



DR. LEE FIELDS

-Distinguished Professor of
Biblical Studies

-Author at Zondervan
Publishing

READ AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE



A simple guide to understanding more of what you read.

ISSUE NO. 5 TEMPLE CONTEXT

Deeply connected to the history of Israel is the place of worship of the Lord. There are several terms used to refer to the tabernacle and temple, including the following: Tent (reserved for the tabernacle), House, Palace, and Holy Place. We can identify the following structures.

Physical Structures

1. The Tabernacle (1400–967 BC) was constructed by the Israelites in the wilderness just after they had been delivered from Egyptian captivity (Exodus 25–30, 35–40). It was portable, but sometimes it might be stationed in one locale for many years.
2. The First Temple, the Solomonic Temple (967–586 BC). David wanted to build a permanent structure in Jerusalem, but the Lord refused, and said he, the Lord would build a “house” for David; the physical structure would be built by David’s son, Solomon (2 Samuel 7:1–117). This Solomon did (1 Kings 5–8). After the split into the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms, none of the kings of Israel faithfully served the Lord and fewer than half of the kings of Judah did. Disobedience to the law, particularly the practice of idolatry plagued both. Though called to repent by many prophets, Judah continued to mix worship of the Lord with worship of other Gods. So, the Lord predicted that they would be exiled and the temple destroyed (Jeremiah 7:13–15; 25:1–14). However, he also predicted that Israel would be brought back from exile and a new temple built (Isaiah 44:28).
3. The Second Temple, Zerubbabel’s and Herod’s (516 BC– AD 70). Though the Jews returned to the land not long after 539, the temple was not rebuilt until the leadership of Haggai and Zechariah. It was dedicated in 516 BC (Ezra 6:13–18). This temple, lacking the splendor of Solomon’s (Ezra 3:12–13), lasted many centuries. Herod the Great, a prolific builder, completely refurbished the temple. This began about 20 BC and was not completed until about AD 66, almost 70 years after Herod’s death. This magnificent temple was destroyed by the Romans within four years of its completion.

Significance for Interpreters: No More Physical Temple is Needed

1. Many Bible teachers read the Old Testament predictions of a rebuilding of the temple and assume that these refer to a time future yet to us. Further, they conclude that before Jesus returns, this physical temple will be rebuilt. However, passages like Isaiah 44:28 and Jeremiah 6:31:6, 23, were written many years before the building of the second temple, and most of them refer to Zerubbabel’s Temple.
2. When Jesus talks about the rebuilding of the Temple, it is he himself (John 2:18–22). In addition, the church is the new, spiritual temple (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Ephesians 2:21–22). It is best to understand the prophecies of passages like Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 11:1–2, are best understood as symbols of the ideal “temple” that is the church and ultimately heaven itself (Isaiah 56:4–7; Revelation 21:3, 21).
3. Finally, any physical temple structure is only a shadow of the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1–2). They are very finite and imperfect pictures of the infinite glory and reality of the presence of the Lord (Revelation 21:22).

What a day that will be when we are in the most real temple, the very presence of God, forever!