

Biblical Theology: The Story of Scripture
Class 5: The Story of Eden to New Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION

[Review purpose of class, last week, and schedule.]

What makes a certain place sacred? Is there even such a thing as a “sacred” place? Is it the architectural structure of a building? Is it a certain location? Certain historical significance? *Did someone famous live there?* But in terms of Christianity do we have sacred places? Why do we call the church a sanctuary? Why have people made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and many other places along the Mediterranean?

The idea of a sacred place, a place which by its very definition is connected with God, is important to the theme of the Bible. As we will see today, the dwelling place of God is central to the Bible’s storyline. We will first take a trip through the Bible, looking at the theme of the dwelling place of God. Then we will take a look at the tools that help us understand the story. Then we will draw out some lessons for us today.

I. RETRACING THE STORY— Eden to New Jerusalem

Take your Bible and turn to the last two chapters of the Book of **Revelation**. This is the end of the book, and John recounts one more vision, he introduces it by these words (from **21:1-3**):

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

This is a dramatic conclusion to the whole story of God’s dealings with humanity. Here we here that God will dwell with man forever. And we see a new heaven and earth – but more specifically the vision focuses just on the New Jerusalem. Professor G.K. Beale has made a convincing case for understanding the New Jerusalem to be another way of describing the new heaven and new earth. It is not that a city is within the new earth, but that the presence of God has expanded to fill the whole earth.

The key is in understanding the New Jerusalem to be essentially a garden-Temple, or rather, The Garden-Temple that has been prophesied and experienced since Genesis 2. This Temple now fills the new earth, and God’s presence is fully experienced by everyone in the city, everyone in the new earth.

We are going to trace this story, of God’s dwelling place from Eden to Jerusalem.

The Garden-Temple (Gen. 2-3)

Turn to Gen. 2:8-10, 15

We learn from Gen 1-2 that God created all things, but then created Eden, the garden, as a place for man (God's creation) and God to dwell. It was to be God's divine residence – a place for him to dwell, and to coexist with man. This is what makes the Garden in Eden the first Sanctuary, Holy Place, or Temple in history.

There are several reasons for seeing Eden as a Sanctuary:

- **Presence of God:** God “walks back and forth” [Hebrew hithpael form] in the Garden – Gen. 3:8
 - This form of the verb for walking back and forth is used of God's presence in the Tabernacle:
“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. (2 Samuel 7:6, see also Lev. 26:12, Dt. 23:14)
- **Priestly Duties:** Adam was to “work it, and keep it” –those words are usually translated “serve and guard”. And when they occur together, later in the OT, they always refer to either:
 - Israel serving and guarding/obeying God's Word (10 times, per Beale)
 - Or, more often, of priests or Levites who serve God in the temple and guard the temple from unclean things entering it. Numb. 3:7-8; 18:5-6
- **Placement:** Entrance to the garden was from the east (Gen. 3:24), just like the Temple was to face east, and both were on a mountain (Ezek. 28:14, Mt. Zion, cf. Ezek. 43:12)
- **Provision of Life:** A river flowed from Eden, and will flow from the end times Temple (Ezek. 47:1-12, Rev. 22:1-2) – and the water of life from the end times Temple has the Trees of Life on both sides (Ezek. 47:12, Rev. 22:2)
- (other) **Parallels:**
 - Cherubim guards the Garden = Cherubim figures guard the ark in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle/Temple
 - Tree of Life = 7-branched tree-like Lampstand
 - Tree of Knowledge of Good/Evil = Tablets of the Law in the Ark of Covenant
 - Both lead to wisdom, tasting/touching either gives death
 - Gold and precious stones are in the area of Eden and also in the Temple or on the priestly garments (Gen. 2:12)
 - The Temple had garden-imagery: elaborate carvings of “gourds and open flowers” (1 Kings 6:18), “carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers” (6:29), and “carved pomegranates” (7:18-20)
- **Prophetic Mention:** Ezek. 28:14-18 where Eden is the garden of God, the mountain of God (later in Eden the Temple is on a mountain), and described as Sanctuaries; LXX views Adam here as “with the cherub” not “like the cherub” (Hebrew)
(from G.K. Beale, “Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation,” *JETS* v. 48, no.1, pp. 7-10)

So Adam was to be a priestly caretaker of God's sanctuary and also a royal image-bearer representing God in this world. He was to expand the borders of Eden and the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth, as he was fruitful and multiplying (creating new image-bearers).

The Fall

But Adam fails in his charge. He fails to guard the dwelling place of God and allows the serpent to defile the garden. Because Adam failed, the temple is now defiled. Not only that but ultimately they have failed to worship God as the priests he created them to be. Adam and Eve are then deprived of their priestly status and expelled from the sanctuary.

“No longer do they have immediate access to God; no longer do they live within the garden-temple. All importantly, their actions jeopardize the fulfillment of God’s blueprint that the whole earth should become a garden-city.” (T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, p. 27)

We know in the following chapters of Genesis that humanity, instead of spreading to fill the earth as God’s image bearers, grow in violence and wickedness. God sets about to “recreate” the ground, through the line of Noah.

“God’s original blueprint is for the whole earth to become a temple-city filled with people who have a holy or priestly status. Tragically, the actions of Adam and Eve endanger the fulfillment of this project. In spite of this, God graciously and mercifully embarks on a lengthy process designed to reverse this setback and bring to completion his creation scheme.” (ibid, p. 30-31)

But like Adam, Noah and his offspring fail in their charge, culminating in the tower of Babel incident (the opposite of God’s intended expansion throughout the earth). We will skip ahead, due to time here.

Patriarchs & The Tabernacle

In **Gen 12**, immediately following the Babel event, God sought out Abraham. Reading on we understand that through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promises are set in motion for God once again to dwell on the earth. Through the patriarchs God communes with them through mini-sacrificial sites or sanctuaries. They were only built in the promised land, and they were usually built following an experience of the presence of God. Examples of this include the Oak at Mamre (Gen. 13:18), Mount Moriah in **Gen 22** (cf. **1 Chron 3:1**) and Bethel in **Gen 28**.

“The result of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob building altars at Shechem, between Bethel and Ai, at Hebron, and near Moriah was that the terrain of Israel’s future land was dotted with shrines. This pilgrim-like activity ‘was like planting a flag and claiming the land’ for God and Israel’s future temple, where God would take up his permanent residence in the capital of that land. Thus, all these smaller sanctuaries pointed to the greater one to come in Jerusalem.” (Beale, *JETS*, p. 15 – quote was from T. Longman, *Immanuel in our Place*, p. 20)

We know that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, end up in Egypt. At the beginning of Exodus [Ex 1:7], we see that the Israelites were in part fulfilling the command God gave to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However the people did not find favor with the King, so God sends Moses as his messenger, and then God miraculously and powerfully rescues his people. In **Ex 19**, God establishes a covenant to Israel. He calls them to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” They were to be priest-kings, fulfilling the role God had intended for Adam and Eve. But how was God going to dwell among this people?

God commissions the building of a special tent. The whole second half of Exodus speaks in great detail to this tent. I am not going to go into all the details, but the tent was to have three distinctive areas. Here is how one author summarizes the structure of the tabernacle:

“A curtained barrier formed an enclosed rectangular courtyard, with an entrance on the east side. Inside this courtyard stood the tabernacle, a large tent divided into two sections. Entered from the east, the first room of the tent was the holy place. In this part stood the menorah, table of the showbread and incense altar. A pair of curtains, embroidered with cherubim separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The latter room was the inner sanctum wherein was placed the Ark of the Covenant. This rectangular box served a double function, being both the footstool of a throne and a chest. Understood as a footstool, the Ark of the Covenant extends the heavenly throne to the earth; this is where the divine king's feet touch the earth. Consequently the tabernacle links heaven and earth.” (ibid, p. 33-34)

Here we see pictures of Eden, and how aspects of this special tent link it to God's plans for the earth. The cherubim guard the Holy of Holies, the entrance is from the east and like Adam the Levitical priests are instructed to serve and guard. It was to be God's dwelling place. When it is finally erected in Ex 40:34-35:

“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”

God's glory filled the tent and remained within it. So through their journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, the divine presence, which appeared as a cloud by day and fire by night (Num 9:15-17, 22), was intimately associated with the tabernacle. [Moses met with God in tent- *ohel moed*--tent of meeting.] The tabernacle also shows us that the God of the universe resides with one people or nation. This idea we will pick up next week.

I should make a caveat to say that I do not mean that God's presence is limited to a tent. The Ark, as I mentioned, is identified as a footstool points to a heavenly throne, indicating that God's being was not contained within the Tabernacle alone.

The Tabernacle also symbolizes the Cosmos. “Lights” (*m'or*) in Pentateuch is used 10 times of the lamps for the tabernacle, and only used again in Gen. 1, 5 times, of the Lights in the sky. The colors of the hangings may represent the skies, and the gold may be for reflection and bring to mind the stars. And consider: God “stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” and “created the host of stars to hang in” (Isa 40:22, 26); likewise Ps 19:4-5 says that in the “heaven” God “placed a tent for the sun.” (from Beale, 17)

There is so much more to dig into at this point in the story, but time presses us to move on.

The Jerusalem Temple

In Josh 8, we see that some of the tribes settle in the land God had promised them and set up the tabernacle, and so it is set up at Shiloh. In 1 Sam 2:12-17, we encounter the tragic event where God abandons the sanctuary at Shiloh. The tragic significance of this event is conveyed by the wife of Phineas when she names her soon-to-be-orphaned son 'Ichabod, saying “the glory has departed from Israel!” (1 Sam 4:21). The story carries on, the shepherd David is appointed as king of Israel. With this event Jerusalem is captured and the Ark is taken up to the city. Here God has chosen his

new earthly dwelling place in the city where the king of Israel lives. David though sees the incongruity of this situation. In 2 Sam 7, David laments that God doesn't have a permanent house. David recognizes that his residence should not be more grand the house of one Lord God. Even though David desires to build God a grand house, God in a twist says that he will build a house for David [dynasty] and that David's son would build a house for God [temple].

"Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' " (2 Sa 7:8-16)

It is David's son, Solomon who finally builds the temple. It should be noted that Mt. Moriah, one of Abraham's shrines, becomes the region where the Temple is built. 1 Kings 8:10-11, describes the dedication of the completed temple, and the same language of God's glory filling the temple that we saw earlier in Exodus is used. This means that the Jerusalem temple has now superseded the tabernacle.

When this happens the temple replaces the tabernacles as God's earthly abode, and the reflections of Eden are seen in this permanent structure. The Lord chooses Jerusalem as his dwelling place. Since God's creation project is to create a temple-city that would cover the whole earth, it is easy to see how Jerusalem is viewed as partially fulfilling God's plan.

The Psalms portray this idea in so many places. A whole section of the Psalter (120-134) are songs used by those who ascended to the temple.

"He rejected the tent of Joseph; he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves. He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever." (Psalm 78:67-69)

"For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: 'This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it'." (Psalm 132:13-14)

"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King. Within her citadels God has made himself known as a fortress.... Walk about Zion, go around her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever." (Psalm 48:1-3; 12-14)

“Israel’s temple served as a little earthly model of God’s temple in heaven that would eventually encompass the whole earth.” (Beale, JETS, p. 18)

For 400 years, through righteous kings and evil kings the Jerusalem temple survived. Eventually, the accumulate failure of the kings and citizens of Jerusalem leads to the destruction of the temple and the overthrow of the city by the Babylonians.

Prophetic Temple

Isaiah 1 highlights the big discrepancy between what the people of God were to be as a holy righteous city-temple, and what they actually looked like. But the prophecies Isaiah move from the historical city of Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem of the future. But in Isaiah 2 this future transformation is anticipated. In Isaiah 65 we see visions of a future transformed city.

Other prophets as well, like Ezekiel, highlights in how even in exile is God is still committed to making the whole earth his dwelling place. He had described the idolatry and wickedness that shockingly caused God to remove his presence from the Temple and the Holy City. Yet Ezekiel describes the New Covenant, and the resurrection of Israel’s dry bones, and the return of God to his Land. Ezekiel spends significant time describing this idealized temple of the future in chapters 40-48. He ultimately prophesies that God will rename the city to: The LORD is There. (Ezek 48:35)

Zechariah looks forward to a transformed city in which God will dwell.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain’.... This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God’.” (Zech. 8:3, 7-8)

In Zechariah’s time, under the leadership of Ezra, God’s people return to Jerusalem and seek to rebuild the temple. We see in Ezra 3 that when the foundations are built some cry because they remember the glory of the old temple. But some also rejoice because they see this as another fulfillment of God’s creation plan. But further measures are needed.

Jesus

We see in the opening chapter of John’s gospel, God was incarnate in the flesh and dwelt among us, or tabernacled among us [John 1:14], in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the temple toward which all earlier temples look and which they anticipated (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-14; Zech 6:12-13). Jesus claimed that forgiveness of sins now comes through him and no longer through the sacrificial system of the temple. This suggests he was taking over the function of the temple, because John 2:13-17 the temple was not fulfilling its purpose it was a have or marketplace. He often refers to himself as the cornerstone of the temple (Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17). Jesus even told the Jewish leaders in John 2:18-21 that he was the temple. [See also Mk. 14:58].

Just like the end times prophetic temple, Jesus is a source of living water Jn. 4:14, 7:37-39 [pours the Holy Spirit Is. 44:3]

Church

In 2 Cor 6:14-18, Paul makes it clear that the church (not the building but the people) is the temple of God. When we believe in Jesus, we are united with Christ and the temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) ["for we are the temple of the living God" cf. Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12; 11-12]. Paul though seems to be pointing to something more, and sees the church as just the beginning fulfillment of the creational blueprint God intended. But what exactly is it that Paul has in mind?

New Jerusalem

The Apostle John has a vision of that which is to come in Revelation. He sees that there is yet a time to come when all that is evil and impure will be removed from this present earth.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with Men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Rev. 21:1-3)

There are several reasons for seeing New Jerusalem as a Temple:

- **Gold & Jewels:** Temple overlaid with gold too (1 Kgs 6:20–22; 2 Chr 3:4–8), and high priest's breastplate has many of the same jewels.
- **Measures like a Cube:** Holy of Holies also a cube. It is expanded over the earth (12000 stadia = 1380 miles = whole earth).
 - Measuring rod used in prophetic passages (Ezek. 40, 42) of measuring the temple (including in Rev. 11:1) – but here in 21 it is measuring the city
- **Tree of Life & River of Life (22:1-2)**
- **God's Name on our Foreheads (22:4):** High priest wore God's name on his head and was the only one who could go in Holy of Holies, but now we all wear His name and live there day & night (cf., Ex. 28:36-38).
- **No Uncleaness There (21:27) :** Just like with the temple, uncleaness should not be permitted to enter.
 - Additionally, this is an argument for seeing the city as the entire new earth, since those outside the city fit the description of those in the lake of fire.
- **Glory & Presence of God:** No temple there = no mediation of God's presence, Glory of God for light (Rev. 21:22-23).

II. PATTERNS IN THE STORYLINE

Promise-Fulfillment

I have on the handout there is the idea of promise fulfillment. But as we have gone through the story one thing stands very clear. What God intended in the Garden finds its "literal" fulfillment in

the New Jerusalem. Let me explain this with an illustration: looking at something at a distance and close-up. Both are “literal”. Beale says it fairly clearly:

“... Christ not only fulfills all that the OT temple and its prophecies represent but that he is the unpacked meaning for which the temple existed all along.⁴⁰ Christ’s establishment of the temple at his first coming and the identification of his people with him as the temple, where God’s tabernacling presence dwells, is a magnified view of the beginning form of the new creational temple, and Revelation 21 is the most ultimate highly magnified picture of the final form of the temple that we will have this side of the consummated new cosmos. Like the distant and close-up views of the earth, such a view of the temple should not be misconceived as diminishing a literal fulfillment of the OT temple prophecies.” (Beale, 27)

Typology

Remember we said that typology was a historical event, person or thing that God uses in redemptive history that foreshadows a clearer, greater and fuller event, person or thing revealed later. In our story we have a couple examples of typology:

Adam is given God’s word and he works out that obedience in the Garden. So then the true purpose of these items is taken up in the Patriarchs and then the priests. But the true high priest is Jesus who perfectly fulfills what God intended for Adam.

Eden => Sanctuaries of the patriarchs => Tabernacle => Jerusalem temple => Jesus

Continuity/Discontinuity

I think a couple examples of continuity include God’s original plan to fill the earth with his glorious presence. From the very beginning God was about this, and it is something we see in Revelation that he accomplished.

One major discontinuity is the idea of a physical temple in Jerusalem to be constructed. This gets to the questions I asked at the beginning, are the sanctuaries here? Is there a temple that needs to be built in Jerusalem? The discontinuity here allows us to say that no there is no need for a physical temple. Beale is helpful on this:

“To focus only upon a yet future physical temple as the fulfillment would be to ignore that Christ at his first coming began to fulfill this prophecy and that he will completely fulfill it in the eternal new creation; so even if there is to be a yet future physical temple built in Israel, it will only point to Christ and God as the temple in the eternal new creation, pictured in Rev 21:22. Therefore, to focus only on a future physical temple as the fulfillment is like focusing too much on the physical picture of the temple and not sufficiently on what the picture ultimately represents.” (Beale, 20)

III. SYSTEMATIZING IT ALL [Putting it all together]

1) God is a holy creator.

It becomes very clear in the opening chapters of Genesis the nature of God as creator. But it is also

clear how holy he is. He cannot tolerate his temple to be defiled. That is why our story talked about the levels of holiness to be in the presence of God. He is a holy God and his holy glory will one day fill the earth.

2) God dictates how humanity is to have relationship with him.

We touched on this last week, but through covenants God determines how his people will approach him. Adam had full communication, sin marred that, and then God chose to speak through a messenger, then through the prophets, now he speaks to us through his Son.

3) God intends for his glory to fill the earth.

This is a constant refrain of Scripture. The Psalms are rich with this imagery. But as we have seen the aim of God from the very beginning is that his image bearers would make God known through their obedience to his word and their holiness. Even after the sin of Adam and Eve, and the curse that was placed on all humanity, God through his temple sought to have his glory fill the earth.

4) In Christ, God dwells through the Spirit in the worldwide Church.

How do we first experience God's tabernacling presence? By believing in Christ: that he died for our sins, that he rose from the dead, and reigns as the Lord God. God's Spirit comes into use and dwells in us in a similar manner that God dwelt in the sanctuary of Eden and Israel's temple. God's presence will become increasingly manifest to us as we grow by grace in our belief in Christ and his word.

5) Christians are the inaugurated temple, designed to expand and spread God's presence throughout the earth.

This is the part of the storyline in which the role of Christian "witness" and "missions" is to be understood. Greg Beale summarizes the church's mission well:

"our task as a church is to be God's temple, so filled with his presence that we expand and fill the earth with that glorious presence until God finally accomplishes this goal completely at the end of time. This is our common unified mission. May we unify around that goal." (Beale, 31)

CONCLUSION

That is the story of God's dwelling place and presence as told through the whole Bible. Next week we are going to look the people of God throughout the whole Bible.