

www.primitivebaptist.net

The Temple and Matthew 24:1

By Elder Keith Ellis

The temple which Jesus refers to in Matthew chapter twenty three verses thirty five and thirty eight is the one which Herod the great undertook to remodel in the year twenty BC. It is the second temple. The first temple (Solomon's) was destroyed by the Babylonians in the year five hundred eighty seven BC. And the second temple, built by Zerubbabel, was constructed on the same site in five hundred fifteen BC. After about five hundred years it began to be remodeled by Herod shortly before the time of the incarnation of Jesus. Until it was remodeled it was modest in comparison to Solomon's temple. Herod's project was a grand undertaking. It was to be a marvelous building, very expensive and elaborate. At the time the events surrounding John chapter two verse twenty took place it was said the remodeling had taken forty six years to this point and it still was not complete. In comparison, Solomon's temple took only seven years to complete. You can see this remodeled temple was a very elaborate undertaking. And it is evident from other testimony the Jews were quite proud of it and placed much trust in it.

The temple which Solomon built was the vision of King David. But because of the warring and bloody hands of David, God told him he would not build him a house. The temple was to be placed on a permanent site and would house all the vessels which God instructed Moses to make for the tabernacle. In this temple, God promised to place His name there. And at times the glory of God would fill the house. In Solomon's dedication prayer much emphasis is placed upon the idea if the people were in trouble they only need pray towards the temple in hope of receiving an answer for their petition. (See 1 Kings 8:30, 35, 38, 42, 44, and 48) From years of traditional practice, the Jews had learned to place great importance upon the temple. Perhaps too much. It is as the forgiveness of their sins, deliverance from difficult temporal circumstances, and the answers to their prayers hinged upon its very existence. (See Psalms 5:7, 137:5 & 138:2) David declares "*I will worship toward thy holy temple.*" (See Psalms 138:2) Jonah also shows he had an understanding of this principle when he says, "... *I am cast out of thy sight; yet will I look again toward thy holy temple.*" (See Jonah 2:4) Daniel, while in Babylonian captivity under Nebuchadnezzar, made it a practice to pray three times a day with the window of his room opened towards Jerusalem, the sight where the temple had been erected and where God had chosen to place His name. (See Daniel 6:10) Of course we can readily see the temple was a type of Christ and how we as Christians are to look to Him and direct our prayers towards Him.

The site for Solomon's temple is said to be the very same place Abraham many years before had offered up Isaac in obedience to God. (See Genesis 22:1-14) David purchased the threshing floor to make sacrifices on this very site. (See 2 Samuel 24:18-25) No wonder the temple was special to the Jews. The offering of Abraham's only son and the other actual sacrifices which took place on this very site foreshadowed the true and ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which sacrifice also took place close by the same site. It has been said that

Jerusalem is the center of the universe. At least it was the center of the Jewish religion up until AD 70. Today the old temple site is divided into four quarters. It is occupied by the arch enemies of Jewry, the Islamic faith. The third holiest shrine in all of Islam, the *Dome of the Rock* now sits on the same site which two thousand years ago served as the foundation for Herod's temple. The Jews, Christians and Armenians also share the old temple site with the Islamic faith. These facts reinforce the truth that God is finished with the literal site and the types which they served.

Yet it is easy to see why anyone trained under such a system would stand in awe at the announcement that the temple would be left desolate. (Matthew 23:38) It can be understood why those who heard statements which they thought threatened the existence of the temple were considered blasphemy against the Jewish religion. To say there would be no temple would be like saying God is not alive. The statement concerning the desolation of the temple must have cut to the hearts of the followers of Jesus. Especially when such a statement came from the person the disciples recognized as the promised Messiah, the deliverer, the one they hoped would restore the throne of David to them and free them from the oppression of the Roman government. But they would soon discover Christ did not place trust in the temple as they did.

Just as the Jews faithfully looked towards the temple and Jerusalem, the disciples of Jesus are to look towards Jesus Christ the true temple, and New Jerusalem, the church. The physical temple, from the Christian perspective, served as a type. Once the anti-type had been manifested there would no longer be a need for the type. This holds true with all the types contained in the Law of Moses. This is one of the reasons the temple was marked out by Christ for its later destruction in AD 70.

Let's take a look at each verse of Matthew chapter twenty-four one at a time, and hopefully we will erase any confusion which may exist about this great subject.

"And Jesus went out and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple."
Matthew 24:1

Of course Jesus had previously, two verses before this, pronounced to the Jews;

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."
Matthew 23:38

This was the statement by Jesus which prompted the disciples to attempt to show their Lord what a marvelous place the temple was. But the disciples could not yet discern that Jesus himself was the true temple of God. Nor did the disciples understand the nature of God's kingdom. They were yet waiting for their Messiah to sit upon the earthly throne of David. The Jews also expected their Messiah to relieve them from the bondage of Rome. This is evident from the question asked of Christ which is recorded for us in Acts chapter one verses six and seven;

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the father hath put in His own power."

Acts 1:6-7

This clearly shows they were looking for an earthly kingdom. Also we are reminded of the time when the multitude sought to take Christ by force and make Him a king, yet He slipped away from them. (See John 6:15) The nature of His kingdom is heavenly and Spiritual, not earthly. His kingdom may be '*in*' this world, but it is not '*of*' this world.

In the same strain I cannot help but feel for those who today are still looking for a literal earthly kingdom to be set up on the earth. They anticipate Christ coming to reign. They do not understand he is reigning '*now*' in His kingdom. At the time of the resurrection, at the consummation of all things, the end of time, we read Jesus will then deliver '*up*' the kingdom to God. At this time Jesus will submit Himself unto God. This is the same kingdom (New Jerusalem) the apostle John saw coming '*down*' from God out of heaven. This is the New Testament church. (See Revelations 21:2 and 1 Corinthians 15: 23-28) This aspect will be discussed in detail in a later chapter.

So just as they thought the kingdom would be an earthly kingdom, they also thought the true temple would continue to be an earthly one. When we read the questions the Apostles asked, **we should not assume their questions to be consistent with the truth.** Neither should we believe the spiritual understanding of the Apostles to be mature at this time. It is evident they lacked understanding of things before the resurrection of Christ. Remember, Christ opened their understanding to the scriptures after his resurrection. (See Luke 24:45) So naturally, we should not assume the recorded questions of the disciples to be ones based upon proper knowledge or of proper understanding. This may answer the reader who has often wondered why Jesus often answered a question with a question. Many of the sincere questions posed to Christ were based upon ignorance or lack of spiritual insight.

God providentially had protected this city and its inhabitants for many generations. There were some temporary lapses in this providential protection when the children of Israel were found to be walking in disobedience, with unrepentant hearts. Once again Gods providential watch-care would be finally removed, His restraining hand withdrawn, and the armies of Titus would be permitted to move against the city. It happened basically the same way when Nebuchadnezzar moved against the city and took it captive and then destroyed it in 587 BC. This also was the judgment of God being instituted in fulfillment of scripture.

God will not allow a new temple to be built in Jerusalem. This is not speculation. There is not one shred of evidence I know of in the New Testament which indicates the necessity for a new temple in which to offer sacrifices and the like. The temple, the holy of holies, the altar and all the instruments necessary to worship according to the Law of Moses were either destroyed or hidden by God on purpose and for good reason. Jesus was their fulfillment. For these things to be instituted again would be to mock the finished work of Jesus Christ.

If we consider God has prevented all attempts to restore the temple, it will help us in understanding the significance of the true, rather than focusing on the type. Again it may also be noted that the temple site in old Jerusalem today is divided. The old temple site now has the Muslim shrine, Dome of the Rock standing in its place. It is a holy shrine for those of the Islamic faith. They believe Mohammed ascended to heaven from this place. And this fact, that Islam, the greatest enemy to the Jewish faith has been permitted by God to occupy the temple site, should be an indication that the need for the man made building has been superseded by a temple not made with hands. (2 Corinthians 5:1) Not only does this hold true with the temple, but also with Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is manifested. It is of a much higher order than the old physical city of Jerusalem.

Though there is much ado among the Jews in Jerusalem today in anticipation of restoring the temple and the animal sacrifices, I do not believe the necessary items (what the Jews think to be necessary) will ever be found. An example is the emphasis which is placed on the importance of the ashes of the red heifer. Vendyl Jones, a self-proclaimed expert on these matters is in search of these ashes. He has already claimed to have found a horn of anointing oil which he says was used to anoint the kings of Israel. He is said to be looking for all the necessities to re-institute the animal sacrifices. There is much controversy which surrounds Mr. Jones and his supposed finds in the wilderness of the ancient holy lands. He is said to be watched very carefully and not to be well trusted by the nationals who have been assigned by the government of Israel to oversee his excavations. However admirable and sincere his intentions are, I believe God will never allow that which *He* instituted thirty five hundred years ago, and that which *He* destroyed in AD 70 to begin again. Though the day will come in which God will graft the Jews into the body of Christ, I do not see God rebuilding the temple. Even if the Ark of the Covenant were found, (which it will not be) or if the Jews did prevail in setting up their pre-fabricated temple on the old site in Jerusalem, God would not honor nor bless any attempts to establish what He intentionally abolished almost two thousand years ago. (See Hebrews 8:13) As for the Ark of the Covenant, it has been caught up to heaven never again to see service upon the earth. (See Revelation 11:19) Jesus, the true mercy seat, was the anti-type of the Ark of the Covenant.

Some may point to second Thessalonians chapter two verse four as argument for a restored temple, saying the son of perdition must sit in the temple of God. Now since we know the temple was destroyed for the last time in AD 70, there arises a problem for those who like to futurize scripture. Most people believe text such as Second Thessalonians chapter two verse four to be future. However we see the events described by Paul as taking place in the temple of God. This text is one which drives the idea that a new temple will be built in Jerusalem sometime in the future. Yet the New Testament says nothing about another physical temple being built in Jerusalem. But it does teach about our bodies being the temple of the Holy Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17) This is what the scripture means when it says, "...Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them..." (See Revelation 21:3) And we are the members of the body of Christ, being lively stones, built up unto a spiritual house. Again, Herod's temple was only a type of the true temple of God. Jesus many times refers to the "*temple of His body*." The temple would sometimes be filled with the brightness of the glory of Lord. (See Ezekiel 10:3-4) Does not the fullness of the Godhead abide in Jesus Christ? Yes it does. This is where the brightness of God's glory will abide for

all eternity. Does not the scripture testify that Jesus had the Spirit of God without measure? (See John 3:34) The promise to the Jews was that God would meet them in the temple and manifest His glory. Did not Jesus say, whosoever hath seen me hath seen the Father? What a wonderful blessing for you and I. “*Jesus is the true temple.*” (See Matthew 12:6 & Revelation 21:22)

So Jesus departed from Herod’s temple for the last time. He turned His back on it after pronouncing judgment upon the scribes, Pharisees, Jerusalem and the temple. (Again this is noted in Matthew chapter twenty three.) This departure of Jesus is also figurative of the glory of God departing from Herod’s temple. As He was steadily moving away from the temple, all the while He was being followed by his disciples who began to proclaim the beauty and grandeur of the temple. He intentionally led them to the Mount of Olives, where everyone concerned had a marvelous view of the temple. Christ took advantage of this opportunity to proclaim to four of His disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew in a private conversation the near future of the people, the temple, and the city. (See Matthew 24:3 and Mark 13:3)

The previous statement from Christ proclaiming the desolation of the temple prompted the disciples to persuade Christ of the temple and its beauty. Christ saw no beauty in the temple or its services. In fact He referred to it as a den of thieves. In the following text Jesus gives specific details about the future of the temple, the people and the city. He leaves no doubt about its certain destruction and desolation. If there ever was gloom and doom preaching, this is it. Keep in mind the **following verses, up to verse thirty four; refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. Period.**