

## The Temple Has Come. Immanuel!

December 17, 2017

This past week, one of my spiritual heroes died. I didn't agree with him on everything, but I don't agree completely with most people. But this man taught me to think bigger about God. This man had a passion for God's glory and primarily, God's holiness. My foundational beliefs were shaped by this man. I still remember when I was in junior high and my dad had just come home from going to a conference with this individual. I was sitting in the back of the van listening to the things my dad discovered. Then, as I was older, I listened to some of this man's teaching. In college, I got a hold of one of this man's books and read some of it – and even some of it shaped my understanding of certain biblical passages.

My understanding of Jacob wrestling with the Lord, my understanding of Isaiah 6. My understanding of God punishing Uzzah. My understanding of Martin Luther. My understanding of apologetics even has been heavily shaped by this man who goes by RC. Now, this past week, God called RC Sproul home. So, when I heard that he had died, I was sad, but I also was happy for him. He's in the presence of the Lord – the One who gripped him sixty years ago.

RC Sproul was a faithful teacher who highlighted the doctrine of *justification*. This doctrine refers to how people are accepted in God's sight. One time, Sproul said people used to believe that we were justified by their works. Other people believe we are justified/accepted by a mixture of our faith and our works. But in our day, he said, people believe we're justified by death. In essence, if people believe there is a God, they believe God essentially accepts everyone. He's loving, right? And we're not that bad, right? So, when we're dead, he's going to accept us.

This pervasive view of acceptance before God completely misses the truth of Scripture. And, this view of acceptance totally negates the necessity of Jesus coming in the flesh. I mean, if we're basically good and God is going to accept everyone, what's the purpose of Jesus? Christmas (i.e. – Jesus coming in the flesh) is pointless. We might as well buy into all the stories of Santa and then solely focus on presents under a tree.

But that's not the case. God is majestic *and* holy. He's terrifyingly glorious. And we humans rebelled against him. There's a horrible predicament for humanity because God is just in punishing sin – and we, by nature, are sinners. Yet, we were created to find our fulfillment, identity and hope in being reconciled with God himself. How can we be brought back to God? This is where Christmas comes in. And this morning, I want to show to you how Jesus fulfills the longing of our soul.

But, I'm not going to go to a manger story account. Instead, I'm going to do today what I did a couple weeks ago. I want to take you back to the Old Testament and show you more of Jesus' glory and what he accomplished when he came in the flesh. So, like I said last week, this sermon might require greater focus and thinking because there are puzzle pieces we're putting together here this morning. Whereas a couple weeks ago, we focused on Old Testament puzzle pieces related to the doctrine of the angel of the Lord. This week, we're focusing on the Temple and how Jesus not only fulfills the temple requirements, but is himself the Temple!

I know this might not sound very exciting at this point, but this is a sermon I've been wanting to preach for about a year now; so, I'm very excited to share this with you. But, this might take a little while to gain

traction before you start seeing the beauty of the pieces coming together. So, let me pray for us, and then we'll move right into the Old Testament.

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The title for this sermon is "The Temple Has Come." And with that title, I am stating my belief that Jesus is the Temple. But what does that mean? In order to understand this, we have to go throughout the Old Testament to see what God himself says of the Temple. We will focus on creation as a temple. Then move to the tabernacle, Solomon's Temple and then the Second Temple after the Babylonian Captivity. Now, I'm not going to teach everything there is on the Temple. I'm only going to give highlights, but in order to write this sermon, I was deeply indebted to a specific book – a book I'd encourage you to read. It's called *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, and it was written by J. Daniel Hays.

As we study certain truths related to the Temple, you will begin to see how no human being can be accepted simply by their own death, but instead, we will see God's splendor in contrast to our sinfulness, and then we will see how we need One who is Holy who can bring us back to God. To see these things, we must now go all the way back to the beginning with creation.

### **The Creation as a Temple**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and Genesis 1 and 2 focus on the power of God in creating all things we see. Many commentators notice the verbiage of the creation account as having similarities with temple talk. In other words, God created all things we see as a Temple for his glory. And we are to be priests who worship him in all we do. As vice-regents in this creation, we have the highest value as being created in his image – and our fulfillment is found in being in the gracious presence of God.

This is what we see in the creation account. After God creates Adam and Eve, we discover that God reveals his presence in a special way in the midst of a garden. In this garden, there is foliage and food. There's beautiful stones and gold. But the greatest glory is revealed in Genesis 3:8. Moses writes, **"<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden"**<sup>1</sup>

This word for "walking" is also used of God's presence in the tabernacle. So here, in Genesis, we have an aspect of worship. God revealing himself and people enjoying his presence. Then, in the midst of this Garden of Eden, there's one special tree – the tree of life. This tree reveals that in God's paradise is life. We also discover that in this paradise, God also gives Adam work to accomplish. God commands him to "work it and take care of it." The only other times these two verbs are used together are actually in reference to the Levites guarding and ministering in the sanctuary. Then we are also told that a river flows out of Eden to water the garden. Interestingly enough, in Ezekiel's vision of the temple, a river flows out of that.

When we put these pieces together, we can see why commentators would believe that creation was a temple, and Eden was essentially a Holy of Holies. God's presence was revealed and Adam and Eve had direct communication with the Lord.

But everything changed when Adam and Eve believed the lie of the serpent. Instead of trusting the Lord, Adam and Eve desired to be at the same level as God. In the moment of eating the fruit, Eve wasn't simply disobeying a small rule. Eve was declaring her love for herself and her desire to usurp the reign of

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 3:8.

God. She declared herself to be autonomous of God by eating the fruit that God created. How could she survive in a world God created? How could she know life, meaningful work, worship, relationship without God as central? She can't. She suffered and so did all of creation. But not only Eve. Adam as well. As the representative and leader, Adam failed.

So, God punished both. He placed them outside the garden. And **outside the garden is separation from God's gracious presence, death, struggle and pain.** We're told then that God places cherubim to guard the entrance of garden of Eden, which is on the east side of the garden. Just so you know, an east entrance is important. The tabernacle's entrance is on the east and so is Solomon's temple. So here, we have cherubim guarding Adam and Eve from being able to eat from the tree of life because if they eat from the tree, they will remain in sin and never enjoy God's presence. So, God sends Adam and Eve away from the garden. And, Adam and Eve (along with their children) receive all the curses their sins purchased.

At this point in the story though, we should be shocked that God allows them to remain alive at all. In fact, God allows people to live long enough to have children and have an ancestry. Why? Because God promises Eve that there's going to be a woman's seed that is going to crush the serpent. Someday, the curse will be abolished. Life, meaningful work, worship, relationship and feasting will return. But not yet. What's very interesting in Moses' writing of Genesis is the fact that Moses continues to point out that people are heading further east – away from the garden of Eden.

In moving away from Eden, we see what people do when they reject God. Longing for worship, but not for God, they build a tower to try to gain access to heaven. We see people living life without thought of God – and God justly punishes the whole earth with a flood. In thinking of Noah's Ark, we should be humbled and silenced at the absolute perfection of God. Humans are wreaking havoc in his creation. God warns and punishes and yet people still head east of his presence.

But even in people's rejection of God, God has a plan. In Exodus, we read of a man named Moses. Having fled from Egypt as a murderer, we read the following of him in Exodus 3:1 – **“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”**<sup>2</sup>

Do you see it? You're probably thinking, “see what?!” I get it. Most of us read this verse and we simply see the details of what Moses is doing and where he is. But let me give you a hint. If we have been picking up on the theme of sinners moving to the east, then we should see something here. Do you see it now? Moses, in fleeing Egypt, began to head west. He was not planning on an encounter with God's presence. While not sewing fig leaves to cover up his sin, he had done just what Adam and Eve had done by fleeing and hiding. Yet, we see even in Moses' sin, God is providentially drawing not only Moses to himself – but a people to himself. God speaks to Moses through a flaming bush that isn't disintegrating. And Moses eventually obeys what God tells him.

As you know, God sends Moses to Egypt. Moses does go and *long story short*, God sets the Israelite people free from Egypt. Eventually, they make it to Mt. Sinai. God reveals his glory to Moses on this mountain with flashes of lightning and a thick cloud. People can't even touch the mountain or they will die. But, Moses comes down having been affected by the glory of being in God's presence.

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 3:1.

In the midst of this show, people sin against the Lord and create something else to worship. People are punished, and yet God doesn't destroy all. What the people receive is God's command for them to build a tabernacle.

### **God's Presence & The Tabernacle**

What's interesting about all of this is that fact that God hasn't only drawn Moses westward, but he's drawn a people westward – back to his presence. And, in the tabernacle specifications, we see God telling people that they can come into his presence again. But it is a veiled presence.

Having said this, listen to some of the things about the building of the tabernacle. Now, if you're anything like me, when you read Exodus and you get to parts of the tabernacle building, you might start yawning. Or, you might be upset that you're not understanding what's being said there. You wish you knew why things mattered so much. Or, maybe you wish you could just skip past the rest of the Pentateuch and go to Joshua – or maybe just stay in the New Testament. I hope, this morning, in giving certain details about the tabernacle that your eyes might be enlightened and your heart overjoyed in God.

So, stick with me here. First, I want you to see the connections that the tabernacle has with creation itself. In the creation account, we read, "And God said" seven times. In the tabernacle account, we read, "Then the LORD said" seven times. Not only is God the Supreme Ruler. But God is the LORD – meaning, the covenant-keeping God. He's revealing promises in the building of this tabernacle. And God always keeps his promises.

As we look at the construction of this tabernacle, we quickly discover that Moses is the mediator of the building of it. And in this building, gold and precious jewels are mentioned. Wait a second, gold and precious stones are mentioned in Eden, too. As I said earlier, the entrance of the tabernacle is to face the east, just like Eden. And, as within the creation story, God rests on the seventh day; so, the final statement after the completion of the tabernacle, the people are reminded of the command for Sabbath rest in Exodus 31:12-18).

Now, this tabernacle is broken up into two interior parts. There's the holy place that only the priests could enter into. In this holy place, they were to work and take care of things (same words as with Adam in creation). They were also to worship God, and they did this on behalf of the nation of Israel. This holy place was a 15x30 rectangle. And in this place was a **table with the Bread of Presence**. On this table were to be twelve loaves of bread, gold plates, dishes, pitchers and bowls. But this table was to be treated as special. It was only to be handled by poles. This signifies God's holiness. People's hands are not worthy to touch what God calls holy. Yet, this table also signifies fellowship. It signifies friendship and covenant relationship. God is calling people to fellowship.

In addition to this table, we find a **golden lampstand**. This lampstand is intriguing. It's in the shape of a tree. But this tree is on fire. Does that sound like anything? It perhaps reminds us of Moses speaking to the Lord through the burning bush. But there is probably more to this. In the Bible, trees can signify life. And fire speaks to the light of God's presence being consuming and powerful. And so, while I think this speaks of the burning bush, I think this also takes us back to the Tree of Life, too. You'll understand more *why* I believe this when we move further along, so just log this away for a while now.

One other interior piece I want to mention is the **incense altar**. This altar was to be carried by poles as well, signifying the holiness of God. On the annual Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the

Holy Place, he had to ensure that incense was coming from the altar and actually wafting from the altar into the next section of the tabernacle – the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was where God revealed more of his glory. And yet, when the High Priest entered, his presence had to be shrouded with smoke. What does this remind you of? It should remind us of Sinai where smoke covered the mountain. God's presence still must be veiled before humanity or else we die!

One of the most beautiful realities of the tabernacle structure (to me) are the interior walls of the holy place. They're linens of beautiful pure-white sheets. The white describes royalty as well as purity and holiness. But do you remember what's embroidered on the interior linens? With bluish-purple-reddish-purple and crimson wool yarn, cherubim are embroidered on some of the linens. When were cherubim mentioned before? At the entrance of Eden. But there, they were keeping people out. In this scenario, they, in a sense, worship alongside a priesthood. And they even allow one priest access to the Holy of Holies.

This holy of holies is 15x15, and it could only be entered one time a year on that Day of Atonement. Within the holy of holies is one thing: the **ark of the covenant**. Interestingly enough, the word "ark" is not a good translation. The word in the Hebrew is simply "box." In this box, God commanded Moses to put the 10 commandments in it as well as a jar of manna and Aaron's budded and blossomed staff. All of these items symbolize God's protection, provision and covenant. But they also are a reminder of Israel's disobedience and grumbling. Even in the midst of their sin, God showed mercy.

And so, on top of this box is what some call the **atonement cover**. Many of us have heard it referred to as the mercy seat. But that can sound misleading. It's not a chair. It's a cover. And the word "mercy" isn't close enough to the root word for this cover. The root word means "to cover or smear over." On the Day of Atonement, the priest would come in with the blood of the sacrificed animal and put it on the cover of the lid. This signified that the sins of the Israelites in just the past year deserved death. And there was death on their behalf so that they could be forgiven.

Now, over this lid are two cherubim. Their wings span the length of the cover and touch each other – and the cherubim are looking down at where the blood would have been smeared.

As we think about the interior of the tabernacle, we see jewels and gold. We see cherubim. We see representations of a garden. We see people with meaningful work. We see the ability to begin to worship God. We see God's presence as central to living. And, once this tabernacle was built, we read this in Exodus 40:34-35: **<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> 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.**<sup>3</sup>

This tabernacle continued for quite some time, but as we look at Israel's history, the people begin to treat the tabernacle and the box of the covenant like a lucky rabbit's foot. What we see is that God is more concerned about the people desiring him than simply being able to have a location for the ark. God has made humans to worship him – not sideline him.

Yet, over time, the people don't value God as Ruler over them. Like Adam and Eve, they want their way when they want it. The priests aren't faithful as priest and the people aren't faithful in the land God has placed them. So, they request a human King. God warns them but also gives them what they ask for.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 40:34–35.

Most, if not all of us, know the disaster that took place through King Saul. But then you get to David. He yearns for God to be worshipped by all the people of Israel. God blesses David. And David wants to build a new place for the ark of the covenant. God communicates that he doesn't need it, but also states that David can't build it because he's a man of war. So, he says a son will build the temple. David begins to get supplies so his son, Solomon, will build a temple.

### **God's Presence & The Temple**

And, once Solomon is King, he does build a magnificent temple. Like Moses, it seems Solomon should be a faithful mediator in building this temple. But Solomon isn't a faithful mediator in this building. I'm not going to go into all the details of this Temple like with the tabernacle, but let me say this. I don't believe that God was referencing Solomon when he said there was one of David's sons to build a temple. Listen to the wording in 1 Chronicles 17:11-12: **I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>12</sup>He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.**<sup>4</sup>

David naturally assumes it's going to be the son who becomes the next king in Israel. But God doesn't explicitly say that here in these verses. That said, God condescends to Solomon's attempts. And, it is a grand condescension because Solomon was not righteous in much of his kingly rule. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20, future kings are commanded to adhere to three things: 1) do not acquire a great number of horses, do not multiply wives, and make a copy of the law, read it and follow it. In 1 Kings 17, we're told Solomon had fourteen hundred chariots and 12,000 horses. In that same chapter, we're also told that Solomon took 700 wives and 300 concubines. Whatever God meant by "do not multiply wives or acquire a great number of horses," it's obvious that Solomon disobeyed the Lord. In addition, we have no comment on Solomon writing the law. Maybe he did. Maybe he didn't. But even if he did, then he's even more culpable. Now, some of you might say, "But Solomon brought such peace. I don't think he was a bad king." But listen. External peace doesn't mean there's real peace. Prosperity isn't equivalent to godliness. Solomon's story is one of irony. He has an appearance of godliness, but he denies the power. And, by the way, this fits even my understanding of Ecclesiastes. If you went through that series, you may remember me saying that I believe the book was written at the end of his life and there are statements of much regret in Ecclesiastes.

If we have this understanding of Solomon being disobedient to the Lord, then this plays into our understanding of the building of the Temple. When you read about the tabernacle construction, there is a slew of reference of God commanding the building. But with the Temple, it's Solomon commanding. The only word we get from God is in 1 Kings 6, and it's a warning: <sup>12</sup>**"Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep all my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my word with you, which I spoke to David your father. <sup>13</sup>And I will dwell among the children of Israel and will not forsake my people Israel."** <sup>14</sup>**So Solomon built the house and finished it.**<sup>5</sup>

If we have a backdrop of Solomon being a disobedient King, then it makes verses 12-14 sadder. God tells Solomon that he wants his heart and Solomon simply builds the house and finished it. And even in the building of the temple, he dishonors the Lord. In constructing the temple, 1 Kings 5 tells us that Solomon forces Israelite labor to build the temple. Solomon is more like the Pharaoh of Egypt than like Moses.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ch 17:11–12.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ki 6:12–14.

Solomon also hires a Canaanite to build the Temple. And in contrast to the tabernacle building, we see many references of Solomon commanding and Hiram obeying Solomon. No command from the Lord to Solomon. Finally, as Solomon builds all of this, he receives a lot of wood from the king of Tyre. And so, Solomon, in payment, gives the king twenty towns in Galilee! This is no small thing. Solomon gives back the promised land that was taken in conquest!

With all of these details, Hayes writes, **“Centralizing the worship for all Israel at the temple in Jerusalem should be a joyful event and a strong nationally unifying event, as is the construction of the tabernacle. Ironically, however, it is the forced labor involved in the construction of the temple (and Solomon’s palace) that sparks the terrible civil war that violently breaks out immediately after Solomon’s death, splitting the nation apart”** (Hayes, 34% digital book).

Without faithful obedience, the temple has no point. God is not interested in impressive temples. The problem of humanity is that they refuse to worship Him – and no building is going to make people worship him more. God is jealous for our worship, and we need to worship him. Only in him do we have life and meaning.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple**

History moves on in Israel, and finally, God decrees the Israelites to be taken in captivity by Babylon. In the midst of the captivity, the prophet Ezekiel has a vision of a chariot-like structure with wheels. Above that is a crystal-like expanse and then God seated on his throne. Four living creatures who are cherubim seem to give this throne its mobility. Ezekiel sees the idolatry of the people – even in the temple. Men are worshipping another god with their backs towards the temple. And then we see God slowly move from the temple. He exits the temple mount and moves to the Mount of Olives.

Ezekiel’s message is devastating. God is not going to bless the people with his presence. But in the end of Ezekiel’s prophecy, Ezekiel sees a new future temple. This temple is more glorious than can be fully imagined! In the midst of despair, God brings hope.

So, after the captivity, Ezra and Haggai both are involved in building a temple. It’s an economy version, and there’s great passion and zeal for God’s glory. God does bless the people with revival. But what’s so intriguing in this story is that God doesn’t descend on this temple. Why? Is God displeased with Ezra and Haggai? No. In Haggai 2:9, we read, **“<sup>9</sup>The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.”**<sup>6</sup>

This temple seems to be connected to the coming of God’s glory in a new and more spectacular way. Now, I’m coming to the end of this sermon and you’re thinking, “Pastor Timothy, what does this have to do with Christmas?!” And I’m so glad you’ve asked. Hundreds of years come and go, and by the time of the birth of Jesus, we have this 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple modified. Hayes writes, “The temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus had been largely constructed by Herod the Great, a ruthless Idumean king who came to power with the assistance of the Romans, murdered numerous people including the babies at Bethlehem as well as two of his sons and his wife, and who also constructed pagan temples. . . . Likewise, . . . [it] is being run by corrupt priestly families who have risen to power through financial and political means. . . .” (Hayes, 76% online book).

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Hag 2:8–9.

God's glory does not descend in this temple. Humans have repeatedly shown their sinfulness against God and they have also revealed their nature to worship, but they won't worship God. And God seems silent. For hundreds of years, his glory is withheld from the temple. Has God decided to not forgive people? Does only doom await?

### **God's Presence and Jesus**

No. One prophet named Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 7:14, <sup>14</sup>“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”<sup>7</sup> Immanuel. This word means “God with us.” For hundreds of years, God has withheld his presence from the people, but God speaks through Isaiah saying that God will come and be with his people again.

And so, in John 1:1 and verse 14, we read, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**<sup>8 14</sup> **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**<sup>9</sup>

What we don't see in the English is the word for “dwelt” that is used in the Greek. It could more literally be translated “tabernacled.” The Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us. And he revealed God's glory. The wording of John here is that Jesus, Immanuel (God with us), is the Temple of God. Jesus is the offspring of David who is bringing the Temple of God to us.

So, two thousand years ago, within the womb of Mary, God's glory descended and took on human flesh. There, Mary became a holy of holies. And upon his birth, priests didn't come and worship, but shepherds were welcomed to worship the Shepherd of Israel. Jesus, God in the flesh, tabernacled with humanity and revealed God's glory wherever he went.

But there's more. Jesus also says of himself in Matthew 12:6, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.”<sup>10</sup> Jesus is superior to the temple because he is what the temple pointed to! In fact, he is the temple that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple pointed to. When Jesus talks of destroying the Temple, he was speaking of that temple being destroyed, but he was also talking of his own body because destroyed but raising from the dead in three days.

And in Jesus' death, he was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of people. His blood, not the blood of an animal, was shed for people in their place. He took the punishment sinners deserved. And God accepted Jesus' sacrifice. So, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead with a resurrected body. And now all who turn from their sins and turn to him as their Lord and Savior, are brought back in relationship with God.

Oh, but there's more. For those who trust and follow Jesus, we are now connected to him. And we are considered his body. Therefore, the Bible says <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Is 7:14.

<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 1:14.

<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 12:6.

<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 3:16.



As a result, Peter says we are now a kingdom of priests to our God. Hold on a second. Like in the Garden of Eden, we can fellowship with God and we are restored as kings and priests under the Rule of our Creator.

But there's more. Revelation 21:22 says, <sup>12</sup>“**22** And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.<sup>12</sup> And Revelation 22:1-4 says, **“22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.<sup>13</sup>**

Do you see how this is better than the tabernacle and temple? Do you see how this is even better than Eden? We have a new creation. Revelation tells us elsewhere that the Tree of Life will return and we will eat from it. We are also told we will feast with him in fellowship. There are no angels keeping us from worshipping him. No veil holding us back from his presence. Instead, in this New Heaven and New Earth, we see a garden-city with angels. There, in that place, are precious stones. There are trees. There's a river coming from the throne of God and the Lamb (which is the Temple). And we behold his glory shining in all of its grandeur. There, people perfectly worship the Lord. They are in his presence. And there's no smoke to shroud him. We will see him face-to-face in glorious relationship. All the temple and tabernacle pictures point to this glory!

Jesus is the one who brings all of this to us. And he brings this because he came in the flesh. He dwelt among us to bring God's glory to us personally. So, when you think of Christmas, think of the holiness of God – that he is wondrous and we are rebels. But also think of this wondrous God choosing to rescue rebels and accepting us – giving us a new home where we will give worship and experience eternal life, relationship, meaningful work, and provision from the Lord. This is what we were created for. This is what Jesus freely gives in himself! Immanuel! God with us.

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<sup>12</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 21:22.

<sup>13</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Re 22:1–4.