

From Tabernacle to Temple

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The written Word of God is an absolute miracle. As I give my split sermon today, I would like you to keep that in the back of your mind. As I mentioned in the offertory sermonette on the first holy day, we know that the majority of church members these days stay in hotels for the Feast of Tabernacles, and not in tents any more. Hotels are still temporary dwellings, as we discussed. The right symbolism is still there, and there is good reason for that. A hotel room is very nice for the Feast of Tabernacles, and it is a nice change for an occasional vacation, but still remember that it is a temporary dwelling. You know the old saying, "There is no place like home."

What I would like to do in this split sermon, today, is to look into the spiritual symbolism of the transition from God's tent-tabernacles to His stone temples. Many years after the completion of the tent-tabernacle and after the Israelites had settled down, they were having a short period of relative peace in the land. Whenever Jesus Christ, or YHVH, as He was called at that time, wished to visit the Israelites, He upgraded from camping in tents to dwelling in the equivalent of a high-end hotel. This is how we might describe the stone temples that were built for His visits.

Although God never complained about camping in the tent-tabernacles, He did eventually consent to having a stone temple built for Himself. He allowed King David to collect some of the materials for the new temple, but He would not let him do the building. This job was given to David's son, Solomon.

As there had been three tent-tabernacles, so there were ultimately to be three stone temples, all used as temporary dwellings for the non-temporary Eternal God. This went for approximately a thousand years, from about 960 BC to 70 AD. Please do not get upset at my dates.

First of the three temples was also known as Solomon's temple, and it was begun about 960 BC, and it lasted approximately 400 years. It was eventually destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians about 586 BC. Most Bible scholars believe that the old tent-tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant may have been destroyed at that time; but that is still a mystery.

The second temple is also known as Zerubbabel's temple. It was much more modest than Solomon's temple. It was built by the returning exiles from Babylon, under their leader Zerubbabel, who was the grandson of the Jewish King Jehoiachin. It was completed about 515 BC and lasted about 500 years. It was not actually destroyed, but it was dismantled; it was taken to pieces, by Herod the Great. Herod the Great was not a Jew, he was an Idumaean which is an Edomite. He wanted to build a bigger, more impressive temple in order to curry favor with the Jews. That was the third temple, which is known as Herod's temple. Again, it was begun about 20 BC. It was very lavish and work continued on it until about 65 AD; this was just five years before it was burned and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

I have a lot of questions in this split sermon. Were those huge stone temples really temporary

dwellings? Surely they were permanent. Well, no! If they were so permanent, where are they today? It is true that their builders meant them to be permanent. And perhaps they were a little more permanent than the tent-tabernacles, but they were still temporary, physical dwellings for YHWH, the Eternal God.

The Israelites and the Jews had the mistaken idea that those temples were indestructible. They alternated between misusing the temples and almost worshipping them in a definite idolatrous way.

Jeremiah 7:1-11 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house [the temple], and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates [temple gates] to worship the LORD!'" Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' [These are like the vain repetitions that Jesus Christ mentioned many years later.] For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD.

Perhaps these were some of the factors why God allowed those stone temples to be destroyed. Despite their relative permanence, only the base stones of the Wailing Wall remain today, even the whole Wailing Wall is not original.

There are obvious differences between the tent-tabernacles and the relatively permanent stone temples. But, do the tent-tabernacles symbolize something different than the permanent stone temples? Well, I believe that they do. First let us ask, what do the stone temples symbolize? Do they symbolize God's home, His temple and palace in heaven? Yes, definitely! Do they symbolize the church of God as a whole? Yes...but! Do they symbolize each member of God's church? Again, yes...but! Yes, but what? Rather, yes but when? At what time? What is the time frame? Are the church of God members anti-types of these symbols for now, or not until the First Resurrection? Is each true member of God's true church considered by God to be a pillar of His temple?

Revelation 3:12 He who overcomes, I will [future tense] make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall [future tense] go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

So we will be pillars of the temple, if we overcome. Again, note the time factor. It is in the future, and it is dependent on our overcoming.

Are each of us here stones of the temple?

I Peter 2:4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

Jesus Christ is the main living stone. He is the "Head Cornerstone" of God's temple.

I Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Just as an aside, can you remember where the Zambian and Namibian brethren are keeping the Feast this year? It is in a town called Livingstone.

We are [present tense] stones of the temple, according to God's word through Peter. We are fellow living stones with our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, but, again, please note the time factor. We are being built up [present tense]. We are stones of God's spiritual house or temple. The implication here is that the temple is under construction. The temple is evidently incomplete and the completion is yet in the future.

Let us go back again in time again. Let us look at the old tent-tabernacle again. I have a few more questions to ask about the tent-tabernacle. Some of them are just for the sake of interest. Were there reasons or symbols why God wanted three tent-tabernacles and three stone temples? Heinrich Bullinger says that the number three symbolizes completion and divine perfection. To go into that is a huge study in itself, and I will leave you to think about that and look into it.

We have already seen that the stone temples collectively symbolize the members of God's church in the World Tomorrow, in the Millennium, and in the eternal Kingdom of God. We will be in our resurrected, perfected state, with our new, permanent, perfect, spiritual bodies. So, if the stone temples symbolize God's church in the future Kingdom of God, then can we say that the old tent-tabernacle better symbolizes God's church today, in our temporary, imperfect, physical, human state? Evidently so! Because God has shown us in some of the New Testament epistles, that the tent-tabernacle definitely does picture the temporary, fragile, human life of God's people.

II Peter 1:13-14 Yes, I think it is right [says Peter], as long as I am in

this tent ["skenos"—tabernacle], to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent [my tabernacle], just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

When Peter wrote this, he was writing about himself putting off his own tent-tabernacle, just as Jesus Christ had showed him. He was referring to the end of his own physical life, to his death, as Jesus had foretold in John 21: 19, "This spoke He, signifying by what death he [Peter] should glorify God." Jesus had told Peter that he was going to die, and Peter knew about this.

The apostle Paul used a similar "tabernacle equals human life" symbolism, but we will come to that in a minute. I have some more questions. What materials was the tent-tabernacle made up of? On the first holy day, we read in Exodus 25 and 35 a list of materials that God required for His tabernacle.

Did the component parts of the tent-tabernacle symbolize anything in particular, as did the pillars and stones of the stone temples did? For example: If the members of God's church are to be pillars and living stones in God's future, permanent, spiritual temple, are we now, in our physical human tabernacles, like individual "tent-pillars" or "tent-stones" in God's portable tent-tabernacle? If so, what do these parts of the tent-tabernacle correspond to? The tent poles and the uprights would be like the pillars of the temple. The wall boards, and the ram and badger skins of the tabernacle, would be like the stones of the temple.

What is the symbolism of these items? Again, it would take more than a split sermon to look into this, but it is a study that is worth meditating on and studying.

Here is one of my main questions: Have you ever wondered what happened to the old tent-tabernacle once Solomon's stone temple was completed? I looked into it, and there seems to be a fascinating and spiritually significant transition period between the tabernacle era and the temple era.

It is interesting to note that, for some reason, both David and Solomon kept the old tent-tabernacle away from the site of the new temple and purposely left it in the neighboring town of Gibeon, which is about seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. When David recaptured the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and brought it into Jerusalem, rather than bringing the old tent-tabernacle too, he had a new tent (which was tabernacle number three) built to house it. Solomon also left the old tabernacle in the neighboring town of Gibeon until the dedication of the new stone temple.

When the construction of the temple was complete, the dedication ceremony did not take place right away. It was deferred for almost a whole year, until the Feast of Tabernacles.

II Chronicles 5:1-5 So all the work that Solomon had done for the house of the LORD was finished; and Solomon brought in the things which his father David had dedicated: the silver and the gold and all the furnishings. And he put them in the treasuries of the house of God. Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, in Jerusalem, that they

might bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD up from the City of David, which is Zion. Therefore all the men of Israel assembled with the king at the feast, which was in the seventh month [probably the Feast of Tabernacles]. So all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. [Note:] Then they brought up the ark, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up.

You can picture the scene here. The old tent-tabernacle and the magnificent new stone temple co-existed separately in neighboring towns for some months. Then finally at the dedication of the new stone temple, Solomon had the old tent tabernacle brought to, and probably into, the new stone temple.

Please keep that dedication and transition ceremony in your mind's eye as we compare this event with two amazing scriptures from the apostle Paul. It is interesting to note that the apostle Paul was a tentmaker by trade. I wonder if that is significant. Listen to this in the *Phillips Translation*:

Ephesians 2:19-22 So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow-citizens with every other Christian—you belong now to the household of God [Under the context it would be better translated the "house of God."] Firmly beneath you is the foundation, God's messengers and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself. In him each separate piece of building, properly fitting into its neighbor, grows together into a temple consecrated to the Lord. You are all part of this building in which God Himself lives by His Spirit.

We can visualize the huge stones of the new temple being shaped, smoothed and polished, and properly fit into the neighbor stones. But it was not just the stones of the temple that fit perfectly. We can also visualize the venerable old tent-tabernacle (along with its furnishings) being carried into the magnificent new stone temple, and again, "properly fitting into its neighbor."

The old tent-tabernacle and the new temple were neighbors of a sort when the new stood in Jerusalem and the old stood in the neighboring town of Gibeon.

The old was brought in to "properly fit" into its new neighbor. Yes, it is true that the old tent-tabernacle building was taken over by the new one, and that some of its furnishings were replaced by larger, more elaborate ones. But the tent-tabernacle and many of the original furnishings, including the Ark of the Covenant, were brought into the new temple.

The spiritual aspect of this event is made even clearer by Paul's second amazing scripture that God gives us through Paul.

II Corinthians 5:1-4 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, [the word is "skenos" which means tabernacle and represents our

temporary human bodies] is destroyed, we have a building [implies a building under construction] from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, [our new spiritual bodies which we look forward to so much] if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent ("skenos"—tabernacle) groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

At the end of its useful life, the old tent-tabernacle (and the Ark and the other old tabernacle furnishings) were taken up into the new stone temple. Thus, the old tent-tabernacle was "further clothed" by the new building. The old tent-tabernacle was "swallowed up" by the new stone temple. This transition is evidently symbolic of our old tent-tabernacle, our temporary mortal bodies. Our bodies being "further clothed," or newly clothed, and "swallowed up" by our new permanent temples, our new spirit bodies, and eternal life.

This is amazing, exciting and encouraging, and it continues even further.

We are on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles 2006. In a few hours we will be leaving the Feast of Tabernacles behind and we will be moving into the Last Great Day. We will be leaving behind the wonderful promises, symbolisms and messages of the Feast of Tabernacles and we will be moving into the Last Great Day, with even more promises, symbolisms and messages.

I would like the final scriptures that I have to serve as another transition. This one is a transition from the Feast of Tabernacles to the Last Great Day.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying,
"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them [as His Son did], and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."

Remember the original tent-tabernacle builders? Their names were Bezaleel and Aholiab. The name Aholiab means "Father's tent." And people say that the Bible is just a collection of mythical stories.

Revelation 21:22-23 But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty (Father) and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God (Father) illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

Here we see that God the Father and the Lamb of God are the ultimate Temple. Our perfect unity with them at that time and how we will fit perfectly in with them is beyond human comprehension, but it is a fabulous thing to meditate on.

God the Father and the Lamb are the ultimate brilliant light, which formerly cast shadows before this time that is spoken of here. Some of those shadows were the old tent-tabernacles and the stone temples.

Again, remember the other tent-tabernacle builder, Bezaleel? The name "Bezaleel" means "shadow of God."

Like Jesus Christ, God's written Word is the Alpha and Omega from its beginning to its end. God's Word is a true miracle. It is like a miraculous jig-saw puzzle.

At the fulfillment of the Last Great Day, God the Father promises to move Himself and His dwelling here to earth so that He can dwell with His children. But this time it will not be in a temporary dwelling. When God the Father comes to this earth, it will not be a temporary dwelling. It will be His permanent home. God the Father will dwell with His children forever!