

# God's Third Temple: From altars to the temple of Herod

## Introduction: Altars of Worship in Genesis

God makes the universe, and mankind, to be his temples. He wanted to be 'at home' in the universe, and especially with man. Something went dreadfully wrong, however, as man disobeyed God. The impact of this was that man could no longer 'walk with God' as a natural thing, and the world was no longer the perfect place God had wanted it to be.



But all hope was not lost. God could still be found, but for this, religious liturgy was needed; After Adam and Eve were evicted from Paradise, their sons Cain and Abel began to sacrifice 'fruit of the ground' and 'of the first-born of the flock and of their fat portions'. For some of those offerings, 'the Lord had regard', for others he did not.<sup>1</sup> After the Flood, Noah

built an altar to the LORD' and took animals and burnt them on the altar. 'When the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man."<sup>2</sup>

Abraham 'built an altar to the LORD' in between Bethel and Ai and 'called upon the name of the LORD'.<sup>3</sup> Then God told Abraham to build an altar in the land of Moriah, and offer there a burnt offering. Initially

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4:3-5

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 8:26-27

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12:9

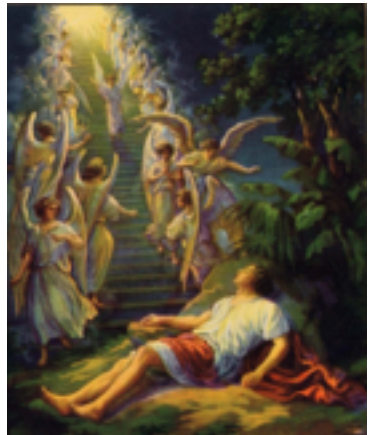
Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, but God provided a ram in the last moment, testing the obedience of Abraham:

And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide".<sup>4</sup>

We read of Isaac building an altar and calling upon the name of the LORD in Beersheba, after God appeared to Isaac.<sup>5</sup>

God appeared to Jacob in a dream when he escaped from his brother Esau, and when Jacob woke up he concluded, "Surely the LORD is in this place. [...] How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."<sup>6</sup> Then Jacob "took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel. "[This] stone [...] shall be God's house."<sup>7</sup>

Jacob, when returning from his long time outside Canaan, after leaving Laban, set up a pillar to his covenant with Laban, and there he "offered a sacrifice in the hill country."<sup>8</sup> Back in Canaan, in Shechem, Jacob bought a piece of land where he pitched his tent, there he erected an altar,



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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 22:13-14

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 26:25

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 28:16-17

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 28:18-22

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 31:51-54

which he called El-Elohe Israel.<sup>9</sup> After he while he moved on to Bethel, to make an altar - a pillar- for God. He then called that place El-Bethel. On the pillar he poured a drink offering and oil.<sup>10</sup>

A long time passes, and when Jacob travelled to Egypt, he sacrificed to God in Beersheba, where Isaac had also sacrificed. God appeared there to Jacob.<sup>11</sup>

### **Tabernacle**

When Israel began its exodus<sup>12</sup> and entered into the desert east of Egypt, God showed his presence:

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.<sup>13</sup>

In the desert, after a battle at Rephidim in Sinai against the Amalekites that was won with the help of God, 'Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is my banner.' And when Moses and Israel were camped at Mount Sinai, Moses' father-in-law Jethro came to Moses and Jethro 'brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with [Jethro] before God.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Genesis 33:19-20

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 35:1, 6-15

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 46:1-2

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 12:27: When Israel is about to leave Egypt, God instructs the Israelites that every household has to slaughter a lamb and eat it. The blood has to be applied to the doorposts and the lintels. This was instituted as an annual feast for Israel. Though there was no altar, the lamb was considered 'a sacrifice of the Lord's Passover' [and after Moses finished his instructions] 'the people bowed their heads and worshiped.'

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 13:21-22

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 18:12

On Mount Sinai God revealed his laws to Moses; In Exodus 20, God gave Israel some rules for what sort of private altars to build. The general idea seems to be that the altars must be simple.<sup>15</sup> After God finished giving Moses his laws,

he got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."<sup>16</sup>

After this, God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle:

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.<sup>17</sup>

Note that there was a pattern according to which the tabernacle and its furniture and worship had to be made. This is what the book of Hebrews says:

[The Jews in their temple] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed

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<sup>15</sup> Exodus 20:24-26: "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. And do not go up to my altar on steps, or your private parts may be exposed.'

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 24:4-8

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by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."<sup>18</sup>

The most important part of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies, with its ark of the covenant; on top of the ark - a sort of golden box - the 'mercy seat' was to be placed:

You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. [...] And you shall make two cherubim of gold [...] on the two ends of the mercy seat. [...] The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

Here we have the heart of the tabernacle - a temple for God, where he was to be present permanently. Not the private altars but the central liturgical tent with its prescribed worship would be the place where Israel could be assured of God's presence.



This ark of the presence of God was to be hidden from the people and could only be accessed annually by Israel's High Priest, as God is too holy and the people too sinful for God to be accessed randomly. The ark of the Holy of Holies was separate from the rest of the temple by a curtain:

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<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 8:5

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 25:17-22

And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. [...] And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the [rest of the tabernacle] from the Holy of Holies. You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.<sup>20</sup>

In the tabernacle, the bronze altar was the other most important article for worship. This was where the people of Israel were to sacrifice animals and other offerings



for forgiveness of their sins, for sanctification and for thanking God.

The tabernacle was erected in the second year after Israel's exodus from Egypt, on the first day of the first month. 'So Moses finished the work', we read.<sup>21</sup> This is

a reminder of the creation story, where we read that 'thus the heavens and the earth were finished'.<sup>22</sup> After God finished creation, he rested on the seventh day. After the tabernacle was finished,

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was

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<sup>20</sup> Exodus 25:31-34

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 40:33.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 2:1

taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.<sup>23</sup>

So Israel, on its journeys, was guided by the presence of God himself; He rested in the tabernacle, above the ark of the covenant, and in this manner He was in the midst of his people.<sup>24</sup>

This presence of God was not guaranteed, though. God threatened to 'hide his face' from Israel in case they would not abide by his laws.<sup>25</sup> Moses, toward the end of his life, made clear to Israel that if they would not abide by the covenant with God, all God's promises of blessings would turn into curses. These curses do not specify what would then happen with the tabernacle, but that seems clear enough. Here just one sample of the threat to the nation:

The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. [...] The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. [...] And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you. [...] Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless. A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see. [...] The Lord will bring you and your

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<sup>23</sup> Exodus 40:34-38

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 33:9. When Moses would go to the tabernacle, the 'tent of meeting' the 'pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.'

<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 32:20

king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you away.<sup>26</sup>

After Israel enters into the land, the tabernacle appears in Bethel (Judges 20:27), later at Shiloh (1 Samuel 1:3), then in Ebenezer, when the Israelites were fighting the Philistines. (1 Samuel 4:3-5). During that battle the ark was captured by the Philistines. David recaptured the ark of God, and God struck Uzzah because he touched the ark (2 Samuel 6:1-7). After some more adventures, King David brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 1:4) and when Solomon became king, we read of the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant being in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 1:4-5).



The existence of the tabernacle as the regular, public place for meeting with God as that was his resting place, did not mean that with God's blessing no 'private' altars were built. In all cases, at the ark of the covenant and at smaller altars, God was served and He is often seen as revealing Himself at those places when his faithful law-abiding servants sacrificed and prayed to Him.

### **Temple of Solomon**

The building of a stone temple was not God's idea. The tabernacle was in use right up until the time of King David and then it was incorporated

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<sup>26</sup> Parts of Deuteronomy 28:25-37



into the temple of Solomon. This temple was David's idea. He wanted a permanent building, a temple like other religions had:

Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."<sup>27</sup>

Had God been consulted? Had He said anything to either Nathan or David about a temple up to this point? Apparently Nathan thought the idea of building a temple sounded like a good idea, so it appears that he presumptuously endorsed it on God's behalf. That very night God came to Nathan with a strong message:

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'"<sup>28</sup>

Nathan's message underlined that the choice of God was to move with his people; why 'fix' his presence to a stone building? It seems as if God made a joke with David: 'David, you do not need to build me a house, I will build your house instead.' At the same time, Nathan prophecies that David's son, Solomon, would build the stone temple David asked for. It seems the construction of the temple was not really

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<sup>27</sup> 2 Samuel 7:1-3

<sup>28</sup> 2 Samuel 7:4-7; the whole chapter is worth reading in this regard.

what God wanted, but he blessed it after all. Just as he originally did not want Israel to have kings, but at their request, He agreed.<sup>29</sup>

When Solomon had pacified the region, he decided to build the temple:

You know how my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the wars which were fought against him on every side, until the Lord put *his foes*[a] under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; *there is* neither adversary nor evil occurrence. And behold, I propose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spoke to my father David, saying, “Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he shall build the house for My name.”<sup>30</sup>

And the LORD agreed to be present in this temple, but on the precondition that Israel would obey his laws:

Now the word of the Lord came to Solomon, “Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel.”<sup>31</sup>

The construction of the building of the temple took seven years.<sup>32</sup> The temple was full of images of angels, plants, trees and animals. When the construction and the creation of some utensils was finished, the ‘things that his fa-



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<sup>29</sup> 2 Samuel 7:13; about the request for a king, see xxxxx

<sup>30</sup> 1 Kings 5:3-5

<sup>31</sup> 1 Kings 6:11-13

<sup>32</sup> 1 Kings 6:38

ther David had dedicated, the silver, the gold and the vessels', were stored in the temple.<sup>33</sup> And then the ark and the whole original tabernacle were brought into the temple. These were in the city of David, Zion, which is close to where the temple was built.

There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.<sup>34</sup>

The glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. God had come to rest in his temple. This is the constituent factor for making a place a temple for God. Solomon, in his dedication prayers, underlines that God is not contained in his temple:

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you

this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.<sup>35</sup>



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<sup>33</sup> 1 Kings 7:51

<sup>34</sup> 1 Kings 8:9-11

<sup>35</sup> 1 Kings 8:27-31

## **Destruction of the temple**

And important to notice: the heart of the presence of God, the Holy of Holies, is marked by the laws of God. His presence and obedience are related. This is very clear from the dedication prayers of Solomon and from the words of God to Solomon:

And the Lord said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you have made before me. I have consecrated this house that you have built, by putting my name there forever. My eyes and my heart will be there for all time. And as for you, if you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'

But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them.'"<sup>36</sup>

God's promise of blessings for the Temple were conditional: 'If you walk before me...' And the words about the destruction of the temple should not only be seen as a warning, but as prophecy. Many kings after Solomon did not follow the ways of God, and the temple got into disarray. King Joash had it repaired, and King Hezekiah had it cleansed:

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<sup>36</sup> 1 Kings 9:1-9

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, "Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord and turned their backs."<sup>37</sup>

King Josiah also revived the worship of God once again, but the moral downward trend in Judah and Israel was not stopped by these few good kings. Under King Zedekiah the end came:

All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the Lord that he had made holy in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy.



Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and

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<sup>37</sup> 2 Chronicles 29:3-6

small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.<sup>38</sup>

### Rebuilding of the Temple

Seventy years later, King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem to rebuilt the temple:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup>

Was this the fulfillment of the words of the prophets of Israel who during their captivity envisioned a new temple? Those prophets had often predicted a glorious future

for the people of God and for their temple. Ezekiel, for instance, describes 14 years after the temple was destroyed, that God gave him a vision of a new Israel.<sup>40</sup> He saw the details of the temple, and the return of God to his temple:



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<sup>38</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:14-19

<sup>39</sup> Ezra 1:2-3

<sup>40</sup> Ezekiel 40:1-2

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 that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face. As 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.

While the man was standing beside me, I heard one speaking to me out of the temple, and he said to me, "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places."<sup>41</sup>

God did not return to his temple after it was rebuilt; Israel was disappointed. Compared to the former glory, the new temple was 'as nothing in their eyes'. So the prophet Haggai encouraged the people. The glory of the Lord had not returned to the temple, but his Spirit was in their midst anyhow:

Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the Lord. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. [...] The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ezekiel 43:1-7

<sup>42</sup> Haggai 2:4-9

The message of Haggai was, God has not left Israel, but the restoration of the glory of the temple is still a matter of the future.<sup>43</sup> The temple of God was rebuilt, but it was not truly where God could be found. And the people were commanded to be strong and to work.

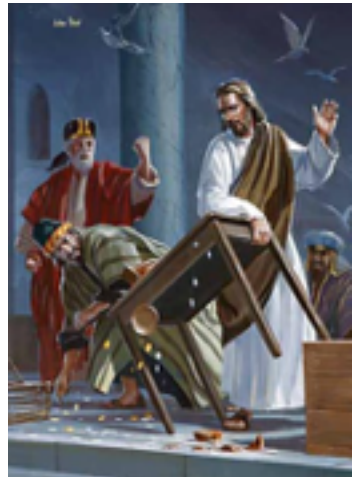
The Jewish theologians of the post-exilic period were so aware of the absence of God from the temple, that they described the period in fact as continuing exile - even though they lived in their own land again. They were waiting for the return of God to his temple.

### **In the time of Jesus**

Jesus often visited the temple; this was the same temple built after the Jews returned from Babylon, but greatly enlarged and refurbished by King Herod. Israel still waited for the glory of God to return and King Herod had greatly increased the apprehension of the pious Jews, as his non-Jewish involvement in enlarging and beautifying the temple was seen as a defilement of the house of God.

While the temple should be a house of prayer for all nations, Jesus called the place “a den of robbers”<sup>44</sup> and drove the businesspeople out. The Jews asked him with what authority he did this, and he answered them:

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said,



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<sup>43</sup> Zechariah has a similar message see Zechariah 2:4f, 10f

<sup>44</sup> Mark 11:15



“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.<sup>45</sup>

These words of Jesus show not only that He considered himself to be God's temple (more about this later) but also that he considered himself a truer temple; the one made of stones, in Jerusalem had become a house of trade and was no longer a house of prayer for people to find God. His view of the temple was further accentuated when his disciples pointed him to the buildings of the temple for their beauty. Jesus then predicted the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem.

### **Final Destruction of the Temple**

In Mathew 23 Jesus had first announced God's verdict over the religious leadership of Israel; this should be seen as a repetition of similar passages in the Old Testament where God warned the people that his vengeance would come if they did not abide by the Covenantal agreements with God. Then he predicted the end of the temple and of Jerusalem:

I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth. [...] Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John 2:19-21

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 23:34-39

The disciples then pointed to the beauty of the buildings of the temple, but Jesus said:

You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.<sup>47</sup>

In the Gospel of Luke we have a more detailed prediction of the looming destruction of the temple:

For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.<sup>48</sup>

In the year 70AD the temple was destroyed as predicted. Josephus was an eyewitness of the destruction of the temple. He describes this in his books *The Wars of the Jews* and *Antiquities of the Jews*, written within a decade after the events. He describes in detail the bloodshed and total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

The destruction of the temple was God's covenantal vengeance, fully in line with His warnings through Moses, the prophets, and Jesus.

As I will argue later, there was also no longer any need for a stone temple in Jerusalem. Jesus himself was the true place for people to find God; and He made his church and his followers into temples of God's glory as they are 'in Him'. The temple had lost its relevance, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in

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<sup>47</sup> Mathew 24:2

<sup>48</sup> Luke 19:43-44



Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

### Conclusions

As the temples of creation and mankind were separated from God and lost the intimacy of the divine presence, there was still a way to relate to God, that is, via the means of liturgy and sacrifice. Through the liturgy of sacrifice, God enabled man to be forgiven and to meet with Him. The place where this sacrifice and meeting took place, became thereby a temple.

Initially, man build his own altars to seek God, without many liturgical preconditions, but during Israel's exodus, God prescribed in great detail how and where He would be graciously present among his people. He 'rested' in a tent that moved with the people, underlining that He is with his people wherever they go.

Solomon build a permanent stone house for God. Just as kingship was not what God originally wanted, so a stone residence was not God's first choice. However, He honored Solomon's desire and rested in the temple as he did in the tabernacle. Solomon himself expressed that he realized that God's presence in the temple was more a signifier than the full reality as God rests in his heavenly abode.

We do need such signifiers, however. The idea that we can have a purely spiritual worship with no habits, rules, images, seems to go against our human nature. In our worship, we all use liturgy. The issue is not whether we use liturgy, but whether it is *good* liturgy, that is, whether it reflects the spiritual realities in a faithful manner.

As Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple were build in accordance with the heavenly example, there must be a pattern in the liturgical worship of Israel that reflects heaven. Does the liturgy we use for our worship reflect the same heavenly pattern?

As Israel did not follow the laws of God, God withdrew his presence from the temple, and He never returned to that stone building; the destruction of the temple in 70AD was God's judgment on his people. He did not want to be in their midst.

Jesus had announced the destruction of the temple; he underlined that the sinful behavior of Israel's leadership was God's reason for his covenantal vengeance. But Jesus had also shown his followers that God would soon be found in a much more meaningful way than in the stone building in Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple was not only God's vengeance but also a pointer that God could be found elsewhere. God had better temples.