

The Temple of God or the Temples of Men

By George Davis and Michael Clark

Down through the ages, men have always felt compelled to build a house for God, the God who created the universe. Even when Moses and Elijah showed up to minister to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, the first thing out of Peter's mouth was, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matthew 17:4, NKJV). Peter wanted to capture the moment, to enshrine it within the works of his own hands. However, what seemed "good" to Peter was of little interest to God. As we shall see, Peter's response to this glorious event is typical of man's response every time God moves in the earth. Almost without exception someone steps forward saying, "it is good for us to be here. . .let us make here."

A host of temples are strewn over the reformation trail, each one built upon some mountain-top experience. They stand as testimonies of religious man's propensity to progress only so far with God and then build--to permanently attach himself to a prior move of God at the expense of the present truth. Tragically, what man builds so often serves as an anchor, marking the end of forward progress and the beginning of the fight to defend their fixed institutions and unique brand of orthodoxy against all who would attempt to continue on. God was not impressed with Peter's new public works program. He answered out of the heavens, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" Build a house for God, His prophets, or His Son? The God that is omnipresent! Whatever gave men that idea? As we shall see, it was not God!

It is clear that the first temples for deities were constructed in ancient Babylon. Throughout Babylon, every city had its own local deity, and each deity had a large temple in which he or she was worshipped. The larger cities had many temples and chapels dedicated to one or more gods. It is estimated that the city of Babylon itself had more than 50 temples during the time of Abraham. "The cella, or inner part of the temple, in which the statue of the deity stood on a pedestal in a special niche, was the holy of holies, and only the high priest and other privileged members of the clergy and court were permitted to enter it. In the temple complexes of the larger cities, a ziggurat, or staged tower, was often built, crowned by a small sanctuary, which probably was reserved for the all-important sacred-marriage ceremony celebrated in connection with the new-year festival." (*Encarta Encyclopedia*)

The concept of a house for a deity is as old as the tower of Babel. The Babylonian concept was a sanctuary where the deity the temple was dedicated to dwelt in the "most holy place." These existed over 430 years before Moses received the pattern for the "tabernacle of witness." Does this strike you as strange? That God's tabernacle should bear such a close resemblance to the Chaldean temples? As we look back over the history of God's dealings with mankind, in His incredible redemptive love and patience He has repeatedly related to man within his current perception of deity. He did this in order to lead man on to a greater understanding of Himself. If man could perceive Him in no other way, He met man there so He might lead him forward. For this very reason, God sent His own Son into the world as God's Word incarnate. Jesus, not only came with a message, He WAS the message. Up until then no one-- not even Abraham--knew who God really was. Even Moses only saw God's back as He passed by. Hence throughout the Old Testament scriptures we see the continuing revelation of God's name, His very character.

The apostle Paul referred to God's way of building upon previous truth when he stood in the Areopagus at Athens. Surrounded by idols, he saw an altar with the inscription, To the Unknown God (Acts 17:23). So Paul said to them, "Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you." The problem with religion is that it so often consists of worshipping "the unknown God." Or as Paul says here, "the One whom you worship without knowing." Then Paul makes a definitive statement, announcing the end of an era and the beginning of another.

"And the times of this ignorance (referring to the unchecked idolatry around him) God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Paul explained to these superstitious people who this "unknown God" is and what His attributes are.

"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things." (Acts 17:24-25)

Here Paul is addressing man's tendency to relate to the Lord of heaven and earth with a pagan mentality, as though He dwelt within temples made with hands. Relating to

God in a pagan mentality has been a reoccurring problem down through the years and is still a problem today.

In Hosea's day Israel related to God in the same manner as the worshippers of Baal, even calling God by the names of "Baali" and "Baalim." God had long suffered the "times of this ignorance." However, "in the latter days" (3:5) "it shall be at that day, says the LORD, that you shall call me Ishi (husband), and shall call me no more Baali" (Hosea 2:16). The days of ignorance are at an end. God winked in a time of ignorance but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

Note that this prophecy is for the latter days. It is for today. Over the years ignorance has been slowly dispelled, as God has little by little removed the names of baalim from the mouths of His people. In the last days the Bride He has wooed is called forth to know Him as Ishi (Husband). We, His bride, are called to attend a wedding feast. In Revelation 21:2 we see the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, depicted as a bride adorned for her husband. This is the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy, for God will have led His people into an understanding of Himself as "Husband" and themselves as the "Bride."

From Tent to Temple

How many times has God "winked at" man's flawed concept of who the Divine is? He stooped to relate to man in spite of his erroneous thinking. Man could not imagine relating to God in any other way than the deity inside a temple, but from the very outset God was clear that this was not His best. He allowed this ignorance only for a season. Therefore, over the years of God's dealing with man we see an ongoing separation of God from the house. We can learn much by going back to the beginnings of the first Hebrew temple as first conceived by King David in Jerusalem.

Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains." Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go and tell My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel

up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever."

According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. (2 Samuel 7:1-17)

David spoke what was in his heart when he said, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains." Note the use of the word "dwell" here. Religious man's concept of a temple is a dwelling place for his god. David's thinking was still influenced by the traditions of religious men. God was about to send Nathan back to David with a qualifying word. At first Nathan had given a general approval to David's aspiration to build a dwelling for God. However, God posed several questions that are revolutionary even to our thinking today. "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved about in a tent and in a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about with all the children of Israel, have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'"

God didn't seem very excited about David's plan, just as He wasn't excited about Peter's idea to build three tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration. God had another idea in mind, one that defines His purposes even today, which is, "I will build YOU a house." God is not nearly as interested in what man can build for Him as He is in what He can build in and of yielded vessels. Yes, God would build David a house and He would set up David's Seed after him, Jesus Christ the Messiah. It is this Seed (singular) through whom God would establish his kingdom and build a house for His name forever. By what authority can we claim this? Read what the Apostle Paul said when he spoke of a certain Seed.

Of that Seed He says, "[Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made.](#)" He does not say, '[And to seeds,](#)' as of many, but as of one, '[And to your Seed,](#)' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:16).

In the book of Acts, Paul referred to this same singular Seed again when he said,

[And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior--Jesus. \(Acts 13:21-23, NKJV\).](#)

Jesus is the "Seed" of Abraham and David and He is the builder of the true temple of God. Nathan went on to speak for God saying, "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son." David wanted to build a house out of cedar, but looking into the future, God saw the house that His Son, the Son of David, would build. He looked to the day when Jesus was to build a house for God's name; the spiritual temple made of the spirits of true believers as living stones, to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. As Paul put it, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" (1 Corinthians 3:16.)

The establishment of His house, His throne, and His kingdom forever, can apply to no other than to Jesus Christ. Zechariah also spoke of Jesus building God's temple when he wrote, "[Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD."](#) (Zechariah 6:12, NASB).

After a forty-year reign, David the son of Jesse died, full of age, riches and honor. David's son Solomon, still a mere child, now sat on the throne of his father. It appears that Solomon was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the kingdom. It is also clear that he did not take these responsibilities lightly. David stored up materials for the building of the temple of the Lord, still thinking in terms of a temporal house for God, but because he was a "man of blood" the LORD would not permit him to build it. That duty fell to Solomon, the son of peace. In a sense God was allowing a physical house to be built because He was still "winking" at the ignorance of man that would presume to build a dwelling for God. Solomon was about to learn otherwise. Solomon sought the Lord with a thousand burnt offerings, and on that very night God appeared to him saying,

"Ask! What shall I give you?" Solomon replied, "Now, O LORD God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" (2 Chronicles 1:9,10, NKJV).

The Lord, greatly pleased at Solomon's request, replied.

"Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life--but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king- - wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like." (2 Chronicles 1:11,12, NKJV).

Shortly thereafter, Solomon began the construction of his temple. However, in his wisdom Solomon saw something that even his father David had never seen before. He saw what God had revealed to Nathan the prophet. Even though David had stored up for the construction of this glorious piece of architecture to which even the temples of Egypt paled in comparison, Solomon knew that God could not be contained in a house build with the hands of men for he said,

"But who is able to build Him (God) a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him?" (2 Chronicles 2:6)

Solomon recognized that the only use for the house was to burn animal sacrifices before God. Unlike the heathen gods made of wood and stone who could easily be contained in temples made with hands, the God of Israel was too vast for the heavens themselves, let alone a temple, no matter how glorious it was. Here we see the wisdom of Solomon. He had seen through the prevailing concept of deity, the way Israel had attempted to relate to God in the manner of the pagans round about. It was time for this ignorance to be cast off.

The time of this ignorance was coming to a close. God required an animal sacrifice for sin and that was what the house was for. Nothing more! It served no other purpose. When animal sacrifices were abolished, the need for temples and buildings dedicated to God ended. This is why, when Jesus, the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin was offered, God rent the veil of the temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus said, "It is finished," the need for the altar of animal sacrifice was done away along with the need to house it. All the types and shadows in the design and purpose of the temple were fulfilled in Christ. From that moment on, God no longer delighted in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin (Hebrews 10:6). David had an understanding of this truth in Psalm 51 when he prayed, "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise." The burnt offering was an interim measure, typifying the coming "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." It was a temporary means to an end. "But Jesus, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).

Solomon's insight demonstrates a wisdom that had been shown only by the prophet Nathan. Solomon saw in a prophetic glance the true worth of the temple he was about to construct. It had no worth except as a place for the offering of the obligatory animal sacrifices under the law. Later, through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord made the very same point to a people who placed their trust in their man-made temples. Thus says the LORD:

"Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build for Me? And where is the place of My rest?" (Isaiah 66:1)

After the crucifixion of Christ, Stephen, the first martyr of the new ekklesia of God, was charged with heresy. While standing before the same Sanhedrin that had condemned

the Lord Jesus to death, he explained God's view of religious man's attempts to confine Him in a temple. They had called false witnesses to testify against Stephen. These "witnesses" said, "This man ceases not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple) and the law." (Acts 6:13) In short, Stephen was accused of threatening the establishment, the status quo, and the whole power base of the Jewish leaders. The charges levied against Stephen were not totally false. It is reasonably certain that Stephen did say something that could be construed by the unenlightened mind as an attack on the temple. In fact, Stephen went on to offer what the Jewish elders would consider collaborating evidence. There was true genius behind Stephen's panoramic, historic synopsis--a genius comparable to the Wisdom of Solomon. Truly he was full of the Holy Spirit.

There is more to be gleaned in a brief overview of Stephen's message than in the particulars themselves. The entire discourse is a single argument refuting the charges brought against him. Stephen recounted the roving past of their forefathers. He tracked their journey as pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, describing one phase of their migratory history after another. He began with Abraham, who was called out of the land of the Chaldeans to a land that God would show him, the very land in which they now dwelt. Then Stephen discussed Abraham's offspring, and how God revealed to Abraham that his progeny would also sojourn in a strange land, and that they would be in bondage for four hundred years (Act 7:6). Stephen then went on to tell how the patriarchs moved to Egypt. He reminded them how after 400 years of slavery, God delivered their forefathers to begin the pilgrimage toward the land of promise. They were still sojourners, still strangers.

We know that before Israel departed Egypt they were commanded to take "a lamb for a house," slay it, apply its blood to the door posts and cook the lamb and eat it together with bitter herbs. This meal was the first Passover. All who ate this meal were to be fully prepared to travel.

Exodus 12:11 And thus shall you eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover.

This is more than symbolic!

Having become a partaker of the Lamb of God, everyone who is born again must be ready to travel. He must eat with his loins girded, with his shoes on his feet and his

staff in his hands. The Passover meal is a call to exodus. If we do not eat this feast with staff in hand, we will stay behind, lost in types and shadows, rather than following on to know the Lord. As unthinkable as it may seem, people find security in bondage. They find the whole concept of exodus frightening at best. It requires faith to leave the security of the known and journey into the unknown--to dwell in a strange land. It requires the faith of Abraham.

Before they killed him, Stephen addressed Israel's refusal to go on with God. From the time of righteous Abraham, who was "a pilgrim and stranger in a strange place," God led them through the period of the judges as a migratory people. But now they had become a static people with a static understanding, refusing to progress with God. God does not change, but He is constantly calling us forward into His own perfection, His eternal purposes and a more perfect manifestation of His bride. Man seems traumatized by insecurity in such a nomadic context. Man loves the predictable, what he perceives to be stable and constant. Buildings are a testimony to man's insecurity and represent the rebellion of man against the change that following God demands. Buildings are like fortified cities that shield people from the faith required to progress with God into the new or unknown.

"Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). Stephen was about to meet the same fate as his Lord, at the hands of the same persecutors, for the very same reasons. Before we become too critical of the Jews, ask yourself a question. In all of church history, were any messengers bringing reform not resisted? If there is such an instance we cannot find it. Those who praised what God had done in the past always resisted the messengers of change. They always resisted the Holy Spirit.

This is not a uniquely Jewish problem. We must earnestly desire God's will over our own or we, like the Jews, will not be able to say, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the LORD." We will take up stones and resist the present truth and all who bring it. We will sew up the torn veil and defend the edifices that represent the previous move of God. There are only two choices before us.

1. We will resist the Holy Spirit, clinging to the things of the past, refusing to forget those things which are behind, which in time will stink like yesterday's manna.

2. We will reach forth to those things which are before, pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of Jesus Christ, counting all else dung that we might apprehend that for which we were apprehended of Christ Jesus.

The children of Israel were called out unto the land that God had promised. Hence Stephen referred to Israel in the wilderness as "the church (ekklesia) in the wilderness." They were called out just as their father Abraham had been. This is very significant. They were not just called out of Egypt, but unto the land of promise. Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders that they were a people of calling, a people not just called out but unto, implying a journeying on, following the cloud. The "Wise Men" were wiser than those Stephen spoke to, for they also were called out of Babylon to kneel before the Creator of the universe. Not one of the so-called "holy men" of Israel went forth to honor Him when these foreigners made their purpose known. Israel refused to be called out. They would not hear of it!

Just as God called Abraham out of Ur of Chaldees and used Moses to call the people of Israel out of Egypt, Jesus issued another call, a warning to forsake the old. He issued a warning to flee Jerusalem and temple worship when He said,

For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:43,44, NKJV).

The temple of Herod was leveled along with Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans and there has not been a Jewish temple since. You cannot be a Jewish follower of God without Jesus any more than you can be a Christian without Him. Stephen quoted a scripture which makes this point conclusively.

This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Acts 7:37).

Like Moses, Jesus leads God's people out of bondage and into liberty. He leads His people from the bondage of religion and its powerless forms that do nothing but serve as a constant reminder of sin (Hebrews 10:3). He leads us forward into the utter freedom that is found only by abiding in Christ, as those "who worship God in spirit and in truth," and once purged should have "no more conscience of sins" (Hebrews 10:2).

"But Jesus, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). He said, "It is finished." What could be added to that? In a sense Jesus did exactly what he was accused of. He destroyed the temple. In a single act of obedience, by "ONE SACRIFICE," He made its function null and void forever. Jesus fulfilled all that the temple bespoke. "There remains no more sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26). Like Moses, He led His people out of the old into a better or new covenant. Jesus led the exodus out of Judaism. There is no more Jew nor Greek but a new creation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul wrote: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). God created a new race in Jesus, "the second Adam." When God says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13).

They say that Hebrews is "the book of BETTER things." Consider these passages from its pages:

. . .Jesus made a surety of a better testament. (Hebrews 7:22)

Jesus has. . .obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)

. . .better sacrifices (Hebrews 9:23).

. . .a better and an enduring substance. (Hebrews 10:34)

. . .a better country (Hebrews 11:16)

...a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35)

. . .the blood of sprinkling (Christ's blood), that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:24)

Also in chapter eleven the author of Hebrews had this to say in praise of the heroes of the faith:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a

heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Dear friends, we have been called unto better things like those pilgrims and sojourners

mentioned in Hebrews 11 who would not look back but waited in faith for a BETTER country. They refused to consider the country they had come out of. They could have turned back and lived at ease, but instead they waited in faith for a heavenly country. We also must learn to set our desires on a BETTER country, a heavenly city. It takes faith to accept God's NEW THING. We are called to ongoing change, from glory to glory, and that requires that we be malleable in His hands and yielded to His continual shaping and renewing. We must be ever ready to let go of yesterday and embrace today. Yesterday's manna cannot sustain us today; it was only good for yesterday. Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW, in the present, is the day of salvation. NOW, today, He gives daily bread. We cannot cling to the old and embrace the new at the same time. If we try clinging to both, we will add the new to the old, attempting to contain the new thing in the old and losing both.

Jesus spoke of this in a parable.

No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, "The old is better." (Luke 5:36-39).

In this passage Jesus is comparing the NEW thing which he brought to earth with the OLD order. No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one, nor stores new wine in an old wineskin. The new patch will make the old garment look worse than ever and the new wine will burst the old wineskin. This describes man's tendency to patch the old and contain the new within the old. The old order cannot contain the new wine. In the book of Acts, the Judaizers attempted to patch Judaism (the old wineskins) with faith in Christ. But the old, rigid structure of the Jews could not contain the new wine of the Spirit of God. The God of Israel could not be contained in that old wineskin and He burst it, just like He rent the veil, as the glory departed.

Jesus goes on to describe why change comes so slowly in religious circles. "No one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'" These four words "the old is better" speak of what has impeded God's progress among men more than any other thing. It aptly depicts religious man's consistent and immediate response to change. As Stephen told the Sanhedrin before they killed him, "You do always resist God's Holy Spirit."

This simple statement "the old is better," reveals the heart of religious man. Change was not acceptable to the elders of the Jews. Like Pharaoh, they would not let the people go. None the less, Jesus was calling His people out.

Stephen also made other repeated remarks about the stubbornness of Israel and how they resisted change at every turn. He told how they turned back again into Egypt in their hearts (Act 7:39). They made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands (Act 7:41).

Stephen went on to remind the Jews of God's perspective regarding the temple, "'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me?' says the LORD, 'Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?' You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you" (Acts 7:49-51, NKJV).

Have you ever ridden a horse that insisted on returning to the barn? He interprets any slack in the reins as free rein, turns around of his own accord and proceeds back to the barn on a dead run, just as if you had commanded him to do so. This can be very frustrating if you have another destination in mind. If you have ever ridden such a horse you might understand what God faced with Israel. They always wanted to turn back. Any progress was made under protest. There were skid marks all the way from Egypt to the Jordan River. A stiff-necked animal doesn't respond to the gentle nudges of the reins, but must be plow-reined to pull his head around and point him in the right direction. Even then he often takes the bit in his teeth, resisting guidance altogether. A stiff-necked horse makes a pleasurable experience into a nightmare.

There is little doubt what Stephen is communicating here. Israel was still trying to build and maintain a dwelling for God even though the temple, its sacrifices and priesthood had been made obsolete by the once for all sacrifice of Christ, the spotless Lamb of God. They wanted to turn back to the barn. They attempted to sustain the system and

sacrifices that were no longer relevant. They hung on to the very system that Christ had called his people out of. They were resisting the present truth.

Men resist any new move of God because they find their identity and support system in what God has done in the past, rather than what he is doing in the present. They are encumbered with traditions that keep them tethered to the past and blind them to what God is doing now. Those who cling to their traditions "always resist the Holy Spirit."

Paul spoke of this in Philippians chapter three. "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:2-3) Paul did not say beware of the circumcision, but beware of the concision (mutilation). Paul was comparing the addition of circumcision to faith in Christ to the cutting and mutilation of idolatrous heathen. The prophets of Baal cut themselves with knives on Mt. Carmel hundreds of years earlier. Paul is warning those who add anything to the finished work of Christ. In doing so it becomes idolatry, expressed in a loyalty to religious things, the worship of relics (dead things from the past) rather than the worship of God. Because Israel had refused to forsake their Jewish traditions to heed the call of Christ--to leave their temple, rituals, and ceremonies behind--they could not help but resist God just as their forefathers had. They chose rather as their object of worship the works of their hands (their temple).

In Philippians chapter three, Paul exhorts us not to look back but to press on ahead. The dung Paul referred to in Philippians 3:8 was his vested interest in the religion of the Jews and all that it had brought Him. It was his religious pedigree, traditions and prestige that he counted as dung. This was the price he had to pay before he could "win Christ." He was called out of Judaism. Those things that were once gain to him he now counted loss as he wrote, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phi 3:7-8). God wants to lead His people forward, but religious man is in a constant cycle of tearing down his barns and building bigger ones. Francis Frangipane summed up the nature of this religious dilemma conclusively when he stated, "Satan's deception during a move of God is both subtle and powerful because the devil's disguise is a religious spirit. He cloaks his activity by honoring what God HAS done, while fighting what God IS doing."

Are you beginning to see how radical Paul's stance was? He didn't count SOME of his previous religion dung, but ALL of it. Religious man still builds temples, calling them "sanctuaries, cathedrals, or churches." Men called "priests and clergy" still preside over them. The Lord still asks, "Would you build a house for Me to dwell in?" This is the reason why change comes very, very slowly in Christendom today. WE want to build Him a house, and HE wants to build His ekklesia as a dwelling place for Himself. He is still saying, "I will build you a house!"

If we do not count our vested interest in the last move of God as dung, we cannot move forward to heed the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. We will stay in UR. We will refuse to leave Egypt and even if we do we will be looking back over our shoulders yearning for the leeks and garlic. If we are to continue to follow God's cloud of truth, we must always count everything that threatens moving on as dung. Defending those things that you have a vested interest in blinds you to the truth the Lord wants to lead you into. The temporal things that He once honored are often brought to an end so that the greater spiritual truth can be seen more clearly. God's truth always adds to the previous revelation, thus making the whole picture that much more complete. He always desires to conform the beholder into a more perfect image of Christ.

Much to the chagrin of religious man, God is not confined to a box like a genie in a corked bottle. Even as Christians, we often think we can rub Him just the right way and He will pop out of confinement and say, "Yes master, what can I do for you? Your wish is my command." God is God and we are not! Like the message I saw on a coffee cup at work, "Me boss, you not!" What makes us think that we can confine Him either with our buildings or our doctrines? We are the ones who must conform to what He is building, not the other way around.

When John the apostle saw the city referred to as the Bride, there was no temple. He sounds almost shocked as he reported, "[But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light](#)" (Revelation 21:22-23). The heavens themselves cannot contain Him, so how could the work of man's hands do more? Who can build Him a temple that could contain His glory? God's question, "What house will you build for me?" reproves man's ambition to build a temple for his God and warns of the futility of attempting to do so. Only God is sufficient for the task of building himself a temple and our effort to do so is an affront to

His glory. All we can do is yield to His work of conforming us into His living stones to be fitted together as He sees fit.

Christians today also resist the Holy Spirit in the very same way that Stephen's accusers had. We must come to see that clinging to the former things is to decline God's invitation to move on. It is a refusal to allow God to conform us into that building fit for His glory, opting for the works of our own hands instead.

The worst thing about buildings is how they displace the real work of God, the preparation of His bride. Temple worship inherently conceals God behind sacrifices and ceremonies that make God inaccessible, or make Him accessible only by earthly mediators. God places in each one of His saints something that He can use to build up His house. Having a physical temple or church building refocuses all the resources and efforts of the Body of Christ. Consequently, much of the finances that could be used to send workers into the harvest field and help the needy, go to pay for the extravagant maintenance of physical buildings. One mega-institutional church in Anchorage Alaska had a regular monthly heating and electric bill of \$30,000. This exceeds the yearly wage of many people. In his book *Going to the Root*, Christian Smith estimated the value of real estate owned by churches in the United States alone to be over two hundred and thirty two billion dollars. If where we spend our money is any indication of our priorities, what then is the priority of Christendom today?

The story is told of Dominic, who was given the royal tour by the Pope when he visited Rome. After witnessing the lavish wealth of the Vatican, the Pope turned to Dominic and said "Saint Peter can no longer say 'silver and gold have I none.'" Dominic replied, "Neither can he say 'Rise and walk.'"

The larger the building is, the greater the need to fill it with people. The more people in the building, the greater the need for order. The greater the need for order, the more control a handful exercises over the many. Finally only the elect few minister and the body that should be participating and functioning becomes quadriplegic. The head does all the work. The only contribution of the silent masses finally comes down to supporting the few who minister and the all important edifice borrowed from another age.

The church building or temple fixes all ministry on a central point of interest. By example, the Church stops going out to save the lost. Doesn't it seem strange to you

that Paul went about the Middle East and Europe in his day and never built a single church building? Modern missionaries and church planters didn't get their ideas from him! I know a minister who moved to a small western town. At first he was very outgoing and visited all the people in their homes like pastors used to. As I heard reports of his efforts, I had hopes. But then the day came when he had gathered a handful of interested people who met with him regularly, and he put out the call to the denomination for help building a "church." They gladly obliged him and once it was built, you had to meet Pastor Sam (not his real name) at the building. This is not the model of the New Testament Church or that of the three-sided tabernacle of David that made the ark accessible to all.

As we look back over the history of Israel, we see ALL that could not contain HIM was cast off, until finally HE in whom the fullness of the godhead dwells bodily arrived on the scene. When the veil of His flesh was torn, the God of eternity rent the temple veil, signifying that everyone who believes in Him has access to the Holy of Holies, not just the priestly cast. God has found a new dwelling place! He no longer dwells in temples made with hands.

When the Jews asked Jesus for a sign, He answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ["Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said"](#) (John 2: 18-22). Jesus referred to His body as the temple, the dwelling place of God. When he said he would raise again in three days, the religionists were threatened. In their paranoia they thought that Jesus had threatened to tear down the temple, which was their trust, their livelihood and their instrument of power over the people.

Jesus was speaking of a different temple altogether, one that could contain the ONE whom the heavens could not. What is the center of our Christian lives? Is it our temple, our church building, our vested interest in our ministries? Nothing but the true Temple, the ONE that was destroyed and raised up in three days, can contain the fullness of HIM who fills all things. We are invited to be part of that Temple as His body with Jesus as the only head. Will we continue to expend all our resources on something God left behind 2000 years ago and find ourselves fighting His purposes? Or will we spend our

time, resources, and the gifts that He has given each of us building one another up as His living stones in a temple fit for God?

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

The true temple of God is not built with the hands of men out of wood, hay and stubble or stone; it is built of precious stones by His Spirit. This is the house to which God referred when He said to David "I will build you a house." This is the Temple that the prophet Zechariah said would be built by the Branch. "He will build the temple of the LORD" (Zechariah 6:12).

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16, NKJV).

This passage contains the answer to the age-old questions God still asks those who aspire to build great and grand temples, cathedrals, sanctuaries or church buildings. "Where is the house that you will build for Me? And where is the place of My rest?" (Isaiah 66:1) God has already chosen the temple that He builds and no other.

God is calling His children out of their temple-laden cities to sojourn with Him. He is calling His people out of the bondage of making bricks without straw and erecting pyramids and temples as monuments to men. Will we be viewed by future generations as faithful like Abraham the sojourner? Or will they see us as stiff-necked, refusing to go forth into uncharted territories? Will we pay the price and count all of yesterday's glories and achievements as dung? Will we forget those things that are behind, and reach forth unto those things that are before?

Back To the Tent

The shepherd-king David lamented that he was living in finery, but the ark of God rested in a tent on Zion. He did not understand that God loved His tent and wants to return to it.

Recently we shared our thoughts about the fluidity of God's true temple with a friend and brother, Charlie Lafferty of Texas. We found that he has also been hearing the

Lord along this line. He basically said, "Amos says that God will restore the Tabernacle of David in the last days. In Acts 15, James quotes Amos. Could it be a reference to God restoring the fluidity to the Church so that we will follow Him wherever He goes again?" Thanks, Charlie. Right on!

The Lord spoke His heart through Amos saying,

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: (Amos 9:11)

Acts 15 tells about a crisis in the early church. Certain men came from Judea to Antioch and taught the brethren that they must be circumcised after the manner of Moses or they could not be saved. This was an attempt to place a new wine in an old wineskin in the belief that "the old is better". Paul and Barnabas disputed with these men, and eventually they went up to Jerusalem to discuss this matter with the apostles there. Paul and Barnabas did not go to seek the counsel of the other apostles; they were going to the source of the problem. The legalists had come to Antioch from Jerusalem; perhaps they were some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to make a point, and that they made conclusively. At the end of that meeting, James recited the verse out of Amos as proof that the Gentiles no longer need to adhere to the old law.

After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle (tent) of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things. (Acts 15:16,17, NKJV)

We have indeed come full circle, from tent to temple to tent again! The temple was an interim measure at best. The tabernacle of David, the tent that David pitched on Zion was always God's best. It represents a return to the fluidity and pilgrim status of all who progressed with God, from righteous Abraham on. God in a tent is God on the move. Until we see the full restoration of all things we are also sojourners, tent dwellers, willing to pull up stakes and follow wherever He leads. It was John, who wrote,

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

The Greek word for *dwelt* in this passage is *skenoo* [4637], which means to "fix one's tabernacle, have one's tabernacle, abide, to (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent), tabernacle" (Strong's). The Word became flesh and pitched His tent among us! God wants to be among His people, not sealed off behind the temple veil. God's purposes are no more complicated than this. He desires to be among us as a Bridegroom longs for His bride!

The early Church had no buildings. Instead they had the abiding presence of God, and the Gentiles marveled at these believers saying, "Behold how they love one another." It was their fluid missionary zeal, their willingness to follow the Lamb where ever He went that "turned the world upside down!" It was the love of the Lord in a group of Jesus People with no church buildings that drew me (Michael) to the Lord in 1970.

At the consummation of all things, God will fully realize His desire, for in that day the tabernacle of God will be with all men, His very elect. As it is written:

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:2-4)

We have no permanent dwelling place here. Let us not make the mistake of minding earthly things. (Philippians 3:19) Christ is the High Priest of a new priesthood. He now ministers in the heavenly sanctuary. The earthly one has been done away. The writer of Hebrews wrote:

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. (Hebrews 8:1-2)

The "True Tabernacle" is the one that the Lord pitched on high, where He is now seated at the right hand of The Father. We must set our affections where "we now dwell in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The High Priest of the sanctuary (Jesus) intercedes there on our behalf.

If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)

Dear Christian, we are pilgrims and sojourners dwelling in a strange land. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are not called to build cities like Cain, or ziggurats like Nimrod. Individually and collectively, we are the habitation of God, the place of His rest. We are His workmanship, His building! We are His temple, His dwelling! There is no other. Nothing else is able to contain Him. This is the house that He promised David He would build, over which his Seed (Jesus) would reign forever. Now rather than a physical house, we have a spiritual house. "You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Amen. Come Lord Jesus, fully in us, your temple.

May God bless each of you as you are conformed into the true temple of God!