

## The Temple and Cafeteria Tray Jesus

### *Ezra 6*

In some ways, chapter six can be seen as the climax in the story of Ezra. In chapters 1-2 we see Israel released from pagan captivity to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their way of life. They make the long trek across modern day Iran, and in chapter 3, we see they complete the altar and the foundation of the temple right away! There is great rejoicing followed by persecution. In chapter 4, adversaries rise up against Israel and stop the rebuilding. The Jews are discouraged and become preoccupied with their own comfort, while allowing the house of the Lord to remain unfinished...for 20 years. But then the prophets Haggai and Zechariah rise up and prophesy to Israel, exhorting them to complete the task they had started, to finish building the temple of the Lord. More opposition arises. Political moves are made, but in chapter 6 we see Israel vindicated before the Persian authorities. A new king, Darius, was in power and he searched the royal archives to discover the Edict of Cyrus, which not only permitted the rebuilding of the temple of ordered that the Persian Empire help finance it! They are permitted to complete the temple! Finally, after scores of years and an arduous return from exile, the temple is finished and dedicated to the Lord with much rejoicing! It is a great day in the life of Israel. But why? Why was temple reconstruction so important? All six chapters and twenty years have been moving up to this very point. Along the way we have seen Israel living as Citizens, Exiles, and Missionaries. And now the temple is complete. Why is this so important? Here are our big questions: 1) Why was the temple so important in Jewish life? 2) How does this templecentric view of life affect us?

### **Why is the Temple such a Big Deal?**

In chapter 6 we discover that, despite enemy opposition, the Jews are freed to complete reconstruction of the temple. Ezra 6:14-15: *“And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.”* Three Persian kings and twenty long years later, the temple is completed. Why was the temple so important? The temple was of unparalleled symbolic and practical significance, partially due to its architectural magnificence but also because of its centrality to the Jewish faith. The temple could be looked to concretely for your identity as a Jew. It was the place where God put his name (Deut 12), and **his presence**, a constant, physical reminder of God with and for his people. *The temple was the presence of God.* Now, there were other key reasons the temple was so important—purity (sacrifice), law (teaching), worship (prayer and festivals), but this morning I want us to trace the development of the temple architecture in order to understand why the temple was so important.

### *Temple in the Bible*

The temple does not always take predictable forms. In fact, the first temple was in the Garden of Eden. In the ancient Near East, garden-temples weren't uncommon. Archaeologists have unearthed their remains. And if you saw *Clash of the Titans*, you may recall the scene with a garden-temple of sorts, a mix of concrete and trees and flowers. So we know it's true. That

there were garden-temples. But how do we know Eden was a temple? Well, let's consider some of the basic temple features. What is necessary to have a temple? One, the presence of **God**. We've got that. We are told that God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. Two, **priests**. We've got that Adam and Eve were priests. Priests? Am I stretching things? Not at all. In Genesis 2:15 we are told that Adam and Eve were to "cultivate and keep" or "work and guard" Eden. This word pair, in Hebrew, occurs in Numbers 3:7 as a description of priestly temple activities, where they labored for God's glory. Now, remember this book was written by Moses, so his temple-centric view of life will color the narrative. Adam and Eve are to be seen as priests in Genesis, people who labored for God's glory in his temple-garden. We can throw in a few more features—an **angel** and an eastern **entrance** (3:24). In short, Eden is a temple. The place of God's presence. [drawing] Unfortunately, Adam and Eve reject their temple responsibilities to work and guard the temple by letting the serpent in. If you recall, A&E were commanded to rule and subdue creation, all the animals, and worship their Creator. But instead they flip it. They are ruled by the serpent and worship the creature. They allow the deceptive serpent into the garden, entertain his lies about God, and don't even lift a finger to drive him out! The serpent rules over them! Sounds like Austin, where people are ruled by their dogs and worship the companionship or kitsch-iness of being a dog owner. So what happens when Adam and Eve trade God for a dog? Exile. They are exiled from the temple-garden of God's presence. Uh. Here they were in a veritable paradise, surrounded by God's presence and goodness, working in the best of all environments. Life was worship! And the screw it up; they reject God. Exiled, banished from Eden. How do you recover from that? One minute you are enjoying the presence of your very own Creator, the next minute you are banished from his presence. But God is merciful and redemptive. He calls out a second Adam, the people of Israel, and puts his presence among them. A pillar of cloud and fire leads Adam's descendants, Israel, out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey (a new garden). The glory cloud would hover over the mobile temple, called a tabernacle (Ex 33:9-10; 40:34-38). Once Israel settled into the Promised Land, they upgraded to a permanent temple, built by King Solomon. This temple was so magnificent that people travelled from afar to see it (1 Kgs 10). On the day of dedication, a glory cloud of God descended into its inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies (1 Kgs 8:10-11). So the second temple had all the features of Eden and more! Presence of **God**, now official **priests** called Levites, an eastern **entrance**. And guess what?! The book of Kings tells us that the interior of the temple walls were carved with **angels, trees, gourds, and flowers** (1 Kgs 6)! Why? Echoes of Eden, the garden-temple. Even with the advent of construction science, the temple retained its Edenic character. Why? Why not just build it bigger and better? Why not just go Frost Tower? Cutting edge. Urban temple garden.

#### *Garden-Temple Makes the Secular Sacred*

Now, why do you think Israel integrated garden imagery into temple architecture? Why the overlap of creation and religion? Isn't this category confusion? Not at all. It was very deliberate. God wanted Adam, Israel, and eventually the Church to understand that *all of life is encompassed by a temple, that all creation is context for worship, worship of God.* He didn't want them to become religious, worshipping him *merely in the so-called spiritual and sacred places, like temple or church buildings.* The garden-temple concept reinforced God's rule over all creation, not just in spiritual matters. All creation is a theatre of God's glory. With God there

is no divide between the Sacred and the Secular. We are created to offer a life of sacred praise to God *in the secular*. Worship is not an event that happens on Sunday or when we sing songs; worship is to be an entire way of life. Why is the temple shot through with creation? To remind us that worship is a way of life, that the world is an infrastructure of worship. First the Eden-temple, then the Tabernacle, then Solomon's temple, and then...let's pick up the story with Israel again. They are in the Land, with the Temple, to worship God, and they do what?

### **Temple Jesus or Dessert Jesus?**

Israel rejects the Creator and worships creation. They worship false gods instead of the one, true God. We're even told that God's glory departed from the temple. Israel is exiled from God's presence, sent to Babylon and Assyria, and the temple is *destroyed*. Israel removed from God's temple presence. Adam failed and exiled. Israel failed and exiled. 70 years away from God's presence. And then, out of his abundant grace, God releases the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and *rebuild* the temple. And now it is complete. Can you imagine the jubilation? Returned from exile, they were back in the land, with the temple or are they? Have they truly returned from exile to live life as a way of worship, to recenter their lives around the Temple, the presence of God? What about us? Are we centering our lives around God? Do we view life as worship? Or do we mark off the world with the boundary lines of secular and sacred, restricting Jesus from certain parts of our lives—sexuality, finances, family, entertainment? Is Jesus Lord over your whole life or have you compartmentalized him into Sundays or City Group? For many of us, Jesus is in a spiritual compartment that is restricted from the rest of our lives. We view him like the **old cafeteria food tray**, with all the different compartments for the entrée, veggies, the roll, and dessert. Many of us restrict Jesus to just one of the compartments, the dessert section or if we are really spiritual, maybe the entrée, but there are other sections of our lives that Christ is not permitted to be in. Jesus isn't allowed into work ethic, family dynamics, or our entertainment. We worship him on Sundays, but treat our families like crap. Some of you *men* need to do some serious repenting. You are feeding your family a dessert-sized Jesus. Your wife and kids don't see you connecting Jesus to everyday life. You don't pray with your spouse or kids, you don't apply the gospel to your use of movies, TV, computers, video games, sports. You don't lead your family in any kind of regular Bible reading or prayer. Hec, you think highly of yourself if you happen to read the Bible for yourself. You don't serve your wife. You don't have a clue the last time you bought her flowers and told her why you love her. You don't lift a finger to cook or clean. You come home, plop down on the couch, flip on the TV or computer, and eat your little dessert Jesus, watching your stupid little TV shows while your wife lingers in loneliness and bitterness and your children run around like crazy. Some of you don't have kids, but you compartmentalize Jesus just the same. You fritter your free time away on entertainment, exercise, and "culture" (which is code for selfishness). You invest very little into your relationships/City Group. You certainly don't pray for them during the week, or drop by to hang out. Life is about you and your preferences. You make very few sacrifices to serve others. And if you show up to do a missional project with your CG, you secretly give yourself a bunch of pats on the back and a get-out-of-City-Group card for the next time sot that you when would rather watch a movie, than love God's people, you don't feel bad. Oh, and you don't have time for a Fight Club *because you're too busy playing around in the rest of your God-forsaken cafeteria tray!* You've got a desert-sized Jesus. pathetic. This is what happens when we

compartmentalize worship, when we divorce the sacred from the secular, the gospel from culture, and Jesus from everyday life. What we end up with is RELIGION. But when we realize that Eden is a temple, that creation is a theatre of God's glory, that there is no dividing line between secular and sacred, then there can be no dessert-sized, compartmentalized Jesus. There can be no cafeteria tray worldview. Jesus is no longer relegated to part of the tray; he is the tray! The whole tray. He is lord of all—family, work, entertainment, future. God is calling us to obey him in all areas of our lives, in our roles as Citizens, public servants, as Exiles, peculiar saints, and as Missionaries, prophetic voices, as Mothers, Fathers, Friends, Daughters, and Sons. Will you worship or continue to play around with religion? Back to the text.

### **The Gospel and the Temple**

The temple is rebuilt in B.C. Israel is rejoicing, but will the Presence of God return pervading all of life, gathering true worshippers? It did not. In fact, Israel fell into sin again and the temple was destroyed again A.D. The Romans rebuild it in great splendor under Herod. But Israel continued to play around with religion instead of engaging in true worship. They remained in spiritual exile. And then Jesus comes along and says to the Jews: "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*" (Jn 3:19). They were aghast. How dare Jesus speak of destroying the temple of God's presence. But that is *exactly* what was required to return God's presence to his people. The temple must be destroyed. What temple? The temple of the body of Christ. Jesus was referring to his body as the temple. The *ultimate* location of the presence of God. Three days in the grave and then raised! In order for Adam, Israel, and the Church and all humanity to be reconciled to God, released from spiritual exile, to be forgiven of their sin. Punishment must be paid. Either we are permanently exiled from God's presence or we get Someone to endure our exile for us. Either we are destroyed or someone else is destroyed in our place. And the abounding, sacrificing, merciful love of God chose Christ. God crucified for our sin, selfishness, and idolatry. The body of Jesus destroyed. Grace chose a Cross. And we are told that when Jesus took his last breath, the temple curtains were torn in two. Temple destroyed. Oh the bittersweetness of the gospel. Judgment for Christ, salvation for us. Death for him and life for us. And here the sweetness emerges...when Jesus died, a new temple was rebuilt, a new dwelling place for the Presence of God—the Church. Peter tells us that the Church is a collection of living stones with Christ as our chief Cornerstone, together we comprise a new holy temple, filled with the presence of God, his Holy Spirit. Individually and collectively we are the New Temple, the place of God's dwelling, filled with the very power of God to live a life of worship. What God commands he provides. His very own Spirit to live a life of worship. For those who hope in Jesus, creation becomes the context for praise. This world becomes a place of worship. As Abraham Kuyper said, "There is not one square inch over all the earth, which Christ has not declared: 'Mine!'"<sup>1</sup> And Christ is calling us to worship him with every square inch—family, work, entertainment, finances, and our future. The Gospel has no room for a dessert Jesus. He is a grand Savior, King and Cornerstone. His temple is not confined to Eden. In the gospel, Eden is spilling out over all the earth through the church, reflecting God's redemptive reign in Christ, offering grace and joy to bring Him worship in every inch.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a paraphrase. The actual sentence from his work "Sphere Sovereignty" reads: "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence, over which Christ, who is sovereign of *all* does not cry: "Mine!"