**The Big Picture**

**Lesson 1 - The Temple**

**Series Introduction**

Too often we see the Bible as a series of helpful, interesting, but unrelated stories about various people, places, and times. We read it like we would read any other history book. This happened, then that happened, here are some random laws and genealogies. But while the Bible is history, and while it does contain law codes and genealogies, it is much more than that. The Bible tells a full story from beginning to end, and all of the sometimes seemingly random pieces fit together like a giant puzzle.

The goal of this series is to help you see how some of the pieces of the Bible fit together. We will be tracing several themes from the Old Testament to the New, and in many cases from Genesis to Revelation. We will show how these themes develop, and how God builds on what he has shown previous generations as he unravels his truth one century at a time. The goal in all of this is to get a better understanding of how your Bible fits together and of the way it shows us who God is and what he does.

**Part 1: The Temple in the Old Testament**

Many people are familiar with the fact that Israel had a Temple, perhaps they even know that Israel had three different temples over the years (Solomon’s, Zerubbabel’s, and Herod’s) and maybe they even know the Bible predicts they will have at least one more (Ezekiel’s). But what is the point of them? Why does the Bible focus on them and spend so much time on them? And how do they instruct us today?

The Temple was viewed as God’s house. But as Solomon so eloquently put it “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!” 1 Kings 8:27

***Why build a house if God doesn’t need a house? What was the purpose of the temple?***

The answer comes in the next few verses “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.” 1 Kings 8:28-30

The Temple was where God and man could meet. God lived in the Temple in the sense that he was there among his people. To understand how all this works, we need to go back to the beginning.

1. **Eden – God and man living together.**

Our story begins in the beginning. God made man and woman and placed them in the garden. But he didn’t just place them there and leave them alone. God gave them a job to do – man was supposed to rule over God’s creation as God’s representative.

1. **God and man dwelling together.**

Sadly, mankind rebelled against God (more on that in a second). But there is an interesting detail in the middle of this account that should cause us to wonder and perhaps feel a little sorrowful as we think about what was lost.

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” Genesis 3:8

***What does the fact that Adam and Eve hid from God teach us?***

***Why does it mention “the cool of the day”?***

***How could God have been walking?***

There is much mystery in this passage, but it would appear that this was a preincarnate Christophany – one of the times that Christ showed up and spoke with people in what appeared to be a physical form before he permanently took a human body (see also Genesis 18:1-2, 16, 22-33, 19:1; Genesis 32:22-23; Judges 6:11-24).

1. **Paradise (and presence) lost.**

But the whole point of that story is that man sinned against God. Now there would no more evening talks with God. The greatest tragedy of being expelled from the garden wasn’t just that Adam and Eve lost a cushy place to live. The greatest tragedy is that they were driven out from living in the presence of God.

***Why do we often focus on creature comforts that were lost when the garden was cleared rather than the broken relationship? How does this thinking show up today?***

***God still communicated with people after the fall, how do you think it was different for Adam and Eve after the fall as compared to before the fall?***

This is the great problem of the Bible – how can man be restored to a place of fellowship and service under God now that he has rebelled against God? It is this issue that the Temple starts to address.

1. **Tabernacle and Temple – God’s glory returns to dwell among men.**

There are a lot of details involved in the Tabernacle and Temple that puzzle modern readers. Why spend one third of the book of Exodus describing how to make the tabernacle and then repeating all of those instructions by describing Israel making them? This is the beginning of a lot of material that can slow down those trying to read through their Bibles. Stories about Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph? Yes please! The dimensions of the lampstand and table of showbread? Maybe not so much. The same thing happens when we get to Kings. 1 Kings 5-8 detail the planning, construction, and dedication of the Temple, and they are long chapters! (160 verses worth of material on the Temple!)

However, although reading through (and profiting spiritually) these chapters may not be easy, the large amount of material here should at least communicate something important. The tabernacle and Temple really mattered to God and to Israel. Why is do they matter so much? Because this was the way that God first came back to dwell among his people again.

1. **Eden is back.**

If Eden is where humanity was able to be in close fellowship with God, then the Temple was meant to be a new Eden, a place where man and God could once again be in fellowship.

Many biblical scholars have observed that the Temple was designed to be a sort of “new Eden.” They think this way because

* The general purpose of the Temple is the same as Eden – a place where God and men can dwell together.
* The description of the carvings of the Temple are designed to make it sound like a garden (1 Kings 6:18, 29-36, 7:18-20).
* The presence of God is guarded by Cherubim, just like the garden of Eden was.

***What were some of the main differences between Eden and the Tabernacle/Temple?***

***How was the Temple an improvement over what Israel previously had?***

1. **God is back.**

Both the Tabernacle and the Temple have a similar ending to their inauguration. After God’s instructions have been followed, after much careful planning and building, there is a dedication. At the conclusion of both dedications, God shows up in a big way (Exodus 40:34-38; 2 Chron 7:1-3). God’s glory came and filled the Tabernacle and Temple so fully that no one, not even Moses could enter at first. God had returned to humanity and was again dwelling among his people!

But there was a condition to this return: obedience. The whole book of Leviticus is designed to solve the problem at the end of Exodus: “How can a holy God dwell with unholy people?” Solomon in his prayer acknowledges that God will judge sinful people if they should decide to rebel against God, but asks that God would hear their prayers of repentance.

Sadly, Israel began to look to the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple as good luck charms that guaranteed their success. They allowed the privilege of God’s presence to create an expectation of ease. They sinned but didn’t repent, because they had the Temple. For this reason, God allowed the Ark of the Covenant (1 Samuel 4:1-11) to get capture and allowed the Temple to be destroyed (Jeremiah 7:4-15).

***In what ways do we think that God will have to help us even though we continue to live in sin?***

***How can we turn the promises of God into a license to sin?***

1. **Ichabod – God’s glory departs from Israel.**

God’s glory came and dwelt in the Temple during the reign of Solomon. But unfortunately, it didn’t stay that way. Instead, we read a heartbreaking account in Ezekiel of God slowly removing himself from the Temple. Although the word Ichabod isn’t used specifically in the Bible itself to describe God’s departing, the Hebrew word is used by those who study God’s Word because of how appropriate its meaning is – “the glory has departed” (cf 1 Samuel 4:19-23).

1. **You broke the rules**

God had given Israel specific rules of ritual and moral purity to follow, and Israel botched it badly. God had made a statement early on when he killed Aaron’s sons for switching up the incense formula (Leviticus 10:1-3), but when we get to Ezekiel the level of wickedness had reached unimaginable lengths (Ezekiel 8:5-18). God’s presence eventually couldn’t take the idol worship, the worship of pagan deities, and the worship of the sun taking place *in his own Temple!*

***How do you think Israel got to such a low point spiritually? In what ways can people today blatantly sin like the people of Israel did here? How do we avoid getting to such a dangerous place?***

So God leaves, a little at a time. First, he leaves the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and goes to the threshold of the Temple (Ezekiel 10:4). Next the glory of God mounts a supernatural chariot driven by cherubim, and goes from the threshold of the Temple to the entrance of the gate of the Temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19). God then tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the city, and message is so severe that Ezekiel becomes terrified that there is no hope (11:13), so God gives an oracle of hope, and then leaves the city entirely (11:22-23).

***Why does God leave when there is sin? How does this work with a believer who is eternally secure and has the Holy Spirit living inside of them?***

While God promises to never leave us nor forsake us, God is clear that there can be a relational distance because of our sin (cf James 4:8).

1. **Not the same**

At the end of the Old Testament we read about the Temple being rebuilt by Zerubbabel – kind of. God wanted it built and even sent Haggai to stir the people up when they quit. But when the new Temple was consecrated, there was no filling by God’s presence. We don’t read about the glory of the presence of God coming on this Temple (Haggai 2:6-9). God had promised a glorious return and an incredible new Temple (Ezekiel 40-48), but the exiles who returned were pretty disappointed (Ezra 3:12-13).

And that’s where the Old Testament leaves us. God’s presence departed when man fell, but then it came back in an observable way in the Tabernacle/Temple. Yet because of Israel’s sin, God once again removed his presence, while promising that he would return in an even more glorious way. And then Israel waited. For over 400 years. But we’ll cover that next week.

***Why do many people not care about the presence of God, or care about much lesser things more?***

***How can a believer cultivate a desire for God’s presence?***