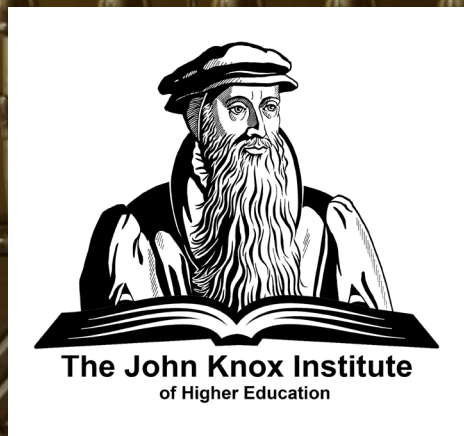


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 2 ~
THE TEMPLE THEME



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series

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Welcome to our next study on the Tabernacle. In this second session of our study, we hope together to cover two main parts. Both will serve as a preparation for the understanding of the various parts of the Tabernacle. Well first, let's review what God calls the Tabernacle himself, in the book of Exodus. And secondly, we'll trace the temple theme throughout the Bible.

God has given five designations to the Tabernacle. The first one is found in Exodus 25, verse 8, where he calls it a "sanctuary." Making sanctuary the first name that God gave to the Tabernacle emphasizes the sacredness of this building. Even if you think about the two names of the main rooms underlines this: the Holy, and the Holy of Holies. In his presence, friends, there is nothing secular, nothing trivial, nothing casual. All is sacred, even to the smallest details of spoons and bowls.



The second name, we find in Exodus 25, verse 9, where God calls it "the tabernacle." This word, tabernacle, reveals that it was the place where the Lord would desire to dwell among his people, and to meet with them. And to do this, he pitched his tent among all their tents, so that their lives may be centered around him. What a beautiful revelation of God is given in this.

Now the third name is given in Exodus 26, verse 36, where it is simply called a "tent." And a tent emphasizes also that it was a temporary, and a movable dwelling. Later, the tent was replaced by Solomon's solid temple. Yet also that proved temporary, until Jesus himself came to dwell among us as the incarnate Son of God.

And the fourth name is Exodus 29, verse 42, where it's called "the tabernacle of the congregation." And that highlights the importance that the Tabernacle was.

It was a meeting place. They were to come to him in and through the Tabernacle, to commune with him. What a privilege that such an opportunity is given.

Then the last name, the fifth name, is in Exodus 38, verse 21, where God called it "the tabernacle of testimony." And again, what a beautiful and fitting name. The entire Tabernacle is testimony. All the provisions and all the details was one great testimony to the greatness and graciousness of God's goodness. Really, it was the visible gospel in the Old Testament. In that sense, the Tabernacle in the Old Testament is the counterweight of the version in the New Testament in John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,"—that is, he came to dwell, in his Son among us—"that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Or,

to use an Old Testament paraphrase, “that we may dwell with him” forever, in his eternal glory and presence.

Well secondly, let’s trace the temple theme throughout the Scriptures. In studying the symbolism of the temple, as well as other doctrines, we will again and again see the importance of understanding the whole of the Bible as one progressive, expanding, and yet united revelation. Progressive means that God is adding more and more details to his teaching, more and more revealing as the ages move on, as the Bible was written. And yet, one message, united, woven through all the Scriptures. See not the Bible as a collection of books, but look at the Scripture as one book. And in this book God is gradually unfolding his plan, and his provision



and thoughts of salvation. Understanding that thought, it will richly deepen your grasp of the message and the comfort of the Bible, as it is written out in the Old through the New.

So let’s have a basic question. What is a temple? Maybe you answered, The temple is God’s house—God’s dwelling place. But how does the Bible define it? What is the most accurate definition? Solomon, when he stands in his newly-dedicated temple, he said this: “But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (2 Chronicles 6:18) In Isaiah 66:1, God adds, in addition to that, from his own mouth, “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?” Add to that Jeremiah 23:24: “Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.” Later, when Paul preached to the Greeks, in Acts 17, he states in verse 24, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”

So, adding up all these Scriptures, we cannot really define a temple as the dwelling place of God, for God cannot dwell in any earthly building. God cannot dwell either in an earthly temple. So the most accurate definition of the temple is God’s meeting place with man. The temple is the means whereby God is able to meet with us sinners. Notice that God himself defines the Tabernacle in that manner. Exodus 25, verses 8 and 22: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them....And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony.” In Exodus 29, verses 42 to 43, it is added, in connection with the burnt offering: “This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout all your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory.” And then if you go to Leviticus 26: “And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (verses 11–12).

Isn’t that beautiful? In the temple, God provides a place or a means, where he could dwell with us sinners. Now, this tabernacle or temple theme is found throughout all the Scriptures, with one exception—Genesis 1 and 2. In vain you look for a tabernacle or a temple in the Garden of Eden. Adam was instructed to dress the garden, but he was not instructed to build a temple. Well, why not? It was not necessary to have a designated place or a means to meet with God. And Genesis 3, verse 8 tells us that they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. The Lord communed on a daily basis with his Adam and Eve directly, though, of course, spiritually. There was no need for a temple. There was no need for a mediator there. There was no unholiness in them. There was no separation, no barrier. Now we know, sadly, that this communion

was destroyed through Adam and Eve's rebellion. Yet, God still desires to meet, and to commune with sinful man. And he did this. He did this through the means of a temple or a tabernacle. In a very, very elementary way, this is already pictured in Genesis 3, when the Lord himself slaughtered an animal to make a new coat for Adam and Eve.

Now this brings us to the first official mention of the Tabernacle in Exodus. However, we are then about 3,000 years after Genesis 1, or 2, or 3. Does that mean that there was no meeting place of God with his people throughout all those centuries, until Exodus? Indeed, in vain you search in Genesis for an officially appointed and specific meeting place, like what we see provided in the book of Exodus. And yet already, in Genesis 4, we read about an altar Abel built, upon which the sacrifice of the firstlings of his flock was brought. So there must have been some revelation of God's will on how to approach, and how to worship him appropriately. For Abel certainly did not invent his own way of worshiping God. Now, you page further through Genesis, we read about altars of the Patriarchs—Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. They were in places where they called upon the name of the Lord God. And each of these altars fit the description God gave of the altar and the sacrifices he later commanded Moses to build, in Exodus 20:24, where he says, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

So, next we come to the Tabernacle, in Exodus 24 and onwards. The point for us to observe now is that the Tabernacle was not made like any other temple that was built on the earth in the time of Moses. Mind you, Moses grew up surrounded with temples in the Egyptian culture. And notice that the Tabernacle that Moses built was entirely different, designed to the smallest details by God himself. God said, in Exodus 25:9, "According," Moses, "to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of" every instrument, "even so shall ye make it." Impressive is the moment when the entire Tabernacle is completed and set up in the middle of the camp. And then you read in Exodus 40, verses 34 and 35: "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation,"—why?—"because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

So as we continue in the Old Testament, we come to Solomon's temple. Now what we see in Solomon's temple is what we see in the Tabernacle already, except in Solomon's is a much larger scale. The Tabernacle was a glorious tent, suitable for a desert, and for a journey. But when they finally settled in the land of Canaan, it was not until the kingship of David, a permanent temple is constructed. Though Solomon's temple was magnificent, it still was not a dwelling place big and glorious enough for God. Remember Solomon saying in his dedication prayer—I said it a moment ago, but let me repeat it—"But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18)

Now after the destruction of Solomon's temple in the Babylonian conquest, the temple is rebuilt, though on a much smaller and simpler scale. To encourage the elderly who faintly remembered the greatness of Solomon's temple, God revealed a very glorious and encouraging promise regarding Christ coming to that temple. Haggai 2, verse 9 tells us: "The glory of this latter house"—that was just built—"shall be greater than of the former house, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts." Some decades before Haggai, God comforted his people also, through the prophecy of Ezekiel, who describes a new temple. Before

the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians, Ezekiel witnessed in a vision the most solemn judgment. In Ezekiel 10, verse 18, it reads: "Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house"—God left. No greater judgment can be experienced than when God left his people. But then, to encourage his believing people, then Ezekiel describes and mentions a new temple, in these words: "Moreover"—God says—"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ezekiel 37:26–27).

Now the description of another temple in Ezekiel raises many questions. Ezekiel's temple was completely structured after the pattern of what God showed to Moses, except the size of this temple is far exceeding even Solomon's temple. It's not the place here to enter into the discussion of what is meant with this temple. But let us suffice to say that this temple was never literally built. And the safest way to interpret this vision of the temple, according to many, is to see it as a spiritual representation of the living temple of God, in Jesus Christ.

And that brings us then to the next stage of the symbolism of the temple of God, in John's Gospel. John begins his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). And then John describes the eternal and the infinite Son of God, in verse 14. Well-known are the words: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory," we beheld "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." Now literally, in the Greek, John wrote the word, "tabernacled" or "tented among us." And here, he lays the link between the Tabernacle and the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal Son of God assumed our human nature—his new temple. In him, God dwelt among us. No, not in a static building full of symbolism, but in a living person full of grace and truth. Through him, we can meet God. Through him, we can approach God. Through him, we can commune with God.

How significant, what Jesus says in John 2, verse 19, in which he responds to the Jewish challenge to the cleansing of the temple square: "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up...But he spake of the temple of his body" (John 2:19 & 21). And then Jesus, as he gave up the spirit, in Matthew 27, verse 51 tells us that: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom," all pointing to Christ. In this divine act, God, as it were, told the whole world, there is no more need of an earthly temple to approach him. There remains, however, a need for a suitable mediator. If we have to draw near to God, we need to know his way. And this means now the living Lord Jesus Christ.

Imagine an Old Testament Jew reading Hebrews 10, verse 19. This would be unthinkable for any serious-minded Jew: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." For with the death of Jesus, God opened the way into the innermost Holy of Holies, or in other words, into his personal presence. And the way by which this is possible is through the living way, which is Jesus Christ risen.

Now moving on to the Apostle's epistles, observe how God continues the theme of the temple there. God speaks about his believing people as the temple. Think of Ephesians 2. After having identified that the church is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, Paul continued in verses 21 and 22: "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." How impressive is the privilege to be part of this "habitation of God"!

That we are, as believers, the temple of God. And as the Tabernacle and the temple were ded-

icated and set apart for God’s service, so are we who are called in grace to be his sacred temple. Paul again, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19) So as we will see, everything in the Tabernacle was holy—totally dedicated for God’s purposes. And now, brethren, if that was true about a piece of furniture, about utensils, how much more are believers to remember that they have been set apart for the service of God, as holy, dedicated temples for the Most Holy God?



And then finally, the Scripture ends with the description of the new heaven and earth, in Revelation 21. Noteworthy is the detail in Revelation 21:3—“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.” How beautiful is that future! God will not dwell with his people through the symbol of a building, or through the written Word, by the Spirit. But God himself shall be with them, as it says in verse 22: “I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.”

So in that blissful future, God will dwell with his redeemed people, in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. There is no need for a temple that stood apart from the people, and formed the solemn meeting place of God and sinners. Why no need? There is no more sin, and therefore no need for a temple structure, like in Paradise. God will commune with his people in an everlasting fellowship. So what Zephaniah chapter 3:17 prophesied will then be true for ever and ever, when he says, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.”

Now may God bless these introductory truths and thoughts about the Tabernacle, for his glory, and for our spiritual comfort. Thank you.