Bible