

From Tabernacle to Temple

The majority of church members stay in hotels, motels, cottages and condominiums for the Feast of Tabernacles nowadays – not in tents – or in tree-branch huts. Still, all of these are *still* temporary dwellings and still have the correct biblical symbolism.

A hotel room is pleasant, comfortable accommodation for the Feast of Tabernacles and is also a nice change for an occasional vacation; but a hotel room is still a temporary dwelling. As the old saying goes: “There’s no place like home.”

In this article, I would like to look at the spiritual symbolism of the transition from God’s Tent-Tabernacles to His stone Temples.

God upgrades from Tabernacle to Temple

Many years after the completion of the Tent-Tabernacle – after the Israelites had settled down and there was a short period of relative peace – whenever Jesus (or YHWH as He was then named) wished to visit the Israelites, He “upgraded” His earthly accommodation from camping in tents to dwelling temporarily in the equivalent of “high-end” hotels – for this is how we might describe the three stone temples which were built for His earthly visits.

Although God never complained about having to camp in the Tent-Tabernacles, He *did* eventually consent to the building of a stone temple. He allowed David to collect some of the building materials, but not to do the building. God gave this job to David’s son, Solomon.

As there had been three Tent-Tabernacles, so there were ultimately to be three stone Temples to be used as temporary dwellings for the non-temporary, Eternal God – for approximately one thousand years – from about 960BC to 70AD.

The First Temple – also known as “Solomon’s Temple” – was begun about 960BC and lasted about four hundred years. It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s armies in about 586BC. Many Bible scholars think that the old Tent-Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were also destroyed at that time; but this is still something of a mystery.

The Second Temple – also known as “Zerubbabel’s Temple” was much more modest than Solomon’s. It was built by the returned exiles from Babylon under their leader, Zerubbabel, who was the grandson of King Jehoiachin of Judah. It was completed about 515BC and lasted about five hundred years. It was dismantled by the Herod the Great (who was an Edomite), apparently to build a bigger, more impressive one – not to glorify God, but in an attempt to curry favour with the Jews.

The Third Temple – also known as “Herod’s Temple” was begun about 20BC. It was very lavish and work continued on it until about 65AD – only five short years before it was burned and destroyed by the Romans in 70AD!

Were these huge stone temples really temporary dwellings? Surely they must have been permanent?

No. If they were so permanent, where are they today? Yes, their builders *meant* them to be permanent. And perhaps they were a *little* more permanent than the Tent-Tabernacles. But they were still temporary, physical dwellings for YHWH – the *Eternal* God!

Yes, the Israelites and Jews thought the stone temples were indestructible. But they alternated between misusing the temples and almost worshipping them in an almost idolatrous way:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house *{the temple}*, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates *{of the temple}* to worship the LORD!" Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'... *{This sounds like the "vain repetitions" Jesus warns against}*... For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place *{the temple}* in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:1-11)

Perhaps these were some of the factors why God allowed the stone temples to be destroyed. Despite their relative permanence, only the base stones of the “Wailing Wall” remain today.

Stones and Pillars vs Poles, Boards and Skins

There are obvious differences between the Tent-Tabernacles and the relatively permanent stone temples.

Did the Tent-Tabernacles symbolize something different than the relatively permanent stone temples? I believe that they did. But first, let us ask what the stone temples symbolized?

Did they symbolize God's home, temple, palace and throne room in heaven? Yes. Did they symbolize the church of God? Yes... but! Did they symbolize each member of God's true church? Yes... but!

Yes but what? Rather, a better question would be, "Yes but *when?*" The church and its members at what time? In what time-frame?

Are we church members anti-types of these symbols *now?* Or not until the First Resurrection?

Here is another relevant question: Is each true member of the true church considered by God to be a Pillar of the temple?

He who overcomes, I will *{future tense}* make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall *{future tense}* go out no more. (Revelation 3:12)

Yes, we will be temple pillars – if we overcome. Please note the time factor here. It is in the future and it is dependent on us overcoming.

Another question: Are church members the stones of God's temple?

Coming to Him as to a Living Stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious... *{Jesus Christ is the main Living Stone... the Head Corner-stone}*... You also, as living stones, *are being built up* a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (I Peter 2:4-5)

Yes, we are – present tense – temple stones. We are fellow-living-stones with our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ. But again, please note the time factor. We *are being* built up... *present tense!* We are stones of God's "spiritual house" (temple) which is under construction. The spiritual temple is evidently incomplete. Its completion is yet in the future.

Back to the Tabernacle

Let us go back in time again, and ask a few more questions about the old Tent-Tabernacle. The first question is this: Were there any reasons or symbolisms why God wanted three Tent-Tabernacles as well as three stone temples?

In his book, “Number in Scripture, E.W. Bullinger says that the Number 3 symbolizes ‘completion’ and ‘divine perfection.’ This concept would be a big study just by itself.

As we have already seen, the stone temples symbolize the members of God’s church collectively, both in the World Tomorrow, in the Millennium, and in the eternal Kingdom of God, in our resurrected, perfected state, and with our new, permanent, perfect, spirit bodies.

So, if the stone temples symbolize God’s church in the World Tomorrow and the Kingdom of God, then does the old Tent-Tabernacle perhaps better symbolize God’s church *today* in our temporary, imperfect, physical, human state? Evidently so! In some of the New Testament epistles, the Tent-Tabernacle pictures temporary, fragile, human life. Just one of these scriptures for now:

Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent... {the Greek_word “skenoma” means “tabernacle”}... to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent... {tabernacle}... just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. (II Peter 1:13-14)

Here, Peter was writing about himself putting off his own Tent-Tabernacle, just as Jesus had showed him. He was referring to the end of his own physical life – to his death – as Jesus had foretold back in John 21:19:

This spoke He, signifying by what death he {Peter} should glorify God.

The apostle Paul used similar “tabernacle = human-life” symbolism; but we’ll come to that shortly. First, let us ask some more questions:

What materials was the Tent-Tabernacle made up of? God’s list of materials is given in chapters 25 and 35 of the book of Exodus. Repetition, once again, for emphasis of something important?

Another question: Did the component parts of the Tent-Tabernacle symbolize anything in particular as did the pillars and stones of the stone temples?

For example, if the Church of God members are to be pillars and living stones in God’s future, permanent, spiritual temple, are we *now* – in our physical, human tabernacles like individual “tent-pillars” and “tent-stones” of God’s portable Tent-Tabernacle? If so, what parts of the Tent-Tabernacle would correspond to the pillars and stones of the stone temples?

The tent-poles and the uprights of the tabernacle would correspond to the temple pillars. The wall-boards, the ram and badger-skins of the tabernacle would correspond to the temple stones. What is the symbolism of these items, if any? This is another topic which might be worthy of further research, meditation and Bible study!

Transition from Tabernacle to Temple

Have you ever wondered what happened to the old Tent-Tabernacle once Solomon's stone temple was completed?

There was a fascinating and spiritually-significant transition period between the Tent-Tabernacle era and the stone-temple era.

It is interesting to note that, for some reason not specifically stated in the Bible, both David and Solomon kept the old Tent-Tabernacle away from the site of the new Temple, and purposely left it in the neighbouring town of Gibeon, which is about seven miles north-west of Jerusalem.

When David recaptured the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and brought it to Jerusalem, rather than bringing the old Tent-Tabernacle to Jerusalem too, he had a new tent (which was the third of the three Tabernacles) built to house it.

As already mentioned, Solomon also left the old Tent-Tabernacle in Gibeon – until the dedication of the new stone Temple. When the construction of the temple was complete, the dedication ceremony did not take place right away. It was deferred for almost a year – until the Feast of *Tabernacles!*:

So all the work that Solomon had done for the house of the LORD *{i.e. the first stone temple}* was finished; and Solomon brought in the things which his father David had dedicated: the silver and the gold and all the furnishings. And he put them in the treasuries of the house of God. Now Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, in Jerusalem, that they might bring the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD up... *{i.e. to the Temple Mount}*... from the city of David, which is Zion... *{this evidently was not the same place as the temple site!}*... Therefore all the men of Israel assembled with the king at the Feast, which was in the seventh month... *{probably the Feast of Tabernacles}*... So all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the Ark... *{Now, please read carefully}*... Then they brought up the Ark, the tabernacle of meeting, and all the holy furnishings that were in the tabernacle. The priests and the Levites brought them up.

(II Chronicles 5:1-5)

Please picture this scene. The old Tent-Tabernacle and the magnificent new stone Temple co-existed separately in neighbouring towns for some months.

Then finally, at the dedication of the new stone Temple, Solomon finally had the old Tent-Tabernacle brought to – and probably *into* – the new stone temple.

Please keep this “dedication and transition ceremony” in your mind’s eye as we compare this event with two amazing scriptures from the apostle Paul. (By the way, Paul was a tent-maker by trade. I wonder if this might be significant). I would like to quote Paul’s first of these two amazing scriptures from the Phillips translation:

So you are no longer outsiders or aliens, but fellow-citizens with every other Christian—you belong now to the household of God... *{In context, this would be better rendered “house of God”}*... Firmly beneath you is the foundation, God’s messengers and prophets, the Cornerstone being Christ Jesus Himself. In Him each separate piece of building, *properly fitting into its neighbour*, grows together into a temple consecrated to the Lord. You are all part of this building in which God Himself lives by His Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Please try to visualize each huge stone of the sparkling new temple – shaped, smoothed, polished and “properly fit into” its neighbour stones.

But it was not just the temple stones that fit perfectly. Also please visualize the venerable old Tent-Tabernacle (along with its furnishings) being carried *into* the magnificent, new, stone Temple – i.e. “properly fitting into its neighbour.”

The old Tent-Tabernacle and the new Temple were neighbours of a sort when the new Temple stood in Jerusalem and the old Tabernacle stood in the neighbouring town of Gibeon.

The old was brought in – to “properly fit” into its new neighbour.

Yes, it is true that the main functions of the old Tent-Tabernacle building was taken over by the new one, and that some of its furnishings were replaced by new, larger ones. But the actual tent itself, and some of the original, old furnishings – including the Ark of the Covenant – were brought into the new Temple.

The spiritual aspect of this event is made even clearer by Paul's second "amazing" scripture:

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent... {Greek "skenos" means "tabernacle" and here symbolizes our temporary human bodies}... is destroyed, we have a building... {the Greek word here implies a building under construction}... from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven... {i.e. our new spirit bodies}... if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent... {"skenos" again}... groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed... {now please note this carefully}... that mortality may be swallowed up by life. (II Corinthians 5:1-4)

At the end of its useful life, the old Tent-Tabernacle (along with the Ark and the other old Tabernacle furnishings) were taken up into the new stone Temple. Thus, the old Tent-Tabernacle was "further clothed" by the new Temple building. The old Tent-Tabernacle was "swallowed up" by the new stone Temple.

This transition evidently symbolizes *our* old "Tent-Tabernacles" – *our* temporary mortal bodies being "further clothed" – or *newly* clothed – being "swallowed up" by our new, permanent "Temples" – our new Spirit bodies – and eternal life!

Amazing? Exciting? Encouraging? Yes it is! And it continues even further!

The Father's Tabernacle

Each year at the beginning of the fall Holy Day seasons, God gives us some symbolic transitions – first, from the regular non-holy-days to the Feast of Trumpets; then from one Holy Day to another. As we approach the end of the Feast of Tabernacles and all of its wonderful promises and symbolisms –

and as we move into the Last Great Day (also referred to by some as The Eighth Day) with its even-more-wonderful promises and symbolisms, we often read this scripture, Revelation 21 beginning with verse 3, which serves as yet another transition from the symbolisms of the Feast of Tabernacles to those of the Last Great Day:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle... {tent or habitation}... of God {the Father} is with men... {once human, but then Spirit beings}... and He will dwell {skenoō: as in a tent}... with them... {just as His Son did}... and they shall be His people, and God Himself... {the Father}... shall be with them, and be their God.

Remember the original Tent-Tabernacle builders, Bezaleel and Aholiab? The name “Aholiab” means “Father’s Tent.”

Now, let us jump down to verses 22 and 23:

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty {the Father} 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 {the Father} did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Here we see that God the Father and the Lamb of God are the ultimate Temple. They are also the ultimate brilliant Light (John 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; Colossians 1:12; James 1:17), which formerly cast shadows (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 8:1-5; 10:1) – two of which were the Tent-Tabernacles and the stone Temples.

Remember the other Tent-Tabernacle builder, Bezaleel? The name “Bezaleel” means “Shadow of God.”

Like Jesus Christ – the personal Word of God, the written Word of God is also the Alpha and the Omega from its beginning to its end! God’s Word is a true miracle. It is like a miraculous jig-saw puzzle!

At the fulfillment of the Last Great Day, God the Father promises to move Himself and His dwelling so that He can dwell with His children. But this time not in a temporary dwelling. When God the Father comes to this earth, it will not be to a temporary dwelling. It will be to a *permanent* home. God the Father promises that He will then dwell with His children forever!

*John Plunkett
Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada
Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada
December 30, 2010*