

May 13

Explanation of the Temple

As we study through the Bible in chronological order this year, we enter into the era of the United Kingdom – an era time when all of Israel was united under a single king. The first king was Saul, then David and then Solomon. It's the only time in all of Israel's history when they were united under a single king.

Well, one of the great accomplishments during that time – was the building of the temple – a massive building in scope and purpose. David collected all of the materials for the temple and then Solomon was the one who went ahead and built it.

It was built on the top of the highest part of the highest hill of all of Jerusalem. Any visitor who came during that time couldn't miss seeing it. The stones for the temple were hewn out of solid rock – massive stones the size of boxcars. And each of these stones was laid one on top of the other to create a marvelous visual experience – an architectural marvel for its day.

The structure of the temple is a lot like these nesting boxes. Each one fits conveniently inside the last box and they get smaller as they go. Now the largest of these boxes is the outer courtyard. It was 500 cubits wide and 500 cubits long. That's 750 ft. by 750 ft. Imagine 2½ football fields each direction making up the outer courtyard. All the people who worshiped the God of Israel were welcomed there. They might be ethnically Israelites or foreigners, they might be men or women, but what they had in common is that every last one of them worshiped the one true God of Israel. These are the courts where Jewish people would meet for feasting and celebration. These are the courts that Jesus would teach in when he came to Jerusalem. These are the courts where Jesus drove out the moneychangers and these are the courts where the early church met for the very first time.

Move a step inside to the inner court or the Court of Priests and you'll find an awful lot of features that remind you of the tabernacle. The first thing that you would experience is a massive altar called the Altar of Sacrifice where all the sacrifices that were required by the Law of Moses would be brought on a regular basis.

Moving beyond that, you would find the laver where the priests would wash and cleanse themselves before offering the sacrifices and ten other mini lavers not too far away. Just beyond that would be a place for the slaughtering of animals with an advanced drainage system that would take the blood out of the temple area.

Moving inside to the next box is the temple building itself. The first room that you would enter into in the temple building is the Holy Place, a place where only the priests were allowed to go. The dimensions of that room were 30 feet wide by 60 feet deep, and as you entered, you would recognize three things. On the left-hand

side would be the lamp stand with its seven branches representing the light or the revelation of God. On the right-hand side was the Table of Showbread that had on it the bread the priests were able to eat. But it reminded them of something that is not physical bread but spiritual bread consuming God's presence and God's truth. And directly in front of you, you would see the Altar of Incense where incense was burned all day long as a sweet aroma to God representing the prayers of the priests on behalf of God's people that were sent up to Him from the holy place.

Then just beyond the Table of Incense would be the curtain – 30 ft. high and 30 ft. wide. Now that is a serious curtain! It was six inches deep and embroidered onto it was cherubim warning anybody who came that they are not to enter there. Only the high priest could go in and only once a year to offer sacrifices in the holiest place on behalf of the people of Israel.

In the next box beyond the curtain was the Holy of Holies – a room that was a perfect 30 ft. cube. In the middle of that room was the Arc of the Covenant – a box that held the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna that they ate in the wilderness and the staff of Aaron. On the top of the Arc of the Covenant was a gold-plated top called the Mercy Seat that had two cherubim on it and it was thought that the very glory of God was made manifest in this location right between the wings of the cherubim. Even God himself said that this is the place where my name will dwell – the holiest place on all of Israel.

There are some important things to note about the temple. Just like the tabernacle – the symbolism is a foreshadowing of Jesus. In the smallest box, the Arc of the Covenant, you have Jesus as the fulfillment of the law – as our great high priest and as the provision of God. At the curtain, you have Jesus saying, *"I am the way"*. In the Holy Place, there is the Altar of Incense, which reminds us that Jesus is offering up intercession for us – day and night before the Father.

The Table of Showbread reminds us that Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life."* The lamp stand reminds us that Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world."*

Moving out to the inner courtyard, we hear Jesus saying, *"I will wash you of all of our sins"* and the laver reminds us of that. Then you have the great Altar of Sacrifice that reminds us that Jesus is our ultimate sacrifice – the one who gave himself in order to pay for our sins and now we no longer have to sacrifice any animals because Jesus is our once and for all sacrifice.

It's all very meaningful, but without the symbolism of Jesus, it's just a bunch of empty boxes. It's just empty religion. God lives on the box called the Arc of the Covenant, and that box is inside the box called the Holy of Holies, which is inside the box called the Holiest Place, which is in the box that's called the Inner Courtyard, which in turn is in the box that's called the Outer Courtyard. In time, this was just God in the Box. It became a religious system devoid of any meaning. The temple became the place where you came to visit God twice a year. It was the ritual, it was the system that gave life order and structure, but God in the Box is

devoid of any kind of spiritual life. It's convenient to put God in a box, isn't it? When we reduce Him to religion, he doesn't interrupt our plans, our comfort or our morality too much. We kind of like him to be tame and controllable and docile. We like to have God in the box because we want Him to be there when we need Him, but not mess with our lives too much when we don't need Him.

But if God is in the box and we control him, then who's really God? No matter how hard we try and put him in the box – God is God and we're not. We may want to put him inside the box, but He's never going to stay there!