

God's Dwelling Places

Introduction. It is easy, in a book as vast as the Bible, to concentrate on particulars and miss the big picture. We know many individual passages and can dissect individual verses almost without end. But when it comes to tying everything together we are sometimes lost.

The accounts of God's dwelling places in the Bible can be used to tell the plot of man's redemption from sin. This is typology, and typology presumes that God is in control of history and that He designs the institutions and events of one age to serve as types or shadows of what is to come in another age (Hebrews 10:1). God's dwelling places both in the past and in the present serve as earthly types of heavenly realities.

I. God's Dwelling Place In The Garden

- A. God's dwelling places begins in the garden of Eden; that is where we first find God and man dwelling together in fellowship (Genesis 3:8).
- B. The garden of Eden is identified with Heaven in Revelation. Heaven, which is the ultimate dwelling place of God, is likewise identified as Paradise (Revelation 2:7), complete with a river of life and the tree of life (Revelation 22:1-2).
- C. In short, Eden was God's Heaven on earth. When man sinned, he lost the perfect world God created for him. The punishment for man's sin included being cast out of the garden (Genesis 3:22-24). Not only was this punishment, but it was symbolic punishment. Man was being separated from the presence of God.
- D. The rest of the Bible is the story of God's plan to deliver man from sin and return him to dwell once again in the presence of God — the new Paradise of the new heavens and the new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1). The next several chapters of Genesis tell the story of man's progressive alienation from the presence of God. At one point, God even repented of having made man at all and determined to destroy the human race (Genesis 6:5-6).
- E. Even when God destroyed the world, after the destruction, man still fell back into sin. By the end of Genesis 11 it is clear that man is not going to extricate himself from the problem of sin. God would have to provide the means to accomplish this return and it begins in Genesis 12:1-3 with Abraham. The blessing of the promise meant that God and man would one day dwell together again

II. God's Dwelling Place In The Tabernacle

- A. At the end of 430 years, God sent Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt and into Canaan (Galatians 3:17). First he took them to Mount Sinai where He gave them a law and organized them as a nation (Exodus 19:1-8). As soon as the covenant was ratified in Exodus 24, God instructed His people to construct a tabernacle (Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46).
- B. The next 16 chapters of Exodus are devoted to the construction of this tabernacle for God to dwell among His people. When the project was completed, God moved into the tabernacle they had built for Him (Exodus 40:33-35).
- C. Although this was a restoration of man to God, it was only partial. Its imperfections and limitations are seen in the fact that even though God dwelt among His people, the average Israelite still could not go directly into the

presence of God. Only the priests could enter the front room of the tabernacle and only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place once a year (Leviticus 16:2). God was dwelling among His people, but it was a “hands off” dwelling.

- D. The Mosaic covenant was a temporary and provisional solution to the problem of sin. The animal sacrifices could not really bring forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 10:4). But the provisional restoration of fellowship provided by God dwelling in the tabernacle was a shadow or prototype of the greater restoration that would come in Christ and the church.
- E. The pattern which Moses was told to follow was essentially a blueprint of Heaven itself, the true sanctuary of God (Hebrews 8:1-2, 5).

III. God's Dwelling Place In The Temple

- A. The children of Israel left Mount Sinai to go to the land of promise. The first 300 years or so of their history was characterized by repeated apostasy, punishment, and occasional renewal. With the establishment of the monarchy and the accession of David, the fortunes of the nation took a dramatic upswing, both economically and spiritually.
- B. In all the flush of success, David decided to replace the humble and tattered tabernacle with a magnificent temple. The temple is only a permanent version of a tabernacle, a tabernacle being only a tent, while a temple was a proper building with foundations and walls. Symbolically they are one and the same.
- C. David's son, Solomon, actually constructed the replacement for the tabernacle. God moved into His new house (2 Chronicles 5:1, 13-14), but it was still within the confines and limitations of the Old Covenant (cp. 2 Chronicles 6:18).
- D. After this golden age in Israel, they began a spiritual apostasy which culminated with Israel and Judah being taken into captivity. The glory of the Lord departed from the temple (Ezekiel 10:3-4, 18-19; 11:22-23) and it was destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:8-9).
- E. In their darkest hour, the same prophets who had announced God's judgment on the nation extended hope that God would dwell again with His people through a New Covenant (Ezekiel 37:24-28). The New Covenant would succeed where the old one had failed. It would be based on the faithfulness of God to His promise to Abraham rather than on the unfaithfulness of man to the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews 8:6). It would be based on a better sacrifice that really could remove sin (Hebrews 9:14, 23). And a real forgiveness of sin would make possible a real restoration of fellowship between God and man.
- F. After the Jews returned from captivity, Zerubbabel set out to build another house of God. However, this temple never saw the glory of the Lord fill its sanctuary as it had in the past. That is a metaphor for the way in which the Old Testament ends. Judaism was a spiritually empty house, chastened by judgment and still waiting for God to come and dwell with them again (Malachi 3:1).

IV. God's Dwelling Place In The World

- A. The remodeling of Zerubbabel's temple carried out by Herod the Great came to be known as Herod's temple. The Herodian temple, with all its hollow magnificence, could be seen as a monument to man's need for the true temple

not made with hands (Hebrews 9:24). Even though Jesus acknowledged it as His Father's house (John 2:16), the only assertion He ever made about it pointed toward its destruction.

- B. The time had come to leave behind the temples made with hands and all the limitations of the Old Covenant to which they appertained. The fulness of time had come for God to provide real and lasting forgiveness for sin. The time had come for God truly to dwell among men (John 1:1, 14).
- C. Jesus brought in the presence of His own person the new temple of the New Covenant (John 2:19-22). Jesus was not the replacement of the long succession of Old Testament temples. He was the fulfillment and continuation of the true Old Testament tabernacle and temple. He was, in effect, claiming that He was the fulfillment of God's promise through Haggai to make the latter glory of Zerubbabel's temple greater than Solomon's temple (Haggai 2:9).
- D. Man needs, not simply for God to descend and dwell with Him, but for he himself to be able to ascend to dwell with God, for no lasting dwelling of God can be established on this sin-cursed earth (Genesis 3:17). Therefore, Christ did not really come to perfect any earthly temple, but to open the door to the heavenly temple, the true dwelling of God, of which all earthly temples are but a model.

V. God's Dwelling Place In The Church

- A. When the Holy Spirit descended and filled the church on the day it was erected, it was analogous to the cloud descending on the tabernacle and temple. God was taking up residence, through the Spirit, in His new temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16).
- B. This new temple, in which we dwell by the obedience of faith, is used in two senses in the New Testament.
 - 1. The first sense is that of the body of Christ, the church, that continues here on the earth (Romans 12:4; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23). We continue to have an earthly counterpart to the heavenly reality. Only now the earthly counterpart is no longer a material temple made with hands, but a spiritual temple not made with hands, and therefore much more like the true heavenly sanctuary (Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 8:1-2; 1 Peter 2:5).
 - 2. The second sense is that of the physical body of Christians (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Christians have no right to pervert and misuse their bodies, for they are not their own master but have been purchased by God at a price. That price, though not mentioned here, is the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19). The picture is of a slave (Romans 6:17; cp. 1 Corinthians 7:23) being purchased from the horrible system of slavery. Christians have been freed from being overpowered by sin (Romans 6:17-18) and Satan (Colossians 1:13) and are enslaved to Christ (Romans 1:1) and to righteousness (Romans 6:18; 1 Peter 2:11-12).
- C. We can see in the church many features which characterized the tabernacle and the temple. As the altar stood in front of the temple, and those who would enter could not do so without an appropriate sacrifice for sin, so the sacrifice of Christ stands before the church, and no entrance is possible without that sacrifice. The laver of washing is analogous to purification from sin in baptism (Hebrews

10:22). The fact that only priests could enter the temple illuminates the declaration that all Christians are members of a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5).

- D. Just as God promised that His dwelling with His people would be conditional in the tabernacle (Leviticus 26:31) and temple (2 Chronicles 7:19-22), so it is with the church (John 14:23; Revelation 2:5).

Conclusion. The tabernacle, temple, and church are all models of Heaven. The church, in the language of Hebrews, is a better model. It is closer to the spiritual reality of Heaven. It is based on a better sacrifice and it is entered by those who have obtained real forgiveness of their sins. But it is still only the earthly counterpart to the true sanctuary where Jesus our high priest has entered, and where He now intercedes.

This is the reason for the longing we have in the body (2 Corinthians 5:2). The church is not the end of the story. It is not the final place of God's dwelling with man. The final place Heaven (Hebrews 11:10; Revelation 7:14-17; 21:3-4, 22; 22:1-5).

Man has always carried deep within his soul a longing for something that seems to be just beyond his grasp — something he is sure will make him truly happy. In youth he thinks it is the privileges of adulthood. As he grows up he finds his longing both greater and more elusive than ever. He thinks he may find it in the love of a woman or in a career or in his children. But however much delight these may bring him, the longing is still there, always just out of reach. That longing is for Eden. It is man's longing for the joy and happiness he had in the presence of his Creator before sin destroyed the union and drove man from the presence of God. To put it another way, it is a longing for Heaven — Paradise regained — where we will finally be brought back to the tree of life to dwell in the presence of Him who made us.