



**Where God Dwells**  
*(1 Corinthians 3:16 and Revelation 21:1–4)*

Talk of God’s dwelling place is rarely met with uniform agreement. We vacillate between describing his residence in heaven, in houses of worship, or reminding ourselves from Solomon’s prayer of dedication that there really isn’t anywhere God isn’t: *“But will God indeed live on earth? Even heaven, the highest heaven, cannot contain you, much less this temple I have built”* (1 Kings 8:27).

So what does it mean to speak of God’s dwelling place?

We shouldn’t run too quickly past what Solomon prayed and ignore what he built. He built a temple for the purpose of being the Lord’s dwelling place. Going back even further, we notice the concept of God taking up residence in various “temples” throughout the biblical narrative. In Genesis 1 and 2, God created the heavens and the earth. For three days he fashioned “containers”—spaces for the rest of creation to occupy (the expanse of heaven, the skies, the waters, and the land). For three more days, God filled those spaces with living things, designing, in fact, a *temple*. On the seventh day, God rested and took up residence in his creation. Thinking of God “entering” his creation might seem strange, but notice how his presence dwells in a unique place in a special way. Without giving up on the truth that God is everywhere present all the time, the Bible’s first chapters focus on his work in Eden—particularly focusing on his *presence* in a garden *within* Eden (Genesis 2:8–14; 3:8–10). In effect, the garden (inside of Eden, inside of the newly-created planet, inside of the newly-created universe) functioned as an inner sanctuary where the presence of God was in a unique and *holy* way. Adam and Eve were created to live in God’s presence in the original “Holy of Holies”!

But sin is not appropriate for such a place, so our first parents were removed from God’s glorious presence in that inner sanctum.

Temples are interesting in their own right, but it’s particularly fascinating how they demonstrate the incredible interplay between God’s holiness and his mercy. God was kind to dwell among his people as they journeyed through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. He did so in a tabernacle, which functioned as a mobile temple in which the presence of God dwelt. There were many stipulations on how certain Israelites were to deal with their impurities (read: *unholiness*) before coming into his tabernacle, yet God was with them. Holiness and presence go hand-in-glove. After settling down in the Promised Land, the Lord permitted Solomon to construct a permanent temple in Jerusalem. The same rules applied: “This is God’s dwelling, which makes this place holy. Proceed accordingly.”

From cover to cover, the Bible reveals how unfit all descendants of Adam and Eve are to waltz into the presence of the Lord.

We have a sin problem, the writer of Hebrews reminds us, that cannot be fixed by any of the activities taking place in that tabernacle or in that temple (Hebrews 10:4).

We have a holiness problem. We need holiness so bad that we in fact need a *new* temple.

Jesus, full of holiness and mercy, replaced the temple. Not only did his ministry take on the temple's many roles (healings, miracles, conferring forgiveness, etc.), but he judged (Mark 11:12–14), cleansed (Mark 11:15–17), and condemned the temple's ministries by reminding his disciples that "this mountain" will soon be done away with (Mark 11:20–24). Jesus was the new locus of God's presence on earth. And that essential sacrificial system the temple operated? As the new temple, Jesus made one final sacrifice for sins forever (Hebrews 10:12).

So God's gracious presence and his holiness are now available to all? Yes, sort of.

Two more moves were made to restore what was lost in the first Edenic temple. First, God made *his people* temples of his Holy Spirit! Pentecost kicked off with the coming of the Spirit to indwell the people of God, literally setting them apart with flames of fire and purification for their sins. In effect, God "holy-ed" his people, choosing "*us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him*" (Ephesians 1:4). Paul invokes this holiness as a result of God's presence when he rebukes the Corinthians about their sexual misconduct (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). Not only are you and I individual temples of God, but *we* are, collectively, a "sacred" body of holy "places," since Paul reminds us that "*you (plural) are God's temple and that the Spirit of God live in you (plural)*" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Jesus is perfectly holy. His work made his followers holy. His followers take that holiness wherever they go, expanding the presence and holiness of God across all creation. No, God does not dwell in the sanctuary at Sunnybrook (though he is most certainly there). But when we gather in worship, when we live into our new identities in Christ, and when we allow the presence of God in us to work to bring into the family new "temples," we create sacred spaces. We often struggle to feel as though we are as holy as the Bible describes us. Let us then allow the Word of God to speak to the dwellings of God (that's us!): we *were* made holy (Hebrews 10:14), we *are being* made holy (1 Thessalonians 3:11–13), and *we will be* made holy in the end (Revelation 21:1–4). Yes, having the presence and holiness of God in us sounds too good to be true. However, I sense enough of the Spirit's work in me to know that because God said it, I need to believe it! I pray that would also be true of you, fellow temples!

---

## Discussion

1. What do you think about when you hear yourself described as a temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you sometimes struggle to feel as though you have been remade into something so sacred?
2. Read Isaiah 6:1–7. How does the picture of God cleansing Isaiah from his unholiness help you think about what he's done for you in Christ?
3. What makes you uncomfortable about God's gift of his holiness to you (Heb 10:14)? What tangible steps can you take this week to "make your hearts blameless in holiness before God" (1 Thes 3:13)?
4. How has this particular lesson encouraged, strengthened, confronted, or challenged you?

---

## Our Corporate Prayer

*Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets may be hidden. Purify the thoughts of our minds and the inclinations of our hearts by the presence of your Holy Spirit in us, so that we may love you, serve you, and magnify your holy name in a worthy manner. We ask you this in the name of Jesus, Amen.*