

## 2. The Formation of Sacred Space in Christ

By His own affirmation, Jesus is the subject of all the Old Testament Scriptures. And since the Old Testament is the record of God's redemptive determination and its progressive outworking on the stage of history, it follows that redemption has its focal point in Christ's person and work. But the ultimate goal of redemption is the recovery and consummation of sacred space. God sent His Son into the world for the purpose of renewing and restoring the whole creation to Himself; His eternal will is that, in the administration of the fullness of the times, He would sum up all things in Christ Jesus.

Thus the New Testament affirms that Jesus is the fulfillment of sacred space. In Him and by virtue of His work, the estranged creation has been reconciled to its Creator, the focal point of which is the reconciliation of the Father and His image-son. And recognizing that Jesus is the fulfillment of sacred space and that all of salvation history leading up to His coming was determined by and directed toward this fulfillment, it becomes clear how all things that preceded Christ come to converge in Him.

All things converge in Him, but they equally flow out of Him. Everything subsequent to the "Christ event" presupposes and draws upon it just as everything before it anticipated and prepared for it. And in that God's ultimate purpose in Christ is the consummate realization of sacred space, one would expect that, just as sacred space is fulfilled in Him, so also it is *formed* in Him. This is exactly what the New Testament reveals, and it does so in three primary ways.

a. The first has logical primacy and points only indirectly to the formation of sacred space in Jesus. This is the fact that He is presented as the *destroyer* of the earthly temple. The temple epitomized sacred space as the realm in which God manifests His relational presence in His creation, especially with respect to His image-bearer. Sacred space is God's design for His creation, so that the indication of the temple's demise couldn't help but raise the expectation of some sort of recovery.

1) The Old Testament witness, in fact, shows that such an expectation is fully warranted. Each manifestation of the Lord's earthly sanctuary met its appointed end: The portable tabernacle was superseded by Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, and that temple, in turn, was torn to the ground by the Babylonians. Inasmuch as they were temporal and symbolic, the sons of Israel should never have expected them to continue forever, and the same applied to the second temple constructed under Zerubbabel.

During the time of its construction, the Lord sent Zechariah to Zerubbabel and the recovered exiles to encourage them to complete their work of rebuilding. Together with Haggai, he affirmed Yahweh's presence with them in their labors and His intention that the glory of this latter temple would exceed that of its predecessor, however insignificant and inglorious it appeared to them by comparison. Strength and resolve for their work were to come, not from what they saw, but what Yahweh promised.

And what He promised was that this second temple would indeed be completed because it was appointed for an even greater glory – not in physical grandeur and adornment, but in the *peace* that was coming to the world in connection with it (Haggai 2:9). At the appointed time, Yahweh Himself – not merely His glory-cloud as previously – would come to this sanctuary in the person of the messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1).

The recovered exiles were to build with all confidence and zeal, not because the second temple was itself ultimate, but because ultimacy – the fulfillment of sacred space – was to come in relation to it. Zechariah punctuated this truth by his reaffirmation to the exiles that the Davidic Branch would build the true sanctuary (thus fulfilling Solomon’s work as the typological fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant) (6:9-15). The exiles’ labors were vitally important in the outworking of Yahweh’s purposes, but only as they carried forward His ancient promise. *The sanctuary they were building was to serve a prophetic and preparatory role in anticipation of the Branch and Yahweh’s true house* (cf. again 4:1-10).

The fact that the second temple looked to a sanctuary beyond it implied that, like the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, it was not to continue forever. Even if by virtue of *fulfillment* rather than physical *destruction*, it would not long endure. But more than its prophetic significance, the second temple’s short lifespan was indicated by the fact that it was erected and existed in the context of Israel’s continued covenant unfaithfulness. The nation’s spiritual adultery had brought the destruction of the first temple; how, then, would its replacement escape the same fate?

2) What the prophets intimated regarding the end of the second temple the New Testament gospel accounts explicitly proclaim. The arrival of David’s Branch indicated the passing of Zerubbabel’s temple, a truth that Jesus Himself affirmed by His *words* as well as His redemptive *work*.

- After introducing Jesus as the incarnate Word who is the tabernacle of Yahweh among men (1:1-18), John records Jesus’ own declaration that He is the true sanctuary (2:18-22). So it was that, when a Samaritan woman later questioned Him regarding the place where men are to meet with God, Jesus explained that, with His coming, the worship of God was no longer a matter of geographical proximity, but authentic spiritual intimacy. Jesus’ presence in the world meant the fulfillment of sacred space, and this meant the obsolescence of the temple in Jerusalem (4:1-24).

And what Jesus implied by His identity as the true sanctuary He made explicit by pronouncing Jerusalem’s coming destruction. The temple would indeed pass away, but not strictly by fulfillment; it, too, was to be torn down (Mark 13:1-2; cf. Luke 19:41-46).

- Jerusalem, as the “city of the great King,” and the temple, as His throne, were to be destroyed because of unbelief and rejection. Not recognizing the day of Yahweh’s redemptive visitation (cf. Luke 1:68-69), Jerusalem was to again be made desolate, never to be restored to its former glory. The reason was not the seriousness of her sin, but the fact of *fulfillment*. By virtue of Christ’s atoning death, resurrection, and enthronement as the Son of David, sacred space had at last been fulfilled. Zion was now to be restored, but as a spiritual dwelling and sanctuary rather than a physical one (ref. Isaiah 52:1-54:17). The physical sanctuary – which had served to *separate* God and man as much as bring them together – had served its pedagogical purpose; true intimacy had been secured in connection with the true sanctuary, putting an end to the veil of separation between divine Father and image-son (Matthew 27:51).

Thus the end of Zerubbabel’s temple signified two things:

1. First, it paralleled the destruction of Solomon’s temple, testifying to the estrangement between Yahweh and His chosen people. The Jerusalem temple epitomized the covenant relationship between God and Israel (ref. Exodus 25:1-8). It spoke of the Father’s faithful and loving commitment to His “son” and the son’s privileged obligation of sincere, single-minded devotion. Israel’s rejection of its covenant Father reached its apex with its rejection of His singular Son (John 8:41-42, 15:20-25; cf. Matthew 21:33-42; John 19:12-15), and Yahweh testified to that rejection by destroying the symbol of covenant intimacy (cf. Luke 21:20-24, 23:27-31).
  2. But more than that, the destruction of the second temple showed Israel and the world that it had served its prophetic and preparatory purpose. What the temple symbolized and held out in promise had now been realized in Jesus, the true sanctuary. The tearing of the veil at the moment of Christ’s death poignantly affirmed this, and Yahweh wasn’t about to allow the Jews to repair the veil of separation and continue their shadowy ritual worship when the substance had come (cf. John 1:17 and Matthew 5:17 with Matthew 12:1-8 and John 5:45-47; note also Colossians 2:11-17).
- b. In His person and by His work Jesus effectively brought an end to the physical second temple. But consistent with the nature and basis of that destruction, He is equally the *builder* of the new temple.
- 1) This, too, was promised in the Old Testament, specifically in relation to David and the Davidic Covenant. David had desired to build a permanent sanctuary for Yahweh, and He had responded by promising His king that a son of his would build His house (2 Samuel 7:1-13). Later, the prophet Zechariah reiterated this covenant oath in connection with the construction of the second temple (ref. again 4:1-11, 6:9-15).