
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 17: TEMPLE

Lecture Presenter: Robert D. McCurley M.Div.



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev. Robert McCurley is the minister of the Gospel at Greenville Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). www.freechurchcontinuing.org

Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

ROBERT D. McCURLEY M.Div.

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Lecture 17

TEMPLE

Lecture Theme:

God establishes a permanent dwelling place among his people in the Promised Land, thereby pointing forward to the coming of Christ and his presence with his people in time and eternity.

Text:

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Rev. 21:22–23).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 17

When you approach a modern city by car, especially if it's a large city, you can often see far off in the distance the tall buildings rising above the horizon. Now, if you have something or someone you're eager to see in that city, that sight builds your anticipation of arriving. Well, as believing Israelites journeyed to Jerusalem for the feasts, they would have seen Jerusalem off in the distance, as they approached, elevated on high ground with the temple situated at the top. They could have seen the smoke of sacrifices rising into the sky, and as they approached, they could have heard the music. You can imagine them singing the Psalms of Ascent as they pressed forward toward the symbol of God's throne and presence among His people. Solomon's temple was truly magnificent. Unlike the beauty of any other architectural structure, it was perched at the pinnacle of the temple mount, at the highest point in the middle of Jerusalem. The Lord appointed the temple to be covered with so much gold that at sunrise, it would have [shone] as a blinding fiery splendor aglow like a little ball of sun. That image spoke volumes. Why was the tabernacle replaced by the temple? How are they similar and dissimilar? What is the connection between the temple and the kingdom centered in Jerusalem? Why is holiness such a dominant theme in connection with the temple? What is the connection between Christ and the temple? What does it reveal about the gospel? Now that the temple has been put away, how does it relate to the New Testament church and contemporary Christians? What is the connection between the temple and heaven to come?

The temple was the centerpiece of Old Testament Israel, their prized possession. The ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's throne, was lodged in the temple's interior room, the sacred holy of holies. The Old Testament believers' whole life, their schedule, their priorities and affections, were tied to this holy structure. Much later on in the Old Testament during the Babylonian exile, we find Daniel still praying at an open window facing east toward Jerusalem. You will note that he prayed at the time of the evening sacrifice. Well, how did he know

that? That's a sacrifice he had not seen for 70 years while in Babylon. Well, Daniel was still operating on God's clock, on God's appointed schedule, and his mind was still centered on the ceremonies of the temple. Listen to Psalm 137:5–6, written at the same time, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." We could multiply examples like this. Think of Nehemiah, who wept over the news of the destruction of Jerusalem and its prized temple. All of this reinforces our need to understand the theology that God reveals about this important structure within the history of His redemption. So, let's consider some of the points that we can learn.

First of all, we'll consider Solomon's temple. The tabernacle, as you will recall, was a temporary movable structure, symbolizing God's presence with His people. It served Israel while they were pilgrims in the wilderness and during the early years in Canaan. The temple, by way of contrast, was a more permanent abode. Once David had captured Jerusalem and established it as the capital of the kingdom, he desired God's throne, symbolized in the ark, to be united with his own reign from Jerusalem. All the pieces were put into place, and Solomon was called by God to bring it to fruition. In I Chronicles 28:9–10, we read David's charge to Solomon, similar to what you read in I Kings 2:2, which we noted in the last lecture, but with this addition; it says, "Take heed now; for the LORD hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it."

One of Solomon's greatest achievements was building the temple in Jerusalem, accomplished by God's strength and His blessing. The glory and splendor surpassed anything ever seen before or since. We read about the tabernacle being brought into Jerusalem and replaced by the temple in I Kings 8. The bringing in of the ark, represented the enthronement of God as King. The temple exhibited stabilization, if you will, [and enlargement] because it was a house for God's name. God says, "My name shall be there," in I Kings 8:29. But Solomon acknowledges that the heaven of heavens cannot contain God, much less the house that he built. It was merely a symbol. It portrayed the saving mercies of God and the forgiveness of sins. It also served as a witness to evangelize the nations. We read of the non-Israelite stranger who will hear of God's great name and who praise toward God's house. Then, in I Kings 8:43, it says, this is Solomon praying, "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name."

Though the temple included a great deal of intricate and artistic design, we learn that God's biblical law of worship was still maintained. Nothing was left to human innovation. It was received by divine prescription. We read in I Chronicles 28 about many of the details as well as the wealth that the temple entailed, but it says that David gave to Solomon "the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord" (I Chronicles 28:12). "All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern" (I Chronicles 28:19). It was all appointed by God Himself. We read in I Kings chapters 6 to 8 that it took Solomon seven years to build the temple. It stood as a magnificent spectacle of the beauty of God's presence. It took the breath away of all who saw it, but it did not last forever. The temple was destroyed at the time of the Babylonian exile. This judgment of God upon the sins of His people brought devastation to them. It signaled that their unrepentant sins had separated them from God's favorable presence. But God's promise did not fail, as we will learn in the lecture on Judah's return from exile, but things were never the same for Israel. Another temple was rebuilt but at a far more inferior scale. When the people looked upon the less glorious replacement, they responded with a mix of joy and sorrow. Ezra 3:12–13 say, "but many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."

Secondly, we need to think about the theology of the temple. There are many obvious parallels between the theology of the tabernacle and Solomon's temple. The basic purpose and the individual components remain similar, though the temple was far more grand in scale and glory, so we will not rehash the points covered in the earlier lecture on the tabernacle, though I would encourage you to reference and review the points relevant to this lecture. Instead, I will draw your attention to a few points of theology that are distinct to the temple.

First of all, everything about the temple is permeated with the idea of holiness. It is a holy place reflecting the presence of a holy God. The psalmist bears witness to this in Psalm 138:2, "I will worship toward thy holy

temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” The holiness of the temple was connected to the holiness of God’s name. The temple was a house unto the Lord God. We read in I Kings 9:3, and then in verse 7, “I have hallowed this house, to put my name there forever;... this house, which I have hallowed for my name.” The theology of holiness features prominently. This explains, in part, Christ’s cleansing of the temple in the Gospels. We read in John 2:15, and in verse 17, “and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables;... and his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” Christ had a holy jealousy for the glory of God in His holy house.

Secondly, one very important text for understanding the theology of the temple is found in Solomon’s prayer of dedication after the completion of the construction. This is found in I Kings 8 and II Chronicles 6. Above and beyond all else, we find the revelation of God Himself. You should notice the theological themes of covenant, atonement, intercession, forgiveness, and repentance and recovery from disobedience, all found in that prayer. As we saw earlier, it also refers to God drawing non-Israelite strangers into saving fellowship with God. All of these points could be fleshed out. This revelation of God led Solomon and the Old Testament believer to conclude, in the words of I Kings 8:23, “LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart.”

Furthermore, within the temple we find a huge, heavy, beautiful veil that separated the inner sanctum of the holy of holies from the rest of the world. It was a very thick curtain. It created a visible picture of separation from the immediate presence of God and the necessity of an atoning sacrifice offered by a holy priesthood. When Christ died upon the cross, that veil was torn open. We read in Mark 15:37–38, “And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.” Christ’s atonement granted open and direct access through His blood into God’s presence. This is why we read in Hebrews 10:19–22, “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.” It goes on, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

The temple extended the influence of God’s wisdom to the nations. People from the surrounding nations were attracted to Jerusalem, and this resulted in them bringing tribute to Solomon in subjection to him. God had promised this expansion in Genesis 15, and it became a reality under Solomon, also referenced in Psalm 72. God gathered the wealth of the nations to build His own house and kingdom, just as Israel had plundered the Egyptians earlier at the time of the Exodus. The kingdom of God and the unfolding of this redemption is central to the world and to history.

If you fast-forward in your mind, at the time of the New Testament, God raised up the Roman Empire who built roads leading to distant places of the then known world. Those roads were put to use. God had put them in place just in time for the gospel to be carried by the apostles and early Christians throughout the Gentile world. They served the advance of Christ’s greater kingdom, a kingdom greater than the Roman Empire. Today, missionaries have airplanes to enable them to take the gospel to distant places on the globe. You are using the Internet to listen to these lectures on biblical theology, though we are separated by many miles, countries apart. God causes everything to serve His plan, His gospel, and the expansion of His kingdom, and we see all of that at the time of Solomon as well where he is gathering together the resources for the establishment of his kingdom.

Lastly under this point, the temple ties together Eden, the garden at the beginning of time, and heaven at the end of time. You will note the imagery of the garden woven into the details and design of the temple. Both the garden and the temple were places where God manifested His presence to His people. After the fall, when man was thrust out of the Paradise of God’s presence, the Lord opened a way back through His own provision of sacrifice and redemption. The earlier tabernacle exemplified this covenant promise, but it comes to fuller expression in the temple. We’ll expound the connection between the temple in heaven in just a moment.

And so, thirdly, we need to think about the fulfillment of the temple in the New Testament. The New Testament makes extensive use of the theology of the temple. As with the tabernacle, the temple was a pattern and a shadow of heavenly and eternal realities. It pointed forward to fulfillment in the greater glory that would come under the new covenant. As we have learned in the previous lectures, these Old Testament ceremonies were

temporary. When Christ came, the temple and its symbols were abolished, and returning to the shadows is prohibited. We now have the realities that the temple prefigured, so the question is, where do we find the New Testament realities that the Old Testament temple symbolized? And there are four places that we find this.

First of all, Christ. The temple prefigured Christ Himself. We read in John 2:19–21, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.” They thought he was referring to the physical structure in Jerusalem. He was referring to Himself, His own body. Now why would Christ refer to Himself as the temple?

Think about that for a moment. Think about what you know about the temple, what it symbolized, what its purpose was, how it functioned within the life of Old Testament Israel. If you think for a moment, you’ll see the answer. The answer is found in Colossians 2:9, “for in him,” that is Christ, “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” Christ was the perfect and full embodiment of the presence of God on earth. That’s what the temple symbolized: God’s presence in the midst of His people. But it comes to its fullest expression in the incarnation of Christ. God’s covenant promise to dwell among His people is fulfilled in Christ’s coming.

The second place that we find New Testament fulfillment is in the church. The church is also described as a temple. Now, this should not be a surprise because Christ dwells in the midst of His Church. So, in Revelation 1, Jesus is described as walking in the midst of the candlesticks, which symbolized the churches. Now, think with me: walking in the midst of the candlesticks. That’s temple imagery, the candlestick that’s found in the temple. But in Revelation 1, we’re told the candlesticks are a symbol of the churches themselves. So, Christ is found present among them. It is Christ Who erects the Church. Remember Matthew 16:18, “and I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” In other words, we are the house that Christ is erecting. Hebrews 3:6 says, “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house we, are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.” He Himself serves as the chief cornerstone promised in Psalm 118, and His people are built upon Him and raised as a temple in the Lord. The church is the habitation of God. This comes out in Ephesians 2, the end of that chapter in verses 20–22. It says, referring to the church, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

All of the pieces are found in that passage. Each believer has a part in this house. In the words of I Peter 2:5, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.” When the church gathers for worship, the glory far excels the earthly glory of Solomon’s temple because “where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name, He is in their midst (Matthew 18:20). Our worship takes place in the very throne room of heaven. Our glory is found in the presence of Christ by His Spirit manifest in our midst through the simple ordinances that He’s given us, like preaching and reading, prayer, singing of Psalms, and the sacraments. And so, the temple finds its New Testament fulfillment, secondly, in the church.

The third area is the individual Christian. The individual believer is also described as a temple. The temple was the place of God’s presence and dwelling, as you know. The Christian actually experiences this reality. We read in I Corinthians 3:16, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” and then in I Corinthian 6:19, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and you are not your own?”

Lastly, we see the same thing in II Corinthians 6:16, “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” Well, this has far-reaching, practical implications. The believer is indwelt by God Himself. Paul says that therefore the parts of our body indwelt by the Spirit are to be employed as instruments of righteousness in the service of God not as instruments of unrighteousness (Romans 6:13). As you will note in I Corinthians 6 and II Corinthians 6, which we mentioned a moment ago, this should result in separation from sin and the world; and rather, it should bring holiness and consecration to Christ.

The fourth area that we see the temple fulfilled in the New Testament is heaven. All of this comes together and culminates finally in heaven itself. Heaven is the final fulfillment of the temple as the abode of God where God dwells with His people for all of eternity. That is why we find no temple there. We read in Revelation 21:22–23,

“And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” Just as with the Old Testament temple, nothing unclean will enter into heaven, as we see in chapter 21 verse 27. Heaven is the place of God’s holiness. So, heaven is the final fulfillment of the temple. There we see the Lord’s people dwelling in the Lord’s presence in perfect purity for all of eternity. There is the heavenly reality replacing the earthly shadow.

In conclusion, in the building of the temple, God established a more permanent dwelling place among His people in the promised land, thereby pointing forward to the coming of Christ and His presence with His people in time and in eternity. But in the next lecture, we will turn our attention to the period after Solomon and to the tragedy of a divided kingdom with one portion of Israel alienated from Jerusalem and the temple, alienated ultimately from God Himself.