

God's Purpose for Temples



Temples of God in the Bible

Temples built by God's people, the Jews, were different than temples built by any other people on earth. Not only were they the center of Jewish religious life for over 1400 years, but uniquely constructed to reflect God's glory and grace. Their main purpose was for God's people to worship Him.

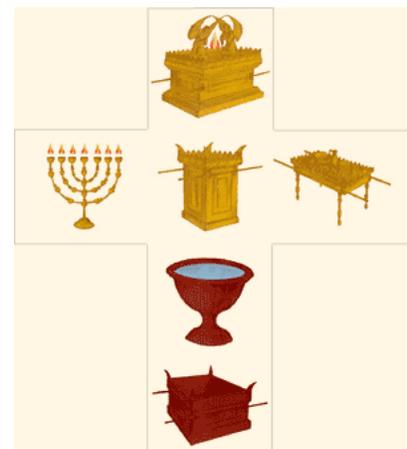
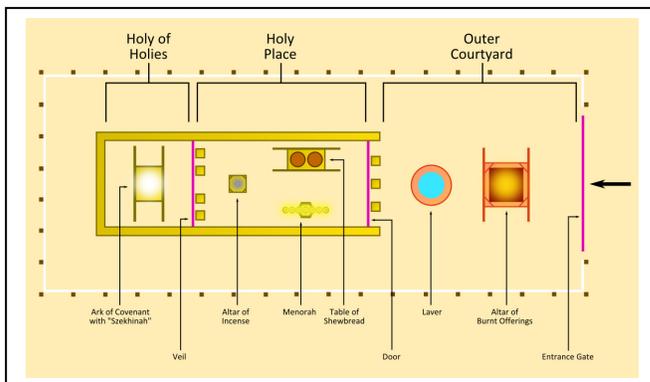
What connection do these Old Testament temples have with New Testament Christianity today? The Bible clearly gives us an accurate picture of the design, activities and spiritual meaning of this center of Jewish worship and how it relates to us today.

The Origin and Design of Bible Temples

From the time of Adam and the beginning of history up until the time of Moses, God did not command His people to build or worship in temples. Until then, God was simply worshipped by His people individually. Each family built an altar to offer the sacrifice of an innocent animal in atonement for their sins and as an offering of praise and thanks to God.

After the Exodus from Egypt (in 1446 BC), Moses was instructed by God to begin temple worship and establish the Aaronic Priesthood. Following the exact pattern God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai, the first temple (which was portable and thus called a tabernacle or tent) was constructed there in that place.

It had an outer court fenced all around by special curtains with only one doorway which faced East. It only had **seven** pieces of furniture, each described in detail by God to Moses for their construction. The temple itself was a curtained room divided into two rooms separated by a specially made veil. Two of the pieces of furniture were outside the temple in the court. They were the Brazen Altar and the Laver of Cleansing. Inside the temple in the first room called the Holy Place, were three pieces of furniture. They were the Golden Lampstand, the Table of Shewbread, and the Altar of Incense. Then beyond the veil was the other room called the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place. In this room there were two special pieces of furniture connected together. The bottom was called the Ark of the Covenant and was a box-like chest. The top or covering was made of solid gold and was called the Mercy Seat.



The Relation of Bible Temples to Jesus Christ

Each one of these pieces of furniture represented something about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Outside the temple, the little lambs that were sacrificed on the Brazen Altar, represented Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. The Laver or basin of cleansing was a bowl-like structure on a pedestal. The priests washed their hands and feet there before they entered the temple. It represents the daily cleansing of the believer by the Lord Jesus Christ to be able to enter into the presence of God.

Inside the temple, the Golden Lampstand (or menorah) represented Jesus Christ as the Light of the world. Gold in the Bible represents deity and so the Golden Lampstand shows that Jesus Christ, the Light of the world is God himself equal with the Father. The Table of Shewbread represents Jesus as the bread of life. The shewbread was unleavened bread, leaven (or yeast) being a picture of sin in the Bible. Therefore, Jesus, the bread of life, is the God-man who never sinned. Believers today are to feed upon Him daily for strength and life.

The third article of furniture in the Holy Place was the Altar of Incense which stood before the veil separating this room from the Holy of Holies. This altar was made of wood and overlaid with gold. It was a picture of Christ, the wood showing His humanity and the gold showing His deity. The incense was a picture of the sweet incense of His life on earth in the sight of the Father.

The only person allowed into the Holy of Holies was the High Priest one day a year (on the Day of Atonement) to offer a sacrifice for himself and for the nation. The Ark of the Covenant which contained the two tables of the law represented Christ in His humanity and deity as God who is righteous and just in His commandments to men. The second was the covering of the box called the Mercy Seat which was made of solid gold. It had two cheribims or angelic beings fashioned on top facing each other. It was between these two beings that God made His presence known among His people in the tabernacle. His glory was seen up over the tabernacle as a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of smoke during the day. The Mercy Seat showed Christ as not only righteous and holy but also merciful to men.

The only way into the Holy of Holies was through the veil separating it from the Holy Place. This veil represented the body of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only acceptable way to enter into the presence of God. When Jesus died on the cross, God tore the veil from top to bottom. After this, God did not intend for his people to worship in temples until Christ comes back the second time to rule and reign.

The Purpose for Bible Temples

God's instructions for the Jews to worship in the temple were specific. The ceremonial law showed God's people that redemption and reconciliation was based on His acceptance of their atoning sacrifices offered through the Aaronic priesthood at the temple. It was each individual person's trust and faith in the sufficiency of those sacrifices to cover their sins that brought salvation. The moral law (or ten commandments) was not given by God for them to try to keep as a means of gaining any part of their salvation, but to show them God's holy standard and to give them a knowledge of how sinful they really were. (Romans 3:20, 28).

In all of history, there were only two official temples of God built on earth and both of them were in Jerusalem. During the reign of Solomon the first permanent temple was built. It was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC when they conquered Judah and took most of the people captive. The second temple began to be built seventy years after the captivity and was finally renovated and finished by Herod the Great in 19 BC. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD at which time most of the Jews were dispersed.

The Uniqueness of Bible Temples

The Bible tells us that God established the temple because of His desire to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8; I Kings 6:12,13). In its design and activities, it emphasized the exclusive elements of the Jewish religion. The only way on earth for any sinful person to approach a holy God was through these stipulated sacrifices and the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Covenant. There were several unique aspects of this covenant that are important.

Gentiles were excluded from the temple proper. Only Jews were allowed in the courtyard and only qualified Aaronic priests were allowed to serve in the tabernacle or temple itself.

Baptism was never practiced as a part of this worship. The basin or laver of cleansing was not meant for bathing or baptizing, but for the priests to wash their hands and feet after making sacrifices on the brazen altar and before entering into the Holy Place. Baptism was never mentioned as being practiced anytime in the Old Testament and was never a part of gaining salvation or worshipping God. John the Baptist was the first prophet of God to baptize anyone and his baptismal work was completely apart from the temple.

Women were forbidden to enter the temple. The Aaronic priests were the only men allowed to enter the temple. Women were never allowed to enter any of God's temples. And God's temples were never used for marriages.

Aaronic priests had to be of the tribe of Levi and prove their lineage. They had to be thirty years old to serve in the temple and could only serve until the age of fifty.

God authorized only one high priest to serve at a time for the whole nation. The High Priest was the only one allowed to enter into the inner room of the Holy of Holies. He could only do that one day a year on the Day of Atonement.

Everything done in the temple was public knowledge. It was all spelled out in the ceremonial law and available to be read by everyone. There were no secrets or sacred oaths or covenants.

Melchizedec priests never served in any Bible temple. As a matter of fact, other than Melchizedec in the Old Testament (who lived a thousand years before the first temple was built), Christ was the only man in history to be a priest after Melchizedec. Though He worshipped in the temple, he never served there as a priest.

Christians and Bible Temples Today

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent in two by God, showing that access into the presence of God was no longer through the Aaronic priesthood and animal sacrifices. His sinless sacrifice was sufficient to pay for the sins of all men for all time.

Therefore, the Mosaic law has been changed and God has given a New Covenant for Christians today. As a result, the Aaronic priesthood was made null and void (Heb. 7:11-18).

Today Christ is the only priest after the order of Melchizedec. His priesthood is an unchangeable priesthood (Hebrews 7:24). The word unchangeable in the original language “aparabaton” literally means something that is permanent, without a successor, and “cannot be passed on.”

The New Testament teaches that all believers in Christ (both men and women; Jew and Gentile) are priests of God today (I Peter 2:5,9) in a new priesthood. This new priesthood is referred to as a Holy or a Royal priesthood.

The New Testament also teaches that God’s temples today are not made of hands (Acts 17:24,25), but are the physical bodies of those who are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ and His sacrifice for all our sins (I Cor. 6:19,20). These believers are to worship God in spirit and in truth through their bodies that are set apart from sin and sanctified daily through His cleansing blood. Believers today are not instructed to build temples, but to worship God together in Bible teaching local churches. The instruction for this worship is clearly given according to the Word of Christ in the New Testament.

The Future Temple of God

The Bible clearly shows that there will only be one true temple of God on the earth in the future. After the end of this dispensation, Jesus Christ will return to Jerusalem to set up His kingdom on earth and judge the nations and reestablish temple worship. The plans and specifications concerning that temple to be built in Israel are set forth in the Book of Ezekiel in the Bible. Christ Himself will be present in the Holy of Holies in that temple.

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