

How the Bible fits together: TEMPLE

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 September 2016

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well at the moment of the evening services we're working through a series which is looking at how the whole Bible fits together and in order to help us to do that we've been working with this diagram that we have on the screen. And the basic principle behind this study is the fact that if you read in Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 and then if you read in Revelation chapter 21 and 22, the last two chapters of the Bible you see the same things appearing.

These themes run through the whole Bible, the theme of land, of family, of temple, of law, of covenant, of kingdom. And so we are looking over a period of weeks in our evening services at each of these wonderful themes. And tonight we are going to focus on the theme of temple. We read in Exodus 25, let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst. And as we look at these themes we're asking three basic questions. What happened in the Old Testament? What happened in the New Testament? What does it mean for us? And so we can just use these as our framework as we look at this wonderful, wonderful theme of temple. So what happened in the Old Testament? What does the Old Testament got to say about God's temple? Well the first thing that we have to note and establish is the fact that the Garden of Eden was in fact a temple. Now that might sound a bit strange to begin with because you think well surely it's a garden, not a temple. And it doesn't explicitly say in Genesis 1 and 2, this is a temple. But if you ask the question what is a temple?

Then the answer to that is a temple is a place where God dwells and a place where we can meet with Him and worship Him. And that's exactly what the Garden of Eden was. In the Garden of Eden God was there. God was present with humanity and He was worshiped. The Garden of Eden was a place where God and humanity were together. In fact Genesis 3a tells us that God walked in the Garden. He was there walking to and fro in the midst of the Garden of Eden. And it's very interesting when you go to Leviticus it describes the temple, the Tabernacle. And it uses the same word. I will make my dwelling among you and my soul shall not abhor you. God's talking about His presence in the sanctuary. I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. The same word that's used of Eden is also used of the Tabernacle. God walking, God dwelling in the midst of His people. And then if you look at the details of the Tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament you will see that there's a lot of similarities with the Garden of Eden. We read part of Exodus chapter 25 and in that chapter there's a lot of references that point us back to Eden.

There's the mention of Cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant. There's the mention of gold and precious stones which is also mentioned in Eden. The lamp stand which we read about in detail was in the shape of a tree, branches and flowers. It's all pointing us back to Eden. And when we read about Solomon's temple which he built later on in the Old Testament we read the following. Around all the walls of the house he carved and engraved figures of Cherubim that points us back to Eden and palm trees and open flowers that points us back to Eden and the inner and outer rooms. The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms that takes us back to Eden. For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made of doors of olive wood again wood, trees, Eden. The lintel the doorposts were five sided. He covered the doorposts of olive wood with carvings of Cherubim, palm trees and open flowers. He overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the Cherubim and on the palm trees. All of this is showing that there's a really clear deliberate link between the layout and design of the temple and the garden of Eden. The temple, the sanctuary, the tabernacle was very garden like. It's all pointing back to Eden. And there's lots and lots of other fascinating things that we could look at but unfortunately we don't have time. The key point is that Eden was a temple because it was a place where God was present with humanity. So that's our starting point for tonight. Eden at the beginning a temple, God and man together. But what happens in the rest of the Old Testament? Well we can go through very quickly and see the various stages that took place. In Genesis chapter 3 Adam sinned and the immediate result is that he is driven out of God's presence. He drove out the man. And so Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden. They're expelled from the temple. And the reason for that is that the sinfulness of Adam makes it now impossible for God and humanity to be together. And so there's this separation. And so then we have got a breakdown in the relationship between God and humanity. They are alienated. They are separated. Humanity is no longer in that beautiful garden and in that wonderful presence of God. And so there's now this kind of separation between God and humanity. And that is reflected very clearly in the next major temple moment in the Old Testament which is on Mount Sinai.

If you remember Israel came out of Egypt and they were led to Mount Sinai and there at Mount Sinai God's presence came. And let's read what happened. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

[6 : 38] Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like a smoke of a kiln. The whole mountain trembled greatly and as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder.

The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain and Moses went up and the Lord said to Moses go down and warn the people lest they break through to the Lord and look and many of them perish.

Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out against them. And Moses said to the Lord the people cannot come up to Mount Sinai and for you yourself warned us saying set limits around the mountain and consecrate it. And the Lord said to him go down and come up bringing Aaron with you but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord lest he break out against them.

Now do you see what that is saying? Think of the contrast. In Eden God and humanity walked together in a garden in peace. They were in God's presence. But now on Sinai God's presence comes down to the top of the mountain but the incompatibility of humanity and God is so much that the people can't even touch the mountain. They have to keep away. They have to keep back.

God's presence is there but they can't go anywhere near it. The whole emphasis is on inaccessibility. Nobody can get close to God. But despite that God wants to dwell among his people.

[8 : 20] And for that reason he gives Moses instructions to build a tabernacle. And we read about that in Exodus chapter 25 and indeed it Exodus 25 right through to chapter 40 is all about the instructions for building the tabernacle. This is going to be the means whereby God will dwell among his people.

And God gives very strict instructions about how it's to be built and God gives very strict instructions as to how he's to be approached. And that's what the whole of Leviticus is explaining. The sacrificial system whereby sacrifices are made so that sinful people can come into the presence of God. Remember Mount Sinai. Remember how God couldn't be touched. He couldn't be approached. Now he's coming into a tent in the middle of the camp. They've got to be so careful when they approach. They've got to make sure that they approach through the sacrificial system.

It's all still very very restricted. But once the tabernacle was built God's presence came there. This is the very end of Exodus. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Now this tabernacle was designed for travel and so it moved about as the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. But when they eventually came to settle in the promised land the tabernacle was replaced with a permanent temple. And this was built by Solomon and again the same specific instructions applied and the same purpose was fulfilled through that building.

And again God's presence was there. As soon as Solomon finished his prayer fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. So God's presence is now in the midst of the people. In this temple this is where God dwells. And we read about how it all worked when we read from Hebrews chapter 9. But it was still restricted. You had the curtain keeping people out and only once a year could the high priest enter in and even then it was only under very strict conditions not without blood. So you can see that we've got this alienation between God and humanity. God is here we are here we're kind of separated and the temple is trying to kind of put that right. It's trying to restore things but the access is restricted. The temple and the tabernacle only go so far in terms of restoring it.

And so that's the pattern that you have in the Old Testament but as with everything in the Old Testament the ultimate story of the Israelites is one of failure. And the people turned away from God and eventually they were overrun and taken into captivity by the Babylonians and the temple was destroyed. And the consequence of all that was that God withdrew his presence from among the people. And this is what the book of Ezekiel is really all about in many ways. And we can read just a couple of verses from that. Oh I haven't put it up. I forgot to put it up sorry I'll just read it for you. Then this is Ezekiel seeing a vision. Then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house that's from out of the temple and stood over the cherubim and the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth before my eyes as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stood at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the Lord and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. The description there is of God's presence leaving the temple. And we read from Chronicles how God's presence filled the temple. Well I think maybe you said about 400 years later 350 years later God's presence left it again. And so God's presence was no longer among the people. And this is a diagram that is summarizing what we're saying at the beginning in Eden God and humanity together. And then we have the fall driven out of God's presence we are separated that's why it's got God and man at the top. Now I would prefer it if it said humanity rather than man but it was too long a word so that's just why I have man. God and man then at Sinai there are we bit closer. God comes down to the top of the mountain but the people can't go near it. Then in the sanctuary that's what we have there sanctuary God is a bit closer and the people are a bit closer but it's still restricted and it's a temporary building. Then you have the temple which is a permanent building a bit closer and a bit closer. You see what God is trying to do. He's trying to get back to what we had in Eden but it's not quite there. It's just restricted. It's bit by bit and eventually the Old Testament story comes to a tragic end when the temple is destroyed and God's presence leaves. And even though the temple was rebuilt after the exile you can read that about that in Ezra it was not the same and the prophecy of Haggai speaks about that. Says this house who says who's left among you that saw the temple this house in its former glory. How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? And so it wasn't the same. The whole temple had kind of failed. But alongside this failure in the Old Testament there is also the great prophecies in terms of the temple. Haggai says that the best is yet to come.

[14 : 19] The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former says the Lord of hosts. Ezekiel chapter 40 to 48 describes a glorious new heavenly temple and God's presence will fill it once again.

And this whole problem of the fact that God and humanity cannot well together is going to be solved. And remember what Isaiah says that one who is going to come whose name is Emmanuel which means God with us. The great promise of the Old Testament is that God and humanity will dwell together again. So that's the basic pattern of what happens in the Old Testament. What happens in the New Testament? Well in the New Testament we very quickly see that Jesus is at the heart of the fulfillment of the temple prophecies. Jesus fulfilled what the Old Testament was promising.

When Jesus became one of us at the incarnation God himself came to dwell among us. As we read in Matthew, behold the virgin shall conceive and be her son and they shall call his name Emmanuel which means God with us. And then we have this key verse in John 1 14. The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we've seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the Father full of grace and truth. Now that word dwelt is really important because literally that word dwelt is the word tabernacled. And so that's immediately pointing us back to the Old Testament. It's saying God has come as a new tabernacle. He's come to dwell among us and it says we've seen his glory. And again what was it that filled the temple in the Old Testament? The glory of God. It's all tying in so beautifully.

Jesus is fulfilling the temple prophecies and Jesus himself makes that so clear because he says destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it. The Jews said to him it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you will raise it up in three days but he was speaking about the temple of his body. So do you see what this is saying? In the Old Testament you had the tabernacle which became the temple. Jesus comes and is saying I am the new temple. I am the true temple and the reason he's the true temple is because when Jesus walked to and fro in this world in her midst, God himself was dwelling with us. Jesus is the presence and the glory of God and when he came God was once again among his people. And if we go back to her diagram you can see things are getting closer. Jesus comes and God and humanity are now even closer. He's walking in her midst. Again think back to Sinai, think of God's presence way up on that mountain inaccessible. Now Jesus is in the midst of the people and so God is getting closer and closer and closer. But not only does Jesus come and dwell in her midst in his own body, he also comes to open up access to God. Remember how it said at Sinai, don't come near the mountain, don't come through. Jesus has come to open up the way to God and he does that by performing a temple duty. He is the high priest and he enters into the holy places as we read in Hebrews and he offers his own body and blood as the sacrifice. And so by dying on the cross Jesus is opening up the way into God's presence. Again he is giving us access.

Now I hope you can see how amazingly this fits together. What happened at the temple when Jesus died? You remember the curtain of the temple was torn into from top to bottom and the reason for that is that the restricted inaccessible blockage that was on God's presence is now being removed and access is being opened. The restriction is being lifted. God and humanity can draw near to each other again. And the book of Hebrews emphasizes this beautifully. Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, now look at that verse, look at that sentence and again think back to cyanide. Think back to cyanide where God's presence was on the mountain and if you touch that mountain you would be exterminated. Now it says we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened us through the curtain that is through his flesh and since we have a great high priest over the house of God let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. The presence of God was a no-go area in the Old Testament but now we can draw near. Now the doors are open through Jesus Christ.

[20 : 31] God is in our midst again and we once again have access to God and so we can go back to our diagram and see it's even closer now isn't it? At the cross access opened up into God's presence.

It was like the door of Eden was being opened again and you could go back in, we can come near to God. So Jesus is coming fulfills so much of what the Old Testament said about the temple prophecies and about God's presence. Jesus was here, God was in our midst. But the question then arises what about the fact that Jesus is no longer here? Jesus ascended back into heaven, Emmanuel God with us is not with us anymore because he's back in heaven. So what happened to God's presence?

Where is God's presence now? Well this is where we take another step forward into the New Testament and we come to the amazing events of the day of Pentecost because on that day of Pentecost a promise which Jesus gave was fulfilled. In John 14-16 Jesus said, I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever even the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him for he dwells with you and I will be in you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. John 14-16 to 18.

On the day of Pentecost all this came to pass and the Holy Spirit was poured out on all believers and ever since then every single believer who's put their faith in Jesus Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit and God himself by his spirit comes to dwell in our hearts. And so do you see what's happening? Do you see what this means? The presence of God is even closer. If we go back to our diagram at Pentecost this spirit doesn't just come amongst us as though Jesus is standing here with us, it comes and indwells us. God is as close as he can possibly be to the believer.

God's presence, God's dwelling place is in you if you are a Christian. And that is why the New Testament says you are the temple of God. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 3-16, do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?

[23 : 36] And so what we lost in the Garden of Eden has been restored through Jesus. Back in Eden man was driven out of God's dwelling place. Now through Jesus Christ you are God's dwelling place. You are the very place of God's presence if you are a Christian. That's why it says where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst. And if you think about it, God's presence has been in various geographical locations. All these things here are different geographical locations on that diagram. He was present on Sinai. He was present in the Tabernacle as it moved about. He was present in the temple in Jerusalem. He was present in Jesus Christ himself as he walked on earth.

And now he is in you because that is where he really wants to be. That's where God really wants to dwell in your heart. And then when we look forward to the new creation we see that God and his people dwell together in perfect fellowship. Revelation 21, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold the dwelling place of God. That's temple language. The dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with him. And verse 22, I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. There isn't a specific temple because the whole thing is a perfect temple just like Eden was. And God's great goal for you is that we will be with him forever.

Where is it that God wants to be? With you. God wants to be with you. And that completes our diagram, the new heavens and the new earth where God and his people are together forever in perfect communion, perfect fellowship. And I hope you can see how it's one big story of God and humanity getting closer and closer and closer where God and his people are together.

So what does all this mean for us? That's what happened in the Old Testament and into the New Testament. But what does it mean for you and for me? Well again you've been so patient and there's so much information to convey. But I want us just to highlight three things that arise from this and that are really, really worth just thinking about and trying to grasp and we'll get through them as quickly as we can. The first thing I want to say, all of this teaches us about God's presence in our lives. Now I don't know if you are like me but I so often think that God wouldn't want to be anywhere near me. I said a bit about this in the morning but I don't mind saying it again because so often you think God would not want to be near me because I make too many mistakes. I do too many things wrong and you think God must be disappointed with me. And you think well if God loves me at all it must be from a distance because you just think well how would he want to be close to me? It's so easy to feel like that. I don't know if you feel like that but all I can say is that I do very often. But the fact that you are now the temple of God, if you are a Christian, tells you that God's great desire for you is nearness.

God wants to be near to you. Please let that sink in. God doesn't want to love you from a distance.

[27 : 54] God does not want to watch over you from a distance. God wants to be near, near you. Now if you think about it, if you really love somebody you just want to be near to them.

Whether that's your wife or your children or whoever, you want to be near them when you really love them. Well that's how God loves you. He wants to be near to you. He doesn't want you at a distance.

He doesn't want you at arm's length. He wants to be as close as he can possibly be. And we must remember that as we go through our lives and remember that word we said at the very start that God was walking with his people. God was walking in Eden, walking in his people's presence.

And as we go back and forth, two and fourth in our lives, God is walking with us. We do everything hand in hand with God. If you go to work tomorrow, as you sit at your desk or wherever it is you sit or stand at your work, God is with you, right there with you. When you talk to people, God is with you in that conversation. When you send a text or send an email, God is with you as you do that. When you are at home, even if you are on your own, God is with you if you are a believer. In the Old Testament, the tabernacle moved from place to place and wherever the tabernacle went, God went. And you are the tabernacle now. So wherever you go, God is with you. And that's how God implements his promise that he will never leave you, nor forsake you. And it's a great reminder that God's temple, God's house is not this building.

This building is not the house of God. You are the house of God. You people are where God dwells. You are the sanctuary.

[30 : 23] You are the tabernacle. You are the temple. In the Old Testament, you went to God's house. In the New Testament, you are God's house. And that means wherever you go, he is with you.

And that's God's great desire that he would dwell in your heart. And so for every believer in here, you are God's household. But if you are not a believer, listen to what God says in Revelation 3.20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me. If you're not yet a Christian, God is knocking on the door of your heart because that's where he wants to be.

That is where he wants to be. And so we learn about God's presence in our lives. The second thing we learn about is the preciousness of your heart. Wherever the temple is described in the Bible, whether it's Eden or whether it's Solomon's temple or whether it's the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21, the emphasis is on the preciousness of it all. That's why we have these precious stones mentioned and you'll see that if you read through it. In Eden, there was gold in that land, which was, it was good, bedelium and onyx stone are there. There's all this emphasis on preciousness. God's temple is a precious place. And that means if you're a Christian, your heart is a precious, sacred, holy place. And when you sing, how lovely is thy dwelling place.

You are no longer singing about the temple. You're singing about your heart if you're a Christian because that is where God now dwells. And for that reason, we must guard our hearts.

That's why when God talks about God's temple, he emphasizes ethical obligations. He says, flee from sexual immorality. Every other sinner person commits is outside the body, but sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own. You are bought with a price.

[33 : 02] So glorify God in your body. Paul is saying, keep sin out of your heart because that's God's temple. Keep sin out of your life because you are God's dwelling place. And it's a great reminder that this dwell in dwelling of the spirit should lead us to practical obedience. In fact, that's the great role of the spirit to write God's law on our heart. And so we have to be very careful with our behavior. And we avoid the idolatry, the sorcery, the enmity, the strife, the jealousy, the fits of anger, the rivalries, the dissensions, the divisions, the envy, the drunkenness, all these things that Paul lists for us in Galatians 5. We put them away and we keep them away.

And instead, our hearts should bear fruit. Now remember, Eden, the original temple, was a garden. And your heart is a garden too. It's a garden that should bear fruit.

What fruit should it bear? It should bear the fruit of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. God's spirit is in you. And the fruit of that spirit should flow out into your lives. So we learn about God's presence. We learn about the preciousness of your heart. Last of all, we learn about our purpose as Christians.

Now this is really important. The fact that we are now the temple of God tells us what our purpose in life is. And so what is the purpose of the temple? Well, there's two things that we can say.

First thing we can say is the purpose of the temple is to worship God. And that's absolutely foundational. That is our chief end to worship God, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[35 : 08] But if you look at the Bible, you'll see that the temple had another purpose as well. And I'm going to read from Isaiah 56 to see what that is. And the foreigner who joined themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant, these I will bring into my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. Now this is the most important bit for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The great purpose of the temple was not just to serve the Israelites.

It was to be a light for all the world. In other words, the temple is God's great missionary tool.

It was this beacon whereby God's word and God's ways were to be proclaimed to all the nations. The means through which God's promise to bless all the families of the earth would be accomplished.

That's why at Pentecost you have all the different languages being heard and all the different peoples being included. That's why in the rest of Acts you hear of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the Gentiles, not just on Jews. The purpose of the temple was to reach out.

And this is beautifully depicted in the Bible by the fact that a river flows from the temple. In Genesis chapter 2 it says that a river flows out of Eden. And in Ezekiel 47 when it's describing the heavenly temple, a river flows out of that temple. And in Revelation 22 it says, Then the angel of the Lord, then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, brightest crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, through the middle of the street of the city also on either side of the river the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the trees were for the healing of the nations.

[37 : 23] Do you see what this is saying? That the purpose of the temple is to bring life, to bring healing to all the nations. The river does not flow into the temple. It flows out, out for the benefit of others. The temple of God is God's appointed means of reaching a lost world.

In the Old Testament the temple was the means whereby he would reach the world. And the same thing is true. The world is reached through the temple of God. And the temple of God is you.

You are the means by which God is going to heal our nation, our community and our household. God has got an amazing purpose for you if you are a Christian. You are the means by which the spirit of God is reaching the world. And this is not the privilege of the select few.

We all share in this work together. And so whether it's your family, your friends, your colleagues, God wants to reach them all through you. This is exactly what Jesus meant when he said, whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. It doesn't say into his heart, out of his heart. You are God's temple.

You are his instrument for reaching the world. You are everything that God needs. Now at one level that's amazing because it means that if you are a Christian you have purpose in your life. But at another level it's very, very daunting, isn't it? And you think, how can I reach out? How can I make any difference? We can feel very, very daunting, can't we?

[39 : 46] But do you know that you don't need to be afraid? Because God is in his temple. God will see to it. God will do the work. God is in his temple. God is in you.

And may he grant that we bring this message of life and hope to all the world. Amen. Let us pray.