

God's Central Temple: Jesus Christ

Introduction: Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we read of amazing promises about a coming Messiah, for instance in Isaiah 11:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
[...] the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—
of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.¹

Note that the *Spirit of God* will *rest* upon him, and his *resting place* shall be *glorious*. In these verses, we come across references to temple worship. The Messiah is presented to us as a temple where the Spirit of God rests in glory. In Isaiah 61, the Messiah is quoted as saying that ‘the Spirit of the LORD God is upon me’, and Jesus would later claim that these words were actually spoken about Him.²

¹ Isaiah 11:1-10

² Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19

The Gospel of John presents Jesus as a temple of God

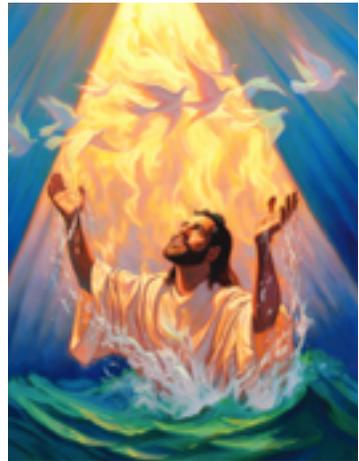
Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented to us as a temple of God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [...] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.³

The Word, i.e., God, became flesh, and *pitched his tent* among us, is what 'dwelt among us' means. And the glory of God became visible. This is temple, or rather, tabernacle-language. God made himself a perfect temple in a human person. This immediately raises the question: 'so what about the stone temple, in Jerusalem?'

The same idea is presented to us when Jesus was baptized; John the Baptist testified that he 'saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.'⁴

Israel had been waiting for the return of God to his stone temple, in Jerusalem. Now, God has returned to his true temple: He has come in Jesus Christ. In Jesus we meet with God in a more perfect way than in the previous temples mentioned in the Bible, because Jesus was the *embodiment* of God, both by his birth and by him being strengthened for ministry by the coming of the Holy Spirit.



³ John 1:1, 14

⁴ John 1:32

Jesus, in very direct words, compared himself also with a temple when speaking with Nathanael. Nathanael was impressed by Jesus' prophetic view, but Jesus told him, 'you ain't seen nothing yet!':

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.⁵

This reminds us of both Jacob's sanctuary and the presence of God in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. Jesus pointed at himself.

In John's Gospel we see a fulfillment of the three great feasts of the Temple's liturgical, annual worship cycle: Pentecost, Passover, and Tabernacles. In addition to these, the feast of Dedication, which began in the time of the Maccabean revolt, is also included in John's recapitulation of the Temple in Christ.



These four major Jewish festivals are all mentioned in John's Gospel. The order goes as follows, and Jesus during those festivals claims that He is the 'fulfillment' of those Temple Feasts:

Passover (John 2:13-3:21)

Very early on in his ministry, Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem from businesspeople who had turned the temple into 'a house of trade'. Jesus calls the temple 'my Father's house', but he seems to indicate that this temple is losing its centrality, when he says:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it

⁵ John 1:51

up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.⁶



Jesus seemed to purposely juxtapose the temple build with stones, with his own body indwelled by the Spirit of God. Passover as a festival was a reminder of both death and God's mercy towards His people—Christ has now linked Passover with his own death and resurrection and the recreation of both Passover and the Temple in Himself.⁷

Jesus did not speak of the destruction of the temple of stone in Jerusalem, but of his own death and resurrection. However, Pope Benedict XVI wrote about this,

The rejection and crucifixion of Jesus meant at the same time the end of this (stone) Temple. The era of the Temple is over. A new era is introduced, in a Temple not built by human hands. This temple is his body, the Risen One, who gathers the peoples and unites them in the sacrament of his body and



⁶ John 2:19-22

⁷ Unashamedly I used much of <http://blogs.ancientfaith.com/onbehalfforall/jesus-is-the-temple-2/> [accessed 19 May 2015]

blood. He himself is the new Temple of humanity. The crucifixion of Jesus is at the same time the destruction of the old Temple. With his resurrection a new way of worshipping God begins, no longer on this mountain but 'in spirit and in truth'. (John 4:23)⁸

Note that Pope Benedict links Jesus as a temple with the church as a temple (more about this later) and with Adam, or mankind, as a temple. Humankind was supposed to be a perfect abode for God, but things went wrong because of sin. Jesus Christ was the true Human Temple. He was sinless and God dwelled fully in him. What went wrong because of the first Adam was restored by Jesus, who is therefore called the second Adam,

Passover (John 6:1-71)

Christ speaks of Himself as the true bread from heaven, a fulfillment of the Passover festival (which involved bread and wine), and also revealed the Eucharistic festival to his followers before the time for such a feast had come (whereby his followers were to eat his body and drink his blood if they wanted to have eternal life, a fulfillment of the mercy of God and life shown to His people in the Passover meal).

Tabernacles / Booths (John 7:1-10:21)



During Tabernacles, the priests would pour several gallons of water from the Pool of Siloam upon the altar steps, while also keeping the Temple courts continually illuminated with candles.

Jesus goes into the Temple and teaches during the feast, "If anyone

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two* (San Francisco, 2011), pp. 21-22

is thirsty, come to me and drink. From within whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will flow rivers of living water!" (John 7:37-38), which is connected with the water poured out from the Pool of Siloam.

In connection with the lighting of the Temple courts, Jesus soon after teaches "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Dedication (John 10:22-39)

This feast was a reminder of the re-consecration of the Temple by the Maccabees while under foreign rule (1 Maccabees 4:56) During this festival, Jesus calls himself "consecrated" by the Father, as he is walking through Solomon's porch within the Temple itself.⁹

Passover (John 11:55-20:31)

When the sacrifice was made on the altar, the blood from the sacrifice would flow through holes in the southwestern corner of the altar, down through a water channel and into the brook of Kidron; In other words, at the time of the sacrifice, blood and water would pour out from the Temple itself. In John 19:34, we read: "One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately, blood and water came out."

Through New Eyes

James Jordan, in his book "Through New Eyes", shows how in another manner, John presents Christ as the New Temple.¹⁰ He suggests that

⁹ John 10:36

¹⁰ James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc. Brentwood, Tennessee, 1988) pp. 267-269. This book is available online for free, see http://freebooks.entrewave.com/freebooks/docs/a_pdfs/jjne.pdf.

John roughly follows the route of the High Priest in Israel's Temple in how he describes the details in the life of Jesus:¹¹

The priest starts with the laver, for his ritual purification, so the first five chapters of John speak of water: baptism of John the Baptist, water into wine, the "cleansing" of the Temple, the new birth (water and spirit), John's baptism, the Samaritan woman at the well, the resurrection of the dead boy (at Cana, where water into wine took place, as well as the washings that were necessary when being cleansed from death on the third and seventh day), and the pool of Bethesda in John 5 ends this section.

The priest then turns to the Table of Showbread: John 6 has Jesus feeding the five thousand, calling Himself the Bread of Life, declaring that if we will not eat of His Flesh and drink of His Blood we can have no part in Him; in John 7 He presents Himself as the drink of life (remember the libations that went with the showbread and meal offerings).

Then we are at the Lampstand. In John 8 we find that Christ is the Light of the world, in chapter 9 He heals a blind man, and in chapter 10 He is the Good Shepherd (connected to David, who is repeatedly referred to as a light, as well as the connection between the shepherd's voice calling to his sheep and the light in a dark place). John 11 moves on to Lazarus, and we are told that Christ had to call him out of darkness and sleep into light and day. In John 12 Christ says that those who would not believe



¹¹ In what follows I have used the summary of Jordan's pages 267-269 by <http://eventodeath.blogspot.com/2007/07/jesus-as-temple-james-jordan.html> [accessed 19 May 2015]

in Him were blind, but those who did believe would become sons of light.

Then Jesus repeats some of the foregoing, but he goes further. He washes the disciple's feet, breaks bread with them, and speaks of the Holy Spirit (the archetype for the seven lamps in the Tabernacle) in chapters 13-16.

Then comes the High Priest's prayer at the altar of incense in John 17. But after this we travel yet further: His death is the sacrifice as well as the ultimate Yom Kippur, and He Is the High Priest who takes the blood into the Most Holy. His resurrection is the High Priest returning from the Most Holy place alive, which means that God had accepted the sacrifice. Also, on Yom Kippur, the High Priest wore a simple linen garment. This is the garment Peter encounters in the tomb in chapter 20, as Christ has returned to His glorified state. The two angels in verse 12 speak of the mercy-seat in Exodus 25: two cherubim, one at either end of God's throne; two angels, one at the head and one at the feet.

We now turn to Eden, the original Temple where the first sacrifice took place: outside the tomb was a garden, reminiscent of the garden symbolism so prevalent in the Temple, and Christ is the New Gardener, the New Adam Who kept His garden safe and died on a tree, was placed in the dust, traveled to the domain where "the worm (serpent) does not die", and returned, reversing the curse by taking the entirety of it upon Himself. We remain in Eden and find Gen. 2:7 in John 20:22, and the naked Adam hiding in the garden is found in the naked Peter hiding in the sea; Adam named the animals, the apostles are to feed Christ's sheep. Christ wore the Old Covenant in His death, and His resurrection has created a new heavens and a new earth, "in which righteousness dwells".

The Apostle Paul about Jesus as the Temple

The apostle Paul links this idea of God dwelling fully in Jesus with Jesus as the place where reconciliation is made by sacrifice:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.¹²

God 'dwelled' fully in Jesus and in this temple God reconciled man and God. Jesus has fully taken the role of the temple build with stones in Jerusalem. Not in that stone temple, but in Jesus Christ can we find God, and salvation.

The belief that all liturgical temple-sacrifices are fulfilled in the cross of Jesus Christ, that in him all the underlying intentions of all sacrifices are accomplished, means that Jesus has taken the place of the temple, that he is the new Temple. All this lies at the heart of Paul's teaching. Pope Benedict XVI wrote some important words about this:

Jesus [...] has taken the place of the Temple, [...] he himself is the new Temple: all of this lies at the very heart of Paul's teaching. [...] The most important text is found in the Letter to the Romans (3:23-25): "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."

The Greek word that is here translated as "expiation" is *hilasterion*, of which the Hebrew equivalent is *kapporet*. This word indicated the covering of the Ark of the Covenant. This is the place over which YHWH ap-

¹² Colossians 1:19-22

pears in a cloud, the place of the mysterious presence of God. This holy place is sprinkled with the blood of the bull killed as a sin-offering on the Day of Atonement. [...]

When Paul applies the word *hilasterion* to Jesus, designating Him as the seal of the Ark of the Covenant and thus as the locus of the presence of the living God, the entire Old Testament theology of worship [...] is preserved and surpassed and raised to a new level. Jesus himself is the presence of the living God. God and man, God and the world, touch one another in him. [...] For Paul, the Temple and its worship is “demolished” with Christ’s crucifixion; its place is now taken by the living Ark of the Covenant - the crucified and risen Christ.¹³



This great theological vision is also worked out in some detail in the Letter to the Hebrews.

The Letter to the Hebrews

We will look at some parts of the Letter to the Hebrews in which Jesus is compared to the temple and to aspects of the temple service. He is presented to us as the ‘better’ temple, the ‘better’ High Priest, etc.

For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* Part Two (San Francisco, 2011), pp. 38-40

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. [...]

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. [...]

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.¹⁴

In the study on Mankind as a temple, we saw how in Psalm 8 mankind is seen as very close to God, and crowned with glory, that is, with God's *shekinah* above him. Man is a temple. Here in Hebrews we see how the same passage is treated as a description of Jesus as a temple. He, the true Son of Man, has been made a little lower than angels (his incarnation), but now he is crowned with honor and glory (his ascension).

Jesus was, according to this passage, not a 'mere' man but He 'partook' of flesh and blood. This points at his incarnation, where God came to 'tabernacle' among mankind. And he is also called a high priest who makes propitiation for the sins of the people. But as he is both compared with a temple and with the high priest, it is also clear that it is not possible to *harmonize* all these images. It is also clear, that the writers of the New Testament did see in all those images from the Old Testament, allegories, or types, or prophecies, of the salvation that came in Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Hebrews 2:5-17

Some concluding remarks

Jesus Christ is presented in the New Testament as the real place for meeting with God and for reconciliation with God 'in his body and blood'. This is temple language. He is the ultimate Temple of God.

In the New Testament, the fact that Jesus is the true Temple of God is seen in apposition to the stone Temple in Jerusalem with its liturgy and sacrifices. As Jesus fulfilled all intentions of that Temple, it was no longer needed. Its destruction in 70AD was closely linked with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The idea of rebuilding that stone Temple in Jerusalem is in direct contradiction with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is presented as the Temple, as the High Priest, as the Ark of the Covenant and more. These images cannot be reconciled but must be seen as efforts to show that the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus are a fulfillment of all the promises of salvation in the Old Testament. These promises cannot be systemized, just as all Jesus did cannot be put in a simple harmonized 'chart'. This is logical as God's perfect work cannot be perfectly described by mere humans.

As Jesus is the true Temple for meeting with God and for salvation, he is the place where to start when we desire for meeting with God and for salvation. To suggest that there are other starting points or other 'roads' to God, suggests that Jesus is not God's ultimate Temple. Outside Jesus, there is no salvation and no meeting with God.