**Biblical Theology Core Seminar**

**Class 5: The Story of Eden to New Jerusalem**

**Intro**

What makes a certain place sacred? Is there even such a thing as a sacred place? Is it the architectural structure of a building? Is it a certain location? Certain historical significance? Elvis Presley ate lunch there! But in terms of Christianity do we have sacred places? Why do we call the church a sanctuary? Why have people made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome and many other places along the Mediterranean?

The idea of a sacred place, a place by its very definition is connected with God, is important to the theme of the Bible. As we will see today, the dwelling place of God is central to the Bible’s storyline. We will first take a trip through the Bible, looking at theme of the dwelling place of God. Then we will take a look at the tools that help us understand the story. Then we will draw out some lessons for us today.

Take your Bible and open up to the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation, ch. 21. This is the end of the book and John recounts one more vision, he introduces it by these words: “*1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*” (Re 21:1–3)

Our attention is supposed to be drawn to this holy city that comes down and fills the new earth. And the voice announces that God now dwells alongside human beings. This is vision is the end of the Bible’s story. John though is using images that are similar to another part of the Bible, the very beginning. So flip with me to the very beginning: Genesis.

***The Garden***

We learn from Gen 1-2 that God created all things, but then created Eden, the garden, as a place for man (God's creation) and God to dwell. It was God’s divine residence a place for him to dwell, and to coexist with man. **Gen 3:8** describes God walking and talking in the garden. [Same word used in **Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14; 2 Sam 7:6-7**] **Gen 2:15** talks about how God placed Adam in the garden to cultivate and keep it, in this charge he is worshipping God. He is a priest. [Serve God’s word and protect the “temple” from unclean things.]

***The Fall***

Adam fails in his charge. He fails to guard the dwelling place of God and allows the serpent to defile the garden. Because Adam failed, the temple now defiled. Not only that but ultimately they have failed to worship God as the priests he created them Adam and Eve are then deprived of their priestly status and expelled from the sanctuary. “No longer do they have immediate access to God; no longer do they live within the garden-temple. All importantly, their actions jeopardize the fulfillment of God’s blueprint that the whole earth should become a garden-city.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

We know in the following chapters of Genesis that humanity, instead of spreading to fill the earth as God’s image bearers, grow in violence and wickedness. God sets about to “recreate” the ground, through the line of Noah. “The receding waters do provide a new beginning but human nature has not changed. People still have a propensity to sin and defile the earth.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

But like Adam, Noah’s offspring fail in their charge. And in an ironic situation in **Gen 11**, humanity instead of filling the earth, set about to build a city that will reach up to the heavens in order that humankind will not be dispersed throughout the earth. This is a complete reversal of God’s plan. God is interested in making the whole earth his residence by filling with holy people. Babel is an attempt to access heaven and avoid filling the earth. One author put it this way: “It represents the antithesis of what God intends. In light of the original creation project, Babel is a stark reminder of how far humanity had fallen and how perverted human nature had become.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

“God’s original blueprint is for the whole earth to become a temple-city filled with people who have a holy or priestly status. Tragically, the actions of Adam and Eve endanger the fulfillment of this project. In spite of this, God graciously and mercifully embarks on a lengthy process designed to reverse this setback and bring to completion his creation scheme.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

***The Tabernacle***

In **Gen 12**, immediately following the Babel event, God sought out Abraham. Reading on we understand that through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promises are set in motion for God once again to dwell on the earth. Through the patriarchs God communes with them through mini-sacrificial sites or sanctuaries. Two examples of this include Mount Moriah in **Gen 22** (cf. **1 Chron 3:1**) and Bethel in **Gen 28**.

We know that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, end up in Egypt. At the beginning of Exodus, we see that the Israelites were in part fulfilling the command God gave to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However the people did not find favor with the King, so God sends Moses as his messenger, and then God miraculously and powerfully rescues his people. In **Ex 19**, God establishes a covenant to Israel. He calls them to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” They were to be priest-kings, fulfilling the role God had intended for Adam and Eve. But how was God going to dwell among this people?

God commissions the building of a special tent. The whole second half of Exodus speaks in great detail to this tent. I am not going to go into all the details, but the tent was to have three distinctive areas. Here is how one author summarizes the structure of the tabernacle: “A curtained barrier formed an enclosed rectangular courtyard, with an entrance on the east side. Inside this courtyard stood the tabernacle, a large tent divided into two sections. Entered from the east, the first room of the tent was the holy place. In this part stood the menorah, table of the showbread and incense altar. A pair of curtains, embroidered with cherubim separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The latter room was the inner sanctum wherein was placed the Ark of the Covenant. This rectangular box served a double function, being both the footstool of a throne and a chest. Understood as a footstool, the Ark of the Covenant extends the heavenly throne to the earth; this is where the divine king's feet touch the earth. Consequently the tabernacle links heaven and earth.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

[Closer you get to the footstool, more cleanliness is needed, holiness]

Here we see pictures of Eden, and how aspects of this special tent link it to God’s plans for the earth. The cherubim guard the Holy of Holies, the entrance is from the east and like Adam the Levitical priests are instructed to serve and guard. It was to be God’s dwelling place (e.g. Ex 25:9; 26:1; 27:9; 38:21; 40:9; Lev 8:10; Num 1:50-51; 3:7-8; 4:16; 5:17; 7:1; 9:15). When it is finally erected in Ex 40:34-35 [“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle”], God’s glory filled the tent and remained within it. So through their journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, the divine presence, which appeared as a cloud by day and fire by night (Num 9:15-17, 22), was intimately associated with the tabernacle. [Moses met with God in tent- *ohel moed*--tent of meeting.] The tabernacle also shows us that the God of the universe resides with one people or nation. This idea we will pick up next week.

I should make a caveat to say that I do not mean that God’s presence is limited to a tent. The Ark, as I mentioned, is identified as a footstool points to a heavenly throne, indicating that God’s being was not contained within the Tabernacle alone.

There is so much more to dig into at this point in the story, but time presses us to move on. “The tabernacle was a small-scale model and symbolic reminder to Israel that God’s glorious presence would eventually fill the whole cosmos and that cosmos would be the container for God’s glory and not a mere small architectural container.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

***The Jerusalem Temple***

In Josh 8, we see that some of the tribes settle in the land God had promised them and set up the tabernacle, and so it is set up at Shiloh. In 1 Sam 2:12-17, we encounter the tragic event where God abandons the sanctuary at Shiloh. The tragic significance of this event is conveyed by the wife of Phineas when she names her soon-to-be-orphaned son ‘Ichabod, saying “the glory has departed from Israel!” (1 Sam 4:21). The story carries on, the shepherd David is appointed as king of Israel. With this event Jerusalem is captured and the Ark is taken up to the city. Here God has chosen his new earthly dwelling place in the city where the king of Israel lives. David though sees the incongruity of this situation. In 2 Sam 7, David laments: “1 *Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.*”” (2 Sa 7:1–2) David recognizes that his residence should not be more grand the house of one Lord God. Even though David desires to build God a grand house, God in a twist says that he will build a house for David [dynasty] and that David’s son would build a house for God [temple].

“*8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ”*” (2 Sa 7:8–16)

It is David’s son, Solomon who finally builds the temple. 1 Kings 8:10-11, describes the dedication of the completed temple, and the same language of God’s glory filling the temple that we saw earlier in Exodus is used. This means that the Jerusalem temple has now superseded the tabernacle.

When this happens the temple replaces the tabernacles as God’s earthly abode, and the reflections of Eden are seen in this permanent structure. According to Psalm 68 [“*68 but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves.*” (Ps 78:68)] and Psalm 132:13 [“*13 For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place:*” (Ps 132:13)], the Lord chooses Jerusalem as his dwelling place. Since God’s creation project is to create a temple-city that would cover the whole earth, it is easy to see how Jerusalem is viewed as partially fulfilling God’s plan. [READ Psalm 48; those who dwell in Zion are blessed because of the Lord’s presence.]

The Psalms portray this idea in so many places. A whole section of the Psalter (120-134) are songs used by those who ascended to the temple.

For 400 years, through righteous kings and evil kings the Jerusalem temple survived. Eventually, the accumulate failure of the kings and citizens of Jerusalem leads to the destruction of the temple and the overthrow of the city by the Babylonians. Isaiah 1 highlights the big discrepancy between what the people of God were to be as a holy righteous city-temple, and what they actually looked like. But the prophecies Isaiah move from the historical city of Jerusalem to the New Jerusalem of the future. But in Isaiah 2 this future transformation is anticipated. In Isaiah 65 we see visions of a future transformed city.

Other prophets as well, like Ezekiel, highlights in chapters 40-48 how even in exile is God is still committed to making the whole earth his dwelling place. He spends significant time describing this idealized temple of the future. And in the most striking to the earlier parts of the book God renames the city: The Lord is There. (Ezek 48:35) [From *Jerusalem to yhwh-salem*)

[Zechariah looks forward to a transformed city in which God will dwell. *8:3: This is what the Lord says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.” 8:7-8: This is what the Lord Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”*]

In Zechariah’s time, under the leadership of Ezra, God’s people return to Jerusalem and seek to rebuild the temple. We see in Ezra 3 that when the foundations are built some cry because they remember the glory of the old temple. But some also rejoice because they see this as another fulfillment of God’s creation plan. But further measures are needed. [Clarifications: Cyrus declaration? 2 Chron 36:23?]

***Jesus***

We see in the opening chapter of John’s gospel, God was incarnate in the flesh and dwelt among us, or tabernacled among us [John 1:14], in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the temple toward which all earlier temples look and which they anticipated (cf. 2 Sam 7:12-14; Zech 6:12-13). Jesus claimed that forgiveness of sins now comes through him and no longer through the sacrificial system of the temple. This suggests he was taking over the function of the temple, because John 2:13-17 the temple was not fulfilling its purpose it was a have or marketplace. He often refers to himself as the cornerstone of the temple (Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17). Jesus even told the Jewish leaders in John 2:18-21 that he was the temple. [Mention destruction; Luke 21].

***Church***

In 2 Cor 6:14-18, Paul makes it clear that the church (not the building but the people) is the temple of God. When we believe in Jesus, we are united with Christ and the temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) [“for we are the temple of the living God” cf. Eph 2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12; 11-12]. Paul though seems to be pointing to something more, and sees the church as just the beginning fulfillment of the creational blueprint God intended. But what exactly is it that Paul has in mind?

Accordingly, in Heb 11 Abraham’s faith is reflected in the fact looked forward “to a better land,” a “heavenly one,” a city with foundations, designed and built by God. [Read Heb 11:8-10,13-16]

*Hebrews 11:8–10 (ESV)*

*8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*

*Hebrews 11:13–16 (ESV)*

*13 These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

Abraham was waiting for a city. The author of Hebrews, like Paul, is convinced that the future experience of all believers involves a city. In 12:22 he refers once more to this city, describing it as “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” and later he states, “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14). [Mention levitical “entering the temple”]

***New Jerusalem***

The Apostle John has a vision of that which is to come in Revelation. He sees that there is yet a time to come when all that is evil and impure will be removed from this present earth. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with Men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.””

**Patterns in the story**

***Promise-Fulfillment***

I have on the handout there is the idea of promise fulfillment. But as we have gone through the story one thing stands very clear. What God intended in the Garden finds its “literal” fulfillment in the New Jerusalem. Let me explain this with an illustration: looking at something at a distance and close-up. Both are “literal”. Beale says it fairly clearly: *“…Christ not only fulﬁlls all that the OT temple and its prophecies represent but that he is the unpacked meaning for which the temple existed all along.40 Christ’s establishment of the temple at his ﬁrst coming and the identiﬁcation of his people with him as the temple, where God’s tabernacling presence dwells, is a magniﬁed view of the beginning form of the new creational temple, and Revelation 21 is the most ultimate highly magniﬁed picture of the ﬁnal form of the temple that we will have this side of the consummated new cosmos. Like the distant and close-up views of the earth, such a view of the temple should not be misconceived as diminishing a literal fulﬁllment of the OT temple prophecies.”* [Quotes in own words; Mention Abraham]

***Typology***

Remember we said that typology was a historical event, person or thing that God uses in redemptive history that foreshadows a clearer, greater and fuller event, person or thing revealed later. In our story we have a couple examples of typology:

Adam is given God’s word and he works out that obedience in the Garden. So then the true purpose of these items is taken up in the Patriarchs and then the priests. But the true high priest is Jesus who perfectly fulfills what God intended for Adam.

Eden => Sanctuaries of the patriarchs => Tabernacle => Jerusalem temple => Jesus

***Continuity/Discontinuity***

I think a couple examples of continuity include God’s original plan to fill the earth with his glorious presence. From the very beginning God was about this, and it is something we see in Revelation that he accomplished.

One major discontinuity is the idea of a physical temple in Jerusalem to be constructed. This gets to the questions I asked at the beginning, are the sanctuaries here? Is there a temple that needs to be built in Jerusalem? The discontinuity here allows us to say that no there is no need for a physical temple. Beale is helpful on this: *“To focus only upon a yet future physical temple as the fulﬁllment would be to ignore that Christ at his ﬁrst coming began to fulﬁll this prophecy and that he will completely fulﬁll it in the eternal new creation; so even if there is to be a yet future physical temple built in Israel, it will only point to Christ and God as the temple in the eternal new creation, pictured in Rev 21:22. Therefore, to focus only on a future physical temple as the fulﬁllment is like focusing too much on the physical picture of the temple and not sufﬁciently on what the picture ultimately represents.”* [Think further about Israel]

**Putting it all together**

*1) God is a holy creator*.

It becomes very clear in the opening chapters of Genesis the nature of God as creator. But it is also clear how holy he is. He cannot tolerate his temple to be defiled. That is why our story talked about the levels of holiness to be in the presence of God. He is a holy God and his holy glory will one day fill the earth.

*2) God dictates how humanity is to have relationship with him.*

Jonathan touched on this last week, but through covenants God determines how his people will approach him. Adam had full communication, sin marred that, and then God chose to speak through a messenger, then through the prophets, now he speaks to us through his Son.

*3) God intends for his glory to fill the earth.*

This is a constant refrain of Scripture. The Psalms are rich with this imagery. But as we have seen the aim of God from the very beginning is that his image bearers would make God known through their obedience to his word and their holiness. Even after the sin of Adam and Eve, and the curse that was placed on all humanity, God through his temple sought to have his glory fill the earth.

4) I*n Christ, God dwells through the Spirit in the worldwide Church.*

How do we first experience God’s tabernacling presence? By believing in Christ: that he died for our sins, that he rose from the dead, and reigns as the Lord God. God’s Spirit comes into use and dwells in us in a similar manner that God dwelt in the sanctuary of Eden and Israel’s temple. God’s presence will become increasingly manifest to us as we grow by grace in our belief in Christ and his word.

5) *Christians are the inaugurated temple, designed to expand and spread God’s presence throughout the earth.*

This is the part of the storyline in which the role of Christian “witness” and “missions” is to be understood. Greg Beale summarizes the church’s mission well: “*our task as a church is to be God’s temple, so filled with his presence that we expand and fill the earth with that glorious presence until God finally accomplishes this goal completely at the end of time. This is our common unified mission. May we unify around that goal.”*

[6. & 7. *The Church is the Temple* (1 Cor 3; 2 Cor 6; Eph 2) – Markers around the land are the ordinaces around the people. Exercise the keys of the kingdom, here among these people dwell. Church is programmatic system.]

**Conclusion**

That is the story of God’s dwelling place and presence as told through the whole Bible. Next week we are going to look the people of God throughout the whole Bible.

1. Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009. p.27 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ibid., p. 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid. p. 30 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid. p. 30-31 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ibid. p. 33-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Beale, Gregory K. “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 5–31., p. 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)