

Picture 5: The Temple



Seven Pictures of God's People (Part 7)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme, "Seven Pictures of God's People." In this series of studies we've been looking in the mirror of God's Word to find out what kind of people we are in God's sight as God's redeemed people. We've not been looking at ourselves primarily as individuals, but rather as God's people collectively.

The particular section of God's Word that we've been looking into is Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. This epistle contains seven successive pictures of God's redeemed people. So far, we've looked at the first four pictures:

(1) The assembly, the governmental body;

(2) the body, the visible agent of Jesus in the earth;

(3) the workmanship, the creative masterpiece of God;

(4) the family, determined by our relationship to our heavenly Father.

Today we're going to look at the fifth picture, the temple. Like the two previous pictures, this also is found in Ephesians 2, in verses 19–22. This is what Paul says—and we're going to go on from the picture of the family to the picture of the temple. Verse 19 presents the picture of the family:

> "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, [I suggest that the best modern version of that would be, 'members of God's family.' Then Paul goes on to say:] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets…" (NIV)

He moves on from the picture of the family to the picture of the building. As a matter of fact, in the Hebrew language in which Paul undoubtedly taught much of the time, the word for a house, or a home, or a family, beit is directly connected with the word "to build," so there's close connection in Hebrew thought between a family and a building. In fact, the word "house" was used in Hebrew not to describe a physical dwelling, but rather a family of people. Those two thoughts

always go together.

Going back then to Ephesians 2:20:

> "...Christ himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord, and in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit." (NIV)

Notice the emphasis on building there: built, building, temple, built, dwelling. Five times the thought is brought out in those verses.

Now there's a principle clearly unfolded in scripture which is this: That God has always required His people to provide Him with a dwelling place. I'll just give you a few examples from the Old Testament. When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to Mt. Sinai and gave them His first covenant. One of the first things He required of them was that they build Him a tabernacle, a kind of remarkable tent. And this tent was the dwelling place of His shekinah glory, His manifested presence, and that traveled with Israel all the way through the wilderness.

Then, when God brought Israel into the Promised Land, into the land of Canaan, He gave them instructions that in a certain city of His choice, which was Jerusalem, they were to build Him a temple. And this was built by Solomon, a most magnificent edifice, I suppose, perhaps the most glorious, costly and elaborate edifice that has ever been built by humanity. But, owing to Israel's idolatry and disobedience, this temple was destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar; and then in due God in His mercy granted Israel a restoration from Babylon. And again, one of the first things they had to do was build Him another temple.

So this is the principle all through, that God requires His people to provide Him a dwelling place. And it's interesting to note that in every case, He did not leave the decision about the dwelling place to His people, He determined it. The materials that I mentioned, the type of structure, and so on—all were predetermined by God.

However, the Bible also makes it clear that these buildings which we've looked at—the tabernacle and the two temples—were only patterns of something infinitely more valuable and important. This is brought out very clearly by the words of Stephen, the first martyr, to the Jewish council, recorded in Acts 7:48–50:

> "However, the Most High [the true God] does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?' says the Lord. 'Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?'" (NIV)

So any material building constructed by men, no matter how wonderful it may be, is not the final dwelling place of God. It's just a temporary place that He honors with His presence as long as His people meet His conditions. The final, eternal temple of God, the one of which all others are just a preview and a pattern, is made up of people. People are the most valuable thing in the universe. And the temple of God has obviously to be made of the most valuable material which is not gold or silver or marble, but people. This is clearly brought out in various passages of the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 17, Paul says to the leaders in Corinth:

> "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." (NIV)

It seems that Corinthian believers were somewhat ignorant of what they really were intended to be. That's one of the important reasons for looking in the mirror of God's Word to see what we really are. Paul kind of rebuked them. He said, "Don't you know that you're God's temple? You'd better be careful how you behave."

And then again in 2 Corinthians 6:16:

> "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God, as God has said, 'I will live among them and walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people.'" (NIV)

That's a quotation from the Old Testament, and again the implication is that if we are to be God's people, and He's to dwell among us, we must provide Him with a temple.

Again, in 1 Peter 2:4–5:

> "As you come to him [Jesus] the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual

> house to be a holy priesthood…" (NIV)

So in this spiritual house which God is building for His eternal dwelling place, you and I and all our fellow believers together are living stones, and we are being built together to constitute the final, eternal house which God has destined from eternity, which is bringing into being now, and of which all His previous dwelling places in the Old Testament were but previews and patterns.

In connection with this picture of believers as God's house, each believer an individual living stone being built up into this house, I'd like to say a little about the process of building, particularly in the city of Jerusalem. I've spent a number of years of my life in Jerusalem. One of the interesting things about Jerusalem is that both under the British mandate and under subsequent governments, the only material for building houses or other buildings that was permitted in Jerusalem was stone. This has greatly helped to preserve the unique character and beauty of Jerusalem. So all permitted buildings in Jerusalem are built out of stone, and there is a quarry somewhere to the north from which many of the stones are gathered.

For some little while in the 1940s, I lived in a town north of Jerusalem and I used to drive regularly in the bus past this quarry where they quarried the stones and then carried them into Jerusalem to be built into the houses. I remember one day seeing a stone that had fallen off the truck on its way into the city and just got left by the roadside. And nobody ever stopped or bothered about that stone. Nobody picked it up; it was just left there. And I thought, "How tragic that some believers are like that. They've been quarried out, but they've never been built in. And they've somehow fallen off the truck and they're just left by the roadside, and they're not really finding their place in God's purposes."

This is what it says about the Temple of Solomon, which is very interesting because it's a picture in 1 Kings 6:7:

> "In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built." (NIV)

That's remarkable. The dimensions for every stone were predetermined, and every stone was shaped and cut into its predetermined dimensions at the quarry, so that there was no last-minute hammering or chiseling in the actual structure of the temple.

Now I think that's like what God is doing for you and me. He quarries us out of this world by the gospel, and then He proceeds to shape us right now, so that when the final edifice rises, there'll be no more hammering and chiseling. We have to be ready to be shaped now. And that's a process that we all have to undergo if we're going to take our part in that temple.

So now let's take the two-fold application again at the end: the essential feature and what's required of us. Well, I think the essential feature of this picture, the temple, is that it's God dwelling place. That's where God is going to reside forever. You know, it's a remarkable thing in the Bible, we always think about getting to heaven. But if you study the Bible, the ultimate purpose of God is to get heaven to earth. The last picture of God's people is a beautiful dwelling place coming down out of heaven to earth.

What's required of us? Well, I think it's clear. We've got to be willing to be quarried out, to be shaped, to be chiseled, to have our edges knocked off, to fit in with a predetermined dimension, and to be made ready before the final structure arises. That's something. Are you ready to be shaped, to be cut, to be chiseled, to be fitted?

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the sixth picture.

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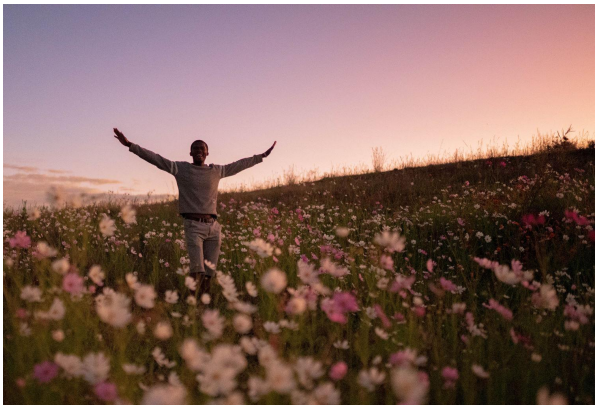

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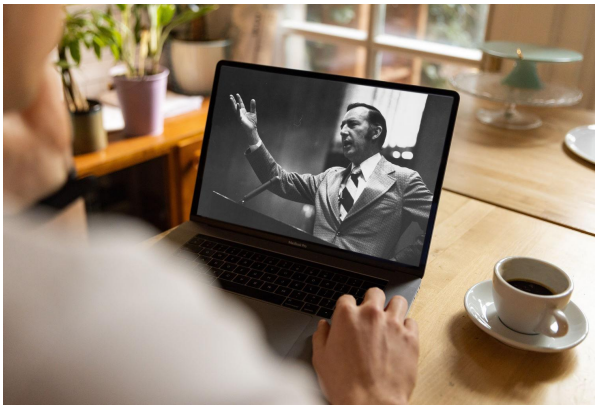

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