

Before the Temple—Tabernacle

Much charged controversy these days is riveted upon the “Temple Mount” in Jerusalem. When was there a Temple built on it? And whose was it?

Actually there were two temples. Both Jewish. The Babylonians destroyed one in 606 BC and the Romans in 70 AD.—and both times the Jewish people were scattered. The Babylonians are gone. The Romans are gone, but the Jewish people are back! But during those years of the Jewish Diaspora, there was still a Jewish majority in “Palestine”—though without city or Temple—until the 600s.

During the Moslem rule between A.D. 650 and 1099, there were also Jews and Christians in the Land. The Al-Aqsa Mosque was established in a basilica built by the Emperor Justinian at the southern edge of the Temple Mount. Muslims claim Mohammad went to heaven from a “remote mosque” ...Then the Crusaders dominated from 1099 until 1250 when the Mamelukes took over until 1517. Until the late 1800s, however, the Land was quite barren and desolated as described by Mark Twain in 1867, “Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields....Palestine is desolate and unlovely....It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land.” Finally in the late 1800s Jewish immigration dramatically increased and eventually the desert began to “blossom as the rose.” Still, after the War of Independence in 1948, Jordan destroyed 58 synagogues throughout Jerusalem and Jewish residents were forced to leave the Biblical “Old City.”

Praying on the Temple Mount

Ever since the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, however, Israel has insured freedom of worship throughout Jerusalem with free access to the Temple Mount for all. But, three decades later Jews are not permitted to pray on the Temple Mount, which Israel has permitted the Muslims to administer.

Today when the Antiquities Department of Israel attempts to do archeological research under the Temple Mount, huge protests are lodged against them. But volunteers of the Islamic Movement together with Moslem employees have continued to illegally excavate—even with a bulldozer—removing tons of earth containing Jewish artifacts dating from 2,000-3000 years ago. The Temple was the only center of Jewish worship—and evidence of that presence is being systematically destroyed.

Tabernacle in “West Bank”

But even before there was a Temple—here was a Tabernacle. What is not frequently mentioned as an issue is that the site of Israel’s Tabernacle existed for 469 years in Samaria—the northern part of so-called “West Bank.” Clear archeological evidences remains that the Tabernacle—as the Scriptures recount—was the focus of Jewish worship in Shiloh.

Purpose of the Tabernacle

What purpose did the Tabernacle—and then the Temple—serve? The instructions for the Tabernacle were given to Moses when Israel was an infant nation. The details were precise. It was a meeting place between God and His people while Israel traveled in the wilderness 40 years and even later when first settled in the Promised Land .

The Apostle Paul assures us that the construction of this Tabernacle and its services were a “shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 8:5; 10:1; Col. 2:17). A “shadow” gives the outward form of the real thing. What happened with Israel was an acted out drama of atonement with actors and staging—leaving an eloquent lesson for Christians centuries later.

The structure and furniture of the Tabernacle was very simple (Ex. 25-27). In the middle of the camp of Israel, the Tabernacle was assembled as a construction 15 feet wide, 15 feet high and 45 feet long. It was erected within a courtyard 75 feet wide and 150 feet long. One could come in from the camp through the Gate at one end of the Court. The first thing he or she would see would be a copper Altar on which animal sacrifices were burned. Just a little beyond this Altar—toward the Tabernacle—was a copper Laver of water for washing.

Entering the Tabernacle

To enter the Tabernacle, one would have to bend under the veiled entrance. However, only the priests were allowed to enter the “Holy,” as it was called. If one could go inside, one would be struck by the goldleaf on the boards of the walls and the ceiling of pure white linen. To the right was a golden Table with stacks of unleavened bread. On the left was a beautiful 7-stemmed Candlestick. Towards the back of this first compartment was another Veil. But just in front of this Second Veil was an Golden Incense Altar.

Again, to enter the back compartment, one would have to bend under this Second Veil. There was only one piece of furniture in the Most Holy: the Ark of the Covenant. It was a chest of wood overlaid with gold. The lid was very elaborate of beaten gold with two cherubim facing each other and downward towards a supernatural light of God’s dwelling.

Sacrifices in the Tabernacle

After the priesthood was installed, there were yearly Atonement Day sacrifices of a young bullock and a goat. What was first done to the Bullock was afterwards done to the Goat. The high priest laid his hands on the Bullock. It was killed and it was then burned on the copper Altar in the Court. But the skins and hoofs were burned outside the camp. This created a peculiar stench. But before the High Priest brought its blood into the Most Holy to sprinkle the Ark, he paused before the Veil to burn sweet incense.

In the Book of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul interprets this unique procedure of the Law—in this extraordinary Tabernacle of so long ago. “For the Law, having a shadow of the good things to come...” (Heb.10:1) What good things? The yearly sacrifices of the Atonement day, of course, pointed forward to the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He offered himself in sacrifice at the River Jordan when he said, “I come to do Thy will” (Heb.10:9). Then for three and one half years of his ministry he was consumed in doing God’s will until actually killed on the cross. Certainly his sacrifice was a sweet smelling fragrance to the Heavenly Father—but a stench to those of worldly thinking.

The Christian is also asked to take up Jesus’ cross and to suffer with him and walk in his footsteps. Just so, we are called from the world (the Camp) to enter the Gate. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). We see and appreciate Jesus’ sacrifice on the Altar. We begin to repent and clean up our lives at the Laver. But it is not until we present our “bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1) that we can bend low under the first Veil and enter the Holy. Then, as pictured by the Lord’s Goat—which follows the Bullock—our human will is sacrificed and we are consumed with him on the Altar. “It is a faithful saying: For if we be

dead with him, we shall also live with him... (2 Tim. 2:11) ...”If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

Certainly, too, as faithful Christians, our lives are often a stench to worldly people who do not understand us. The Apostle Paul also identifies us with this Tabernacle sacrifice of the Atonement Day when he says, “Let us go out unto him without the Camp bearing his reproach” (Heb.13:13).

Sacrifice of the Church

While our human hopes, aims and strength are being consumed, we are spiritually growing as new creatures as represented in the High Priest. Jesus is the Head. We are the Body members. As the High Priest eating the Bread, enjoys the light of the Candlestick and burns Incense—the Christian partakes of spiritual food and light, offering prayers as “incense” (Psalm 141:2). Passing under the Second Veil represents death when the High Priest brings the blood of the Sacrifices into the Most Holy—representing God’s presence. Actually, the High Priest enters twice, first with the blood of the Bullock (representing Jesus) and second with the blood of the Goat (representing the Church). These two parts are considered one sacrifice—because all the valuable merit is in Jesus. We have the “hope” to enter beyond this Veil into God’s presence because Jesus is our “forerunner” (Hebrews 6:20). We are the after-runners!

When all the sacrificing is done, the High Priest comes out to bless the people. The “Camp” of the whole world is waiting for this “manifestation of the Sons of God” (Rom. 8:17). Yes, the true church will be a “royal priesthood” blessing, instructing, giving life to the world in Christ’s Kingdom (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 5:10).

After Tabernacle and Temple. . .

Thus, the Tabernacle was replaced by a Temple—and both are being replaced by the wonderful reality. The Church is represented as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . .Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them. . .” (Rev. 21:2,3). The spiritual New Jerusalem, this “tabernacle,” will actually rule men from heaven when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). And then the earthly Jerusalem will represent this spiritual Jerusalem to all the nations of the earth....

When a New Covenant is made by God with His people Israel, the literal city of Jerusalem as a whole will be filled with the Divine favor, so that the Ark of the Temple and Tabernacle will lose their special significance. Jerusalem will be the center of God’s Kingdom and His worship. “They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord. . .At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all nations shall be gathered unto it. . .” (Jer. 3:16, 17).