

Where Does God Dwell?

“Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?”
(Acts 7:44-50).

What a shocker! In his first and last sermon, a deadly one for him and the longest speech on record in the Book of Acts, Stephen told a group of angry Jews that God did not need a building to live in. God lives in the hearts of Spirit-filled men. He cannot be confined. He cannot be contained. He cannot be explained. He is everywhere present and nowhere absent. A simple basic of the Bible is “In the beginning God” (Genesis 1:1).

Altars

Altars were important throughout the Old Testament. A quick search shows 433 references. The Jews had altars where they offered their sacrifices. In the New Testament the cross was the altar where Jesus Christ offered Himself as the spotless sacrifice.

The altar was revealed early in the Bible as a basic in approaching God. Noah built the first altar after he left the ark. (See Genesis 8:20.) Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and many others in the Old Testament built altars.

When Abraham arrived in Canaan, he immediately built an altar to the Lord. There the Lord appeared to him.

“And there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD” (Genesis 12:8).

Jacob had a dream at Bethel in which he saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven. Angels were coming down and going up.

“Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it” (Genesis 28:16-18).

Years later he returned to Bethel, built an altar and renamed the place El-Bethel. Bethel means “house of God,” and El-Bethel means “the God of the house of God.” It is one thing to have a “house of God,” but better to have “God in the house of God.”

The Tabernacle

“And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

God instructed Moses to build a portable church called the Tabernacle. It was the church in the wilderness, a picture and a shadow of heavenly things to come. It showed all Jesus Christ was going to accomplish on earth. Moses carefully obeyed God’s instructions and built the Tabernacle according to the pattern (for a pattern).

“Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD” (Deuteronomy 12:11).

Old Testament believers worshiped God in their homes and also in a place chosen by God Himself. Believers still have a common place of worship where they come together.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Also read Matthew 18:20.

The Old Temple

David, a man after God’s heart, had a dream. He wanted to build a house for God. He dedicated the last years of his life to collecting funds and materials to construct the Temple. Solomon took over this project, and it took seven years to build.

At the dedication of the house of God, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice. The glory of the Lord appeared in a visible manifestation. God gave Solomon this promise, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

When the New Testament Church was established and dedicated (Acts 2:1-3), the fire of the Holy Ghost came down and sanctified the sacrifice. This time the sacrifice was not an animal, but a group of people yielded to the Lord.

Jesus had promised that He would build His church. This was fulfilled in Acts as the apostles carried out the great commission. They were ordinary people serving an extraordinary God. Jesus is the wise Master Builder and our Chief Cornerstone.

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:18-19).

The Temple was much nicer than the Tabernacle. However, the Temple design copied that of the Tabernacle.

“...The Temple had a powerful symbolic role in Israel’s faith. Israel’s God was one, and the people who worshipped him were one. The emphasis on one place of worship taught both the unity of God and the unity of God’s people, a unity based not on race but on loyalty to the God of the covenant.” (The *Revell Bible Dictionary*, Page 966)

Over the years three Temples stood on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. Solomon built the first one. The second was built by Zerubbabel, and the third by Herod the Great. The Temple built by Herod was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was destroyed in A. D. 70.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Every Christian is a living temple to God. We have been chosen to be of service to our God.

Among the heathen, temples were always regarded as sacred. They believed them to be inhabited (lived in) by the gods to whom they were dedicated.

God dwelled in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple, but now He dwells in us. God comes into us (His temple) when we receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Study Questions

1. Who gave the longest speech on record (in the Book of Acts)? _____

2. How do we know that “altars” were important in the Old Testament? _____
