

The New Temple

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[0 : 00] Well, in our evening services over the past five weeks, we've been looking at what we've called epic images from the prophecy of Ezekiel. Ezekiel's a vast book, 48 chapters long, it's one of the longest books in the Bible, and we've just, in so many ways, just dipped into it to look at some of the powerful and vivid imagery that is set before us in this Old Testament prophecy. We've gone through various images. In chapter one, we looked at that astonishing image of God, which is full of motion and power, wheels and wings and all sorts of astonishing imagery before us. Then we looked at the quite shocking image of an abandoned baby in chapter 16.

We then looked at the watchman speaking of the responsibility of the prophet and also the need to listen to God's warnings. Then we came to the shepherd and chapter 34, that remarkable chapter that rebukes the leadership of Israel and in response, God says, I myself will be the shepherd. Then last week, I was away, but you were looking at the valley of dry bones, that remarkable chapter speaking of God, breathing new life into deadness through word and spirit.

Tonight, we come to the final image, the new temple. I'm just going to read a couple of verses again from chapter 43. Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east, and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east, and the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory, and the vision I saw was just like the vision I'd seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I'd seen at the Hebar Canal, and I fell on my face, and the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the gate facing east.

The spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. The first five images that we looked at are in many ways very vivid and powerful.

[2 : 37] This last one is maybe a wee bit different because it's perhaps a wee bit less exciting. If you read through Ezekiel, particularly if you read through the 30s, the chapters 30 onwards, it's dramatic, it's stunning, it's vivid. Then you come to the 40s, and it's maybe not quite so fast-paced. It can almost seem a little dry. Reading through chapters 40 through to 48, there's lots of measurements, and there's lots of descriptions of walls and rooms, there's lots of duties explained, and in chapter 48 there's one of these big long lists of names and tribes and all sorts of stuff like that. It can almost seem a wee bit dry, but what I hope that we'll see together tonight is that the new temple is possibly the most epic image of them all.

We're going to look at this in many ways in terms of the big picture of the whole imagery that the Bible gives us of the temple. While there's loads of detail in chapters 40 through to 48 in Ezekiel and the passages that I've read picked out some of these details, in many ways we're taking a wee bit of a step back from that, and we're looking at the bigger picture. I want us to start by just thinking about the story of the temple in the Old Testament, because that's a fascinating theme that runs through scripture. The key point that we must recognize is that the story of the temple begins at the very beginning, because the first temple is the Garden of Eden.

Now that's not explicitly stated when you read the descriptions of Eden, you won't see the word temple, but when you look a bit more closely it becomes very clear that Eden was in fact a temple, because if you ask the question what is a temple, the answer is that a temple is a place where God dwells and where we can meet with Him and worship Him, and that is exactly what the Garden of Eden was. It was a place where God and humanity dwelt together. It's really fascinating that if you look back into Genesis chapter 3 you'll see that it says that the Lord God walked in the Garden, and then if you jump forward to Ezekiel, in other words to Leviticus 26, when God is talking about making His sanctuary, His tabernacle, He says, I'll make my dwelling among you, my soul shall not abhor you, and I will walk among you and will be your God. The same word, same idea, this idea of God and humanity being together. And it's actually a fascinating study to explore the similarities that exist between the Garden of Eden and the later tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament.

A good place to go is Exodus chapter 25. There God describes what his tabernacle is supposed to be like, and there's many similarities. There's cherubim, there's gold and precious stones, there's this lampstand that's shaped like a tree with branches and flowers. The same thing again is seen in Solomon's temple. I'm going to read a few verses from 1 Kings and listen for the kind of garden language that is throughout this. Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers in the inner and outer rooms. The floor of the house he overlaid with gold in the inner and outer rooms. For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, the lintel and the doorposts were five-sided. He covered the two doors 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. If you'd been able to walk into the temple it would have been full of echoes of Eden with the garden imagery, with the gold, with the cherubim. [7:06] And there are many, many more fascinating connections. Eden was a temple. God was dwelling with humanity.

So if you like, that's the kind of starting point of the story of the temple in the Old Testament. God and man dwelling together in a temple, in a garden. So what happens in the rest of the Old Testament? Well there's various stages that we can go through. As I'm sure you know, in Genesis chapter 3 Adam sins and the result of that is that he is driven out of the garden, driven out of God's presence, driven out of the temple. Genesis 3:24, he drove out the man and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword. In fact there's another similarity again. When Ivor read, where was the gate? Which direction was it? It was east and of course the entrance to Eden was in the east as well. Another connection.

Anyway, I'm getting distracted. Man was driven out and it's clear that now it's impossible for God and humanity to dwell together. So the relationship is severed and the temple access is completely restricted and that's where humanity is left as a result of the fall. The next major temple moment in the Old Testament comes at Mount Sinai just after the Israelites have come out of Egypt. You'll remember that under Moses' leadership the people came out of Egypt, they were led through the wilderness and came to Mount Sinai and there in Exodus chapter 19 we read that God's presence returned to earth again. I'm going to read some verses, I want you just to let the description paint an image in your mind. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the 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 to 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 for you yourself warned us saying set limits around the mountain and consecrated and the Lord said to him go down and come up bringing Aaron with you but do not let the people the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord lest he break out against them. Now there is a temple moment because God himself came down to the top of that mountain and the whole emphasis is keep back and so instead of walking with God like you have in the Garden of Eden here you have this immensely strong emphasis on inaccessibility the one thing you did not do before that smoking shaking mountain you did not go near it and so you can see the problem and dilemma that exists [11:03] God wants to dwell among his people but as a sinful people that cannot happen and there's this incompatibility between the holiness of God and the fallenness of humanity but God's desire is still that he would be among his people and so that brings us to the next stage of the temple story God gives instructions to Moses to build a tabernacle and he gives very specific instructions as to how that's to be built that's really what the whole of the second half of Exodus is all about chapter 25 right through to 40 that describes how it should be built and then in the book of Leviticus God gives very specific instructions regarding how he is to be approached and the holiness of God the seriousness of sin means that that an elaborate and complex sacrificial system is necessary if the people are going to be able to approach God so instead of God being at the top of a mountain like Sinai God is now going to come right into the midst of the camp but the restrictions are still very, very high and the instructions have to be followed with absolute precision

and when that tabernacle was made God's presence came and filled that tabernacle. Exodus 40, 34 then the cloud covered the tent of the meeting the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle so if you just think about it if you could be a time thavallar I know that's impossible but just imagine that back to the future was through and you could jump into the car and if you could go back to Eden and you would say where's God you'd say well he's in that garden if you came to Sinai and said where's God you'd say well he's at the top of that mountain if you could then come to the camp and say where's God you'd say he's in the middle of that tabernacle tent that's in the midst of our camp that tabernacle was designed for traveling because the people were on the move eventually when they had settled in the promised land the tabernacle was replaced with a permanent temple built in Jerusalem that was built by Solomon it served the same purpose and once again God's presence was there second chronicle seven 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 God dwelt there in the midst right in the middle of the temple in the holy of holies among his people but again again access was so restricted the temple curtain kept people out the sacrificial system made sure that that access was very very limited and so you can see in terms of this story of the temple there's an alienation between God and humanity created by sin but in the Old Testament the temple is functioning to go some way towards restoring that it's not the same as Eden it's not as good as it was there are so many more restrictions and difficulties but God's presence in his temple was a key part of the nation of

Israel it was a key privilege that they had it was it was a step towards solving the problem that sin had created and that temple had a crucial function in the life of the people it was well it was many things I'm going to say that it was four things it was a place of worship their God was worshiped their offerings were poured out their thanksgiving was offered their fellowship was shared it was a place of worship it was also a place of purity and so whenever you read about the temple whether it's in Exodus or Leviticus or whatever it in for the tabernacle or later on for the temple there's this immensely strong emphasis on cleanliness and purity the temple was a holy place it was a place of purity there was no casualness everything was kept pure the temple was also a channel for mission and that's a very important point to emphasize when Israel had the privileged status of having God's temple in their capital at the center of their nation that wasn't just for their benefit it was to be a blessing and a light for all the nations of the world fulfilling the promise that God gave to Abraham Isaiah 56 speaks of that it says the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to them to love the name of the

Lord and to be his servants everyone who keeps the Sabbath and not and does not profane it and holds fast my covenant these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar for my house my temple my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples ultimately it wasn't just for the Israelites it was it was pointing towards a mission to reach all nations so it was a place of worship purity mission and fourth it was a place of community when God said I want to make a sanctuary it was so that he might dwell in their midst at the heart of the temple was God's glorious presence among his united people and so if you can carry on in your your time traveling and you were to come into Jerusalem and say the year 930 ish it would have been BC that is and you said where's God they're appointed to the temple he's in there Israel enjoyed that extraordinary privileged status because they had the temple but as is the case with all of Israelite history in the Old Testament the story of the temple was one of failure the people repeatedly turned away from God and they continually rebelled against him and the eventual consequence of this was that they lost the temple and God withdrew his presence from among the people and Ezekiel is the prophet that describes this moment chapter 10 18 to 19 is Ezekiel is seeing a vision then the glory of the Lord went out from the threshold of the house 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 it's a description of the withdrawal of God's presence from the temple and in the years when Ezekiel was a prophet the Babylonians came laid siege to Jerusalem and eventually took the city destroyed it and destroyed the temple God's presence was no longer among the people and so we've got up just a wee summary there for you as to what I've said at Eden God and humanity were together the fall separated that at Sinai comes a wee bit closer together in the sanctuary a wee bit more closer together the temple a wee bit more because it's a permanent place

where God dwells but the exile ends that and God's presence is withdrawn and the privileged status of Israel in terms of having the temple is shattered now after the days of Ezekiel when some people returned from exile to Jerusalem they began to rebuild the temple but it's interesting in the prophecy of Haggai we read a description of that and it talks about rebuilding the temple and yet it says who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory how do you see it now is it not as nothing in your eyes where did it all go wrong well we said that the the the temple was was four key things a place of worship purity mission and community Israel failed in all four of these areas in terms of worship they turned from the living God and they went after idols worshiping the gods of the nations around them in terms of purity they defiled themselves and one of the passages I think it was 43 spoke a little bit about that how the people defiled themselves by turning away from God's law and indulging in all sorts of immoral and sinful practices in terms of mission instead of being a light to the nations around them they had just become like the nations around them and they just wanted to conform to what other people were doing and as a community they were divided and broken the nation disintegrated the family of God made up of this

great structure of 12 tribes ended up eventually at war with one another alienated as a family and separated from God and as we've been saying Ezekiel is kind of the the low the low point of all of that and we said maybe a couple of weeks ago that that the history of of the people of history in the Old Testament is a bit like the shape of a Nike tic if you've got a pair of Nike shoes you can look at them and see that it's kind of down down down down down to the lowest point and then it's a tiny wee upward bit at the end where people return from exile but at the lowest point you have the destruction of Jerusalem the destruction of the temple at the time of Ezekiel and Ezekiel comes with a message of judgment because the people had abandoned God and walked away from their covenant relationship with him but at the same time as bringing a message of judgment he comes with a message of salvation and hope because although the people had abandoned

[22 : 14] God he had not given up on them and here in Ezekiel chapter 40 through to 48 at the time when the temple lay as a pile of rubble we have this description of a glorious new temple set before us and as we read in chapter 43 once again God's presence will fill this temple that whole problem of the fact that God and humanity cannot dwell together is going to be solved although the physical temple in Jerusalem has fallen God's plan is not over and God and humanity are going to dwell together again now it's very important to recognize a very small word right at the very start of the passages that we read if you look at this passage on your bulletin you can see in verse two that Ezekiel saw a vision and he saw something like a city and the wee word like is so important because it's reminding us that what has been described before us here is not to be taken literally it's not saying that that the people should build a building according to the outline and the measurements that's been set before us here in Ezekiel in fact the emphasis is not that people build it the emphasis is the fact that God has already built it it's there and it's not instructions for building it's a description of something that has been divinely appointed it's not a literal building that's been described it's a symbol of something else and it's telling us that

God's plans for the temple are bigger than just a spectacular building in the middle of Jerusalem and of course the fulfillment of that does not lie in the return from exile the fulfillment of that lies in the New Testament and when you come to the New Testament we see very quickly that at the heart of Jesus's role Jesus is many things but one of the things that Jesus is is a fulfillment of the temple prophecies in the Old Testament so you'll remember at the incarnation when we think of Jesus coming into the world in Matthew 1 23 it says behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son they shall call his name what was it? Immanuel which means God with us that's temple language God dwelling among his people and then there's another key version John 1 14 it says the word became flesh and dwelt among us we've seen his glory glorious of the only son from the Father full of grace and truth now remember glory that's a key temple concept God's glory dwelling among the people and hidden in that verse is another crucial clue when it says the word became flesh and dwelt among us the word dwelt literally means tabernacled among us again temple language later on Jesus himself says destroy this temple I will rebuild it in three days the Jews said it's taken 46 years to build this temple and you'll raise it in three days but Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body Jesus is a fulfillment of these temple prophecies Jesus is the presence and the glory of God among people and so things are getting closer now Jesus comes and God walks among humanity again he speaks to humanity he's there right among the people but it doesn't stop there because not only does Jesus bring God's presence to us in his own body he also opens up full

access to God remember when we said spoke about Sinai and about the tabernacle and about the temple on all of these things there's like a massive no entry sign from God access is absolutely restricted Jesus transforms that through the cross he opens up access to God what happened when Jesus died what happened to that big curtain that effectively said no entry at the temple it was torn into and access was opened up Hebrews chapter 10 emphasizes that very powerfully says therefore brother since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus now that to Old Testament years is unthinkable to just walk into the holy place where God dwells and yet we have confidence to do it by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain that is through his flesh 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 their heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water so Jesus is coming into the world God is among us through Jesus's death access is being opened up through the cross we're being brought closer and closer but the question then arises if you think of the narrative of redemptive history at this point Jesus returns to heaven and so that key temple fulfillment where he's among us he's gone again and he's now back at the right hand of God he's no longer there so you ask where is God's presence now well here we come to the next key key temple moment in the history of the Bible the day of Pentecost what happened on the day of Pentecost? God's spirit God's presence was poured out on all believers and ever since then whenever someone comes to faith Jesus Christ comes to faith in Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in your heart and do you see what that means it means that the presence of God is coming closer and closer and closer he's now as close as possible to you as a believer because he's in your heart God's presence God's glory is dwelling in you that's why Paul says do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you what we lost at Eden has been restored through Jesus back in Eden