



Gospel Lessons from the Old Testament-Part 7

The Places of Worship for Israel

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Well, after all that good stuff, I don't mean to insult you, but I think our brains are like a Nerf ball. "Speak for yourself, Pastor Mike." Well, I am speaking for myself. I know I'd like to think that my brain is like a supercomputer or for the sake of this comparison, maybe like a lump of modeling clay. And when my mind encounters truth, no matter how hard that edge might be, my mind adjusts and it adopts that and embraces that, and then it maintains its shape and it remembers and it will act accordingly from that point on. I like to think that, but of course, that's not the case, it's more like a Nerf ball. I have encounters with the truth and I see the facts and my mind it does, it adjusts. But once I'm done with that truth encounter, it seems my mind, probably like yours, starts to tend to go back to the shape it was before. It retracts. It gets back to thinking more familiar thoughts, particularly in our theology. When we think about God, we can encounter the hard edge of truth that God has revealed about himself in a particular area of who he is or what he expects. And I'll say, well, that's true and I'd like to embrace that. I know it's what God teaches. And then I kind of get back to more familiar, more comfortable thoughts about God.

That's a tragic thing and it's actually a costly thing, as Tozer reminded us six decades ago now when he said that when we have a low view of God, we entertain that low view of God, it is the cause of 100 lesser evils among us. In other words, when we don't think rightly about God, when our view of God is deficient, it may not be that we have not been exposed to good biblical truth, it's just that we have those encounters like in the Old Testament, Israel had those encounters and as Psalm 50 says, they tend to go back to thinking about God that's a God that's more like them. And Tozer said, when you do that, there are all kinds of other deficient things that start to happen in your life. Bad theology is going to lead to a bad Christian life. Deficient theology is going to lead to a deficient way to go about thinking and acting and valuing and prioritizing.

That's why at our church, if you have checked out our Web site, maybe you've poked around at some of the rooms in here where we have our eight distinctives, beyond the theology that we want to affirm, we're looking at distinctives that kind of help calibrate and adjust our thinking and our direction. Our third one is to always work to maintain a high view of God. And that's because our tendency is to not maintain a high view of God. We have to continually adjust and readjust and redefine what we think about God, because we're going to go back to more comfortable thoughts about God. You can be well taught and end up nursing thoughts about God that are far from the truth. As we put it on the website, if you've read it recently, it says, we can't afford to think less about God, less than he is. We can't try and in our minds, just kind of ride into our thinking about God in a way that is just based on our feelings or our imagination. Certainly the world is doing that all the time. And you know that, right? We bring the Bible into the conversation. We say here's what God has revealed about himself. Here's his own self-disclosure about who he is and we're proclaiming that. But in our minds, we've got to be careful that we don't shrink back into thinking less about God than what we know and have been taught.



We've been studying Stephen's response to this council, the Sanhedrin, that had arrested his pastor and had, of course, turned Christ over to be crucified not many months ago, and he is here on trial defending his Christianity. I would suggest to you that the problem is that the Sanhedrin, these leaders of Israel, had a deficient view of God. A deficient view of God, that when the culmination of all that they had studied in the Old Testament came right before them, they failed to see, as Paul put it, the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. They could not see the glory of God and the gospel because they didn't think rightly about God.

As a matter of fact, one of their concerns in the discussion that we saw in the accusations towards Steven in Acts Chapter 6 verse 13 was that they were really concerned about what he thought about the temple. Of course, Steven was going to defer to what Christ thought about the temple and Christ, of course, he submitted himself to the regulations of the temple, his parents did, when a leper was cleansed, he said, go and show yourself to the priest. I mean, it was all about the fact that whatever God had set up regarding that temple, certainly Christ affirmed it. But he did speak about the time that was coming when it would be destroyed. That was clear even that he forecasted in his teaching as he talked to the woman at the well, you might remember, and she was concerned about whether the temple at Mount Gerizim, the Samaritan Center of worship or Jerusalem, he said, "I know that's the debate," and she brought that up as a theological diversion. And he says, "You know what?" God is looking for "a time is coming and it now is where we're looking for people who worship God in spirit and in truth." And that's hard because that shift from that very tactile, that sensory, even olfactory experience of walking into the temple is now going to be replaced by something that is without that means of worship. That was really hard for the gatekeepers of the Temple Mount, the Sanhedrin, and all who we're watching as Steven stood there trying to defend the fact that he wasn't blaspheming Moses and he wasn't blaspheming God. And when they said, you're speaking against the temple, it's taken for us, it's taken seven weeks to get to where he's finally going to address the topic of the temple.

That's where we're going to study this morning. I'd like you to take your Bible if you haven't already, and to see that what's really playing out here is Stephen, who has embraced the culmination of the Old Testament revelation and that he is now affirming Christ, he hasn't even mentioned him by name yet in this speech, is a defense before a group of people who unfortunately had lost sight of what God says he is and what God said they should do and how God says they ought to respond to the truth that he's given them.

So we're going to start in verse 44 and try and study through verse 50. And as you'll see here, I've reversed the order on our outline. If you download those outlines, you'll see that I want to get the to bottom of the passage first. But let's read this text as he finally comes in for a landing and begins to discuss the fact that, yeah, you're concerned about the temple and what Christ said about the temple and you think the Christians are going to destroy the temple. But that's not what Jesus even said. They had twisted his words. But he said, let's talk a little bit about that. We talked about Abraham, we talked about Joseph, we talked about Moses and the exodus. And now he's going to say, let's talk about that tabernacle.



Of course, the nomenclature should be explained. Right? If you don't know the tabernacle was the portable worship center and the temple was the permanent structure or at least the more permanent structure there in Jerusalem that Nebuchadnezzar would later destroy in 586 B.C.. But let's look at these words of Stephen as he responds to the charge and see if we can be careful to have his perspective and not those of his accusers. He says in verse 44, follow along as I read it for you, Acts 7:44, "Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness." Now it's called by many things, right? The Tabernacle, the tent of meeting, the tent of testimony. This is the way the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament likes to refer to it, the tent of witness. We'll talk about all that that means. But the idea of God certainly bearing witness to the people, particularly by the tablets that were in the box, the Ark of the Covenant.

It was there and it was there because God said it should be there because just as God spoke to Moses and directed him to make it according to the pattern that he had seen. You might remember in our Daily Bible Reading, we've been reading about all that back in Exodus 25, "things that I show you up on the mountain, I want you to come down and I want you to lay this out, design it and structure it just the way that I showed you there on Mt. Sinai." Well, it was portable, that's why it can move around in the wilderness wanderings for 40 years. It says in verse 45 that "Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers."

Now, that's important because we've always talked about throughout this whole discussion, as Steven is saying, look at the mobility of God. He's showing up in his glory in Mesopotamia, in Haran and in Egypt, all these different places. And now we have this portable worship center. They're there in the heart of it in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin are, and they're trying to care and concern themselves with guarding that. This is all about the place where God's glory is and you're speaking as though it's unnecessary. They get the implications of the fact that in some ways, as the book of Hebrews says, it's going to become an obsolete kind of mechanism. Right? Completely when it's destroyed by the Romans but it was already from the time of Christ's death, made obsolete by the death of Christ. They're concerned about it and he says, look, it didn't even enter into the Promised Land until Joshua brought it in after all the work and the descriptions of God's work throughout biblical history in the Old Testament.

So it was in a tent, at different places, Nob, Gibeah, all these places where this went around till David finally brought it into Jerusalem and he wanted to build a temple. "So it was until the days of David, who found favor," verse 46, "in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob." That sounds interesting. You're going to find a little house here for God. That's at least how it reads here. But we know that was not his theology. It had become the theology of those who were guarding the Temple Mount and the Sanhedrin, as we'll see. "But it was Solomon who built a house for him." You might remember David wanted to build that, but God said, "No, you're a warrior. You're a man of blood. You've killed a lot of people. I want a man of peace to build it." So Solomon, whose name even reflects that, is going to construct that temple. We know it as Solomon's temple and in the 10th century B.C., he builds that.



Now he's going to say all of that. You're concerned about the house. Of course, there was a house that was constructed by Solomon, preceded by the Tabernacle that was a portable worship center with the Ark of the Covenant there and the tablets of the Ten Commandments in it. Yet he reminds them, speaking of maintaining a high view of God, "Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says." Now he's going to quote Isaiah 66, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what kind of house will you build for me," says the Lord? "Or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hands make all these things?" Now, if you asked the Sanhedrin, the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, the scribes, "Hey, do you think God lives in that building over your shoulder?" They'd say, "Well, no, we know he doesn't."

But you do realize that the focus of the Israelites at the particular time that Jesus is walking there on the Temple Mount, he says, "this is not what it's supposed to be. You are governing this Temple Mount and you're administrating the activities on it in a way that is not in keeping with God's intention. You've made it a house of robbers." Remember when he said that? "I want it to be a house of prayer and that's how it was established?" Right? This is a place where we would look to and we would pray, we would ask for God's forgiveness, we would ask for God to give us grace and favor. And it's become, you know, Costco for you guys, you're money changers there and he tips over all those tables.

That concern had moved from seeing it as just a reflection of the God, a symbolic reflection of the greatness of God on earth, a directive, a means to an end to connect with and fellowship with this God, they began to see it as an end in itself, which happened long before the days of Christ. You might remember Malachi Chapter 1, where there was this sense in which everyone just saw this as a ritualistic practice. And at one point in Chapter 1 of Malachi, God says, "Oh, I wish that there were someone to just shut the doors of this place." In Isaiah, "Away with the noise of your songs, I don't want your sacrifices." I'm just tired of this because you've missed the whole point. And if anything was true about the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes in the first century, they'd miss the point. They so missed the point that when Christ got to the apex of the point, they rejected him and turned him over to the Romans to be crucified.

They didn't understand the greatness of God or what we might call the transcendence of God, that he certainly was not going to be, not only localized, which they would say, well, we don't believe that, but he certainly was domesticated. Do you see that? There's an idea of them kind of fitting God into their lives. That was the whole concern of Malachi Chapter 1. That was the last book of the Old Testament, warning everyone before these 400 years of silence, do not minimize, do not localize, do not trivialize, do not domesticate the God who is. And that's a problem. A problem of their view of God.

So let's just think about that statement regarding the nature and character of God, the bigness of God, to use those spatial analogies. The highness of God, the Most High God, and let's just make sure that we don't do what those leaders of Israel did. But I certainly think the early church will recognize the greatness of God that found its greatest expression in the arrival of his Son as not only our king, but as our redeemer.



If you're taking notes, let's just summarize those last three verses with this phrase. We need to humbly affirm, we need to make sure we do it over and over and over again because of the Nerf ball brains that we carry around, let's "Humbly Affirm God's Infinite Transcendence." And that means that God is higher than you think he is. He's bigger than you think he is. And even those are spatial analogies, I want you to understand what those mean. Think about the fact that God is a God who cannot be, not only localized in a particular place, he cannot be domesticated. He cannot be your servant. He cannot be your life coach. He cannot be something smaller than he is. And because that's our tendency, we just need to constantly recalibrate and retune our minds to say how great is the great God that we say we serve. Do we serve him as though he is that great God?

When we talk about the greatness of God I don't want you to miss that all of that reflects what we think about his attributes and what he does. Here's a verse for you to jot down. How about one of my favorite chapters in the Bible, Psalm 103? Psalm 103 reminds us that it's not just the, and these are spatial analogies, the transcendence of God as in terms of who he is, the nature of God. But when he expresses himself in whatever he does it's so much greater qualitatively than anything we could do. Here's the verse I was thinking of, Psalm 103 verse 11. It says, think of this spatial analogy, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is," his love, "his steadfast love," his faithful covenant love, "toward those who fear him." We're called to love because God is love. We're called to be holy, because God is holy, we're called to be just because God is just, you're called to be righteous this week because God is a righteous God.

But when we think about God, we need to think not only is he so much bigger and so much more uncontained than we like to think when we put God and our theology in our back pocket, it's everything that he does becomes this huge, qualitatively huge, this immense, I use the word infinite, this infinitely great expression of who he is. And I think that begins to really humble us and challenge us. This week did you love your wife? Did you love your kids? Did you do right in your work? Were you a man of integrity? Those are questions you think, "OK, well, yeah, I think I'm hitting the mark." Well, as it says in Psalm 50, when we make God more like us and we don't allow that view of a real lofty, expansive view of God to rule in our minds, we begin to think, "Well, sure, I'm doing pretty well with those things." We need to let our understanding of God be so expansive and so big, so qualitatively better than anything that we might see here on earth that our minds are constantly working at making this God the real perfect and holy Most High God that he is. It's hard for us to put that into words without using analogies, but it's helpful for us to think about the fact that we should ask the question, how big is our God? How high and lofty is my view of God?

When Solomon, and it might be worth jotting down for your study this week, First Kings Chapter 8 is when Solomon gets to doing all of the temple construction that David had said in his heart... matter of fact David, had sequestered the materials and got everything together and then Solomon has it built and he has this prayer of dedication. It might be worth looking at. Let's go there real quick. This is the last service. We got till one o'clock, I was told. So we got all kinds of time. First Kings Chapter 8. Drop down to verse 12. Solomon is now thinking



about the God that, frankly, I think by the first century and even by the fourth century B.C., I think every successive generation struggles with this, it had become much less than this. They could see, even as they did back in Samuel's day, that the Ark of the Covenant, this box in which the Ten Commandments were held. I mean, that's like our good luck charms. We got that, we got... we're OK. And the Sanhedrin, the council, could say, "Well, we're gatekeepers of this piece of real estate. We're OK. This is where God's favor is and we're fine because we have it."

And Solomon, even, for all that he does later in life that we would raise our eyebrow at and even condemn as godless and him wandering away from the truth, we see him here with really good theology about what's going on in the temple. Look at verse 12. "Solomon said, 'The Lord has said he would dwell in thick darkness.'" Now there's something here, there's a little double entendre. There's a little bit of two things we should see. We should think about the God, the invisible God, the God who you cannot see, where he says you shouldn't represent me in any form. Remember, we talked about that when we talked about the golden calf here recently. There's a God that is and he is a God that is not to be represented by these creatures or these images because he can't be reduced to any of that.

As a matter of fact, we think of the New Testament, First Timothy 4, "he dwells in unapproachable light." There's something about the expansiveness and the distance and the otherness of God without going too far to where we start to affect our thinking about truth that we can't know him. Well, we can know him because he's revealed himself, but that God is so different, holy, that's what it means. He's not like us. And in that distance, in that disconnect from us, we have to think, OK, there is something that is so uncontained that I can't reduce him to that. And that's the distance picture of God. Of course, he's here as well. But then we have that picture of an actual cloud. Well, you had it, first of all, as they wandered through the wilderness, this cloud by day and a pillar fire by night. But then there was this cloud outside of the Bible. They talked about the Shekinah Glory of God. But the idea of this cloud that came and rested there in the Holy of Holies, this 30 by 30-foot square room within the tent and later in the temple. And that place was a place where there's a visible manifestation of God's presence was, at least a presence, some representative, symbolic presence of God in this cloud.

It says, "The Lord has said I will dwell in thick darkness." But he says here, verse 13, but "I indeed have built you an exalted house." I mean it's the best building that Israel had ever built. "A place for you to dwell in forever." See there he did believe in a domesticated God. No, that's not true. As a matter of fact, we can take time to go through all this, but let me drop down later in this discussion when he begins to pray in verse 22. First of all, he's talking about the greatness of his attributes. He knows that he's a God who's above everything, "Solomon says I stood before the altar," verse 22, "in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and he spread out his hands toward heaven." Right? He knows he's looking up. He's thinking like we're taught to think and pray. As Jesus said, "Our father who art in heaven." Right? And then "hallowed be your name." Great, and that's the word holy. You're different. You're out there, you're distinct from us. You're set apart from us.



"And he said, 'O, Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or in earth beneath.' Right? There's no one like you. Incomparable. "Keeping covenant." You always are faithful to your promises, "showing steadfast love," faithful love. You're loyal to what you say you're going to do and to your people, "to your servants who walk before you with all of their heart." He goes on to talk about the promises that were kept to David, his father. Let's get down to the core of it, verse 27, he says, now, listen, I built this house and he said earlier, you're going to dwell in forever. Well, we know that can't mean that he thinks he's going to contain God in this back room. "Will God indeed," he asks a rhetorical question, "dwell on the earth?" No, of course not. I think the Sanhedrin would probably say, well, we believe that, too, but they weren't living like it.

"Behold, the heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house I have built!" Now it's the most majestic house ever built in Israel. But he's saying, I know you don't live here. You're not localized here. "Yet," here's the whole point, "have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea," talking about himself in the third person. "O Lord my God, listen to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you've said my," here it is, the suggestion that, "my name shall be there." Right? This representation of God's greatness, "that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place." Right? "And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place." Right? He knows where God is. We're talking about some kind of a presence of God, cannot be localized, cannot be domesticated. He can't be put in the back room. "And when you hear, forgive." He goes on to talk about that, we're really looking to you knowing we've got a problem. We've got a problem.

This little manifestation of the glory of God in this room, you need to see it is bookended in biblical history between two eras, two epics that are completely different than everything in between. The temple as it's laid out here in the 15th century B.C. as Moses is coming out of Egypt is some kind of symbolic representation of the glory of God. And it looks like something that we learned about in Genesis 1 and 2, a garden called Eden. And in Eden we saw God in some strange description walking with Adam and Eve. How weird is that? Talking and having fellowship and everything is harmonious. It has a sense of this perfection of God living with us and us living with him. And then you look at the end of the Bible, Revelation 20, 21 and 22, and you see this whole description again of God living with people. And now it says, as heaven opens up, here comes this new city that's the same dimensional proportions as the Holy of Holies. It's coming down out of heaven.

Well, John had already said, "I don't see a temple here. Where's the temple?" We don't have a temple. Why? Because it says now the dwelling place of God is among men. So God now brings this whole reality down to this thing called the new earth. And God's presence is there. And you have this sense in which God is really dwelling there. Before you had here in the Garden, God, at least, dwelling in fellowship and in harmony with Adam and Eve. Well, everything in between, everything in between Genesis 3 and Revelation 19 is this period of time that you could really put over the top of that, Isaiah 59:2, "Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God." What happens in the Garden when they're kicked out



of the Garden? What does God do? Think back Sunday school grads. He put some sentries at the front, actually, to the east, to the east opening of the Garden so they wouldn't go back in, he puts to cherubim, remember that? And he gives them flaming swords, so don't come back in. It is interesting, by the way, a lot of emphasis on the direction, the direction is east. They're kicked out to the east.

Well, when God gives instructions to Moses to build this temple, he says, I want the opening to be coming in from the east and I don't want you to see any longer these angels, at least in the symbolic representation, with flaming swords keeping you out. As a matter of fact, there are cherubim. Remember the cherubim that are crafted by gold on the top of the Ark of the Covenant? They're not looking out guarding people. As a matter of fact, you remember the descriptions, they're turned inward toward the box. It's almost like, at least, an inferred invitation, like, yeah, come on in. Well, that was done with a lot of ritual and a lot of shedding of blood. And you couldn't even be in the room unless you were the high priest and only one day a year. But you had this symbolic reminder that the separations because of our sin, this darkness between Genesis 3 and Revelation 19 could be symbolically represented in this box.

But it's only a reminder of this connection to a God and we can't wait to get to a place when the dwelling place of God is among men. It's why we constantly have been saying right from this pulpit it's not about the "here and now." It's about the "then in there." A lot of good things about the Christian life, a lot to do, a lot of mission, a lot of stuff. But the ultimate reality is when, as Paul said, we no longer "see dimly through this glass," this foggy picture. Right? But when we see him what? Do you know the phrase? "Face to face." Right? We can't wait for that.

Everything about that temple is a reminder of the fact that there's a problem. Matter of fact, there are a bunch of veils, there are a bunch of curtains, there are a bunch of things that say "keep out." And yet there is this sense of reminder that God wants to draw us in. And there's a sense of the reality of connection with God that we don't have but we have in some mediatorial way through the priesthood. But the whole point is what was lost in paradise is going to be regained in the eternal state. Even this phrase, and I think we often misunderstand it, if you can go back to our passage in Acts Chapter 7, he quotes Isaiah 66 here and he gives this weird phrase about the earth is my footstool. Here's a couple of passages to write down that might be helpful regarding that phrase, "the earth is my footstool."

I don't know what you picture. You probably picture if you try to envision this, which you shouldn't for very long. But picture this image in space and some gigantic body in a white robe and his feet are on this sphere of the planet. Is that what you picture? "Your brain is a Nerf ball, Pastor Mike." Well, listen, I just want you to not think in those general terms, "the earth is my footstool." Jot these references down, three of them. First Chronicles Chapter 28 verse 2. First Chronicles 28 verse 2. When David's talking here about building the temple, he said, "I had it in my heart to build the house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord for the footstool of our God, so I made preparations for the building." He calls the building and



the Ark, "the footstool of God." Oh, it's on the earth, but that's the footstool. It's like this connection to this transcendent God. It's like here's a little touch of it. Here are his toes, if you will, as blasphemous as that may sound, on the top of the box.

Here's another one. How about this? Psalm 132, Psalm 132 verse 7, "Going to the dwelling place of God that we might worship at his footstool." I might be in Galilee, I might be in the environs of Jerusalem, but I'm going to go to the Temple Mount and I'm going to worship at his footstool. So I'm just talking about that. Not in general as the sphere of the planet on which we live, but specifically that place where we worshiped in the Old Testament. How about one more? Psalm 99 verse 5, "Exalt the Lord our God," and it says here, it's a call, come and "worship at his footstool, for holy is he."

The contact of the transcendent God in the symbolic way in the temple, if nothing else, you see it's a means to an end to have us look up and lift up and pray to and connect with God. It's not ever an end in itself. And so often with any liturgical or any practice or any routine, even in the Christian life, we start to think it's about that. "I went to church this week. I said my prayers. I had my quiet time. I went to my small group," and we can start to focus on that as an end in itself. The temple certainly should never have been viewed that way. The Tabernacle should have never been viewed that way.

It's like being in a relationship, a long-distance relationship. I remember back in the day and giving my girlfriend, now my wife, like a calling card. That just shows how archaic I am. But let's pretend there were cell phones back then, and giving her a cell phone saying, "I want you to call me." Sending her a picture and saying, "here's my picture. I want you to think about me. I want you to call me." Well, I want all of those to be means to an end. I want her to relate to me. But all of those... Do I want her to look at the picture? Of course I do. But I want her to see through that picture. Do I want her to look at the phone and say, "this is a great phone that he got me?" That's great. I want her to appreciate the phone, but I want the phone to be a means of communication. Right? This is not some kind of mystical connection with God through the temple, but it was something that certainly was to take the people's hearts to pray and to see the barriers and the problems that sin had created and longing for and praying for the kind of reconciliation that God had promised that was coming ultimately in Christ and then completely in the New Jerusalem.

So much more, we could obviously speak all day about the greatness of God's attributes, the transcendence of his majesty, the greatness of how he reflects that in his character, but I just want you to know our tendency to get back to domesticating, shrinking our view of God. Are you still there in...? Well, I turned you... No, I didn't turn anywhere did I. Acts 7 verse 45, we're working our way backwards through this, I don't want to overstate what's being said here, but I at least want to observe in verses 45 through 47, this portable worship center before the construction of the temple by Solomon, it was mobile. And there was something about that being the continual emphasis and theme of Stephen's speech. Right? How often have we talked about that, right? Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran and Egypt? Even when Abraham was going through as a sojourner. Right? He didn't even own and possess a "foot length" of property it said.



So God is a God whose glory is showing up in Midian and in Sinai. And here they are in Jerusalem, very concerned about that piece of real estate, which they should have been, as it was rightly understood, a representation, a reminder, a symbolic channel through which, a means through which I connect with the transcendent God. But we see in a passage like this that it was outside of this piece of property and it was brought in at least to the place, the nation, Canaan, when the nations were dispossessed and Joshua brought it in and drove out those child-sacrificing cultures. And so it was until the day of David. David found favor in the sight of God and asked for a dwelling place for the God of Jacob and it was Solomon who built the house for him.

So that whole transitional, mobile, sojourning representation, not only the representation, but the actual appearance of the glory of God that we've seen throughout this speech. I like to make this some kind of fuel for your time with God this week, but I want us to think about what that means for you and I as we sit on the other side of the planet as a bunch of Gentiles, I would assume most of us are, and we have no relational connection genealogically to Abraham. We had no claim on the rights of the property in Israel, the access to the Temple Mount, the promises of all that God said about Abraham and the people of God, "these are my people." All of those kinds of things we were outside of all that.

The "us/them" mentality was really clear and it became, it got to a place of a sinful kind of "us/them" mentality. But God recognized that there was in the intention of the Abrahamic covenant as we started in our study we saw was to have Abraham and his descendants be a means through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. Not just because they were good guys infiltrating the planet, but because through Abraham would come this one who would redeem them, be the ultimate high priest who would give everyone who would respond in repentance and faith, as God called them, to a place of dwelling with God. I just want us as Christians to be thankful for that, as Gentile Christians we should be thankful for that.

So jot it down that way, if you would. Number two, I put it this way, we need to "Gratefully Ponder God's Borderless Redemption." He's not localized in Israel. As a matter of fact, the whole tenor of where this is going in the book of Acts is to go to the Samaritans. We're going to see that in the next chapter and then to the Italians, to the Romans in Chapter 10. The continual concentric impact of the gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, God's plan moving outward should make those on the outside who become insiders very, very grateful. We should really be super grateful that we are now a part of something, the beneficiaries of the impact of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

And of course, Stephen is about to die because he is being killed, thinking by the Sanhedrin that he is opposed not only to the supremacy of the piece of real estate over their shoulder, but even the people of Israel. Matter of fact, that's where the book of Acts goes, right? Matter of fact, we should look at that. I didn't plan to go there but that hasn't stopped me, right? Uh. Let's go in the book of Acts, let's go to Chapter 13. We're getting ahead of ourselves here, but Paul is bringing this message. And you can think of just this as an outgrowth of the problem



and the tension and the equation of what's happening with Stephen and the Sanhedrin. Verse 44. Acts 13:44, "The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him."

And didn't we say that at the beginning of this, that we had the jealousy of the Jews not only delivering Jesus up to the Romans to be crucified, the jealousy of the Jews after 3,000 and then 5,000 become Christians, and you have them all meeting in the back, you know, on the Temple Mount, in the backyard, if you will, of the gatekeepers of the temple, the Sanhedrin and they have this concern. "You're leaving us behind. We got to silence you, no more of this. They're going to take over the world. They're turning the world upside down." These are the phrases we read of in the book of Acts. Verse 46, "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first.'" That sounds a lot like Romans Chapter 1? The idea of "to the Jew first." "That we're not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe to the Jew first and also the Greek." Of course, that's fulfilling the sequential order of what God had promised through Israel, through Abraham. All the nations of the world would be blessed.

So, of course, the Messiah came. The call to repentance and faith "should be given to you first, but since you thrust it aside..." And why would they do that? The blinded to the glory of God in the face of Christ, they are rejecting the means of salvation, the great high priest, the lamb of God. Well, judge for yourselves. Or "you've judged for yourself, then you're unworthy of eternal life," which is an interesting slam of a way to put it, right? "Since you thrust it aside and judge yourself unworthy of eternal life, behold, look, we're turning to the Gentiles. For the Lord has commanded," now he's quoting Isaiah 49. "I've made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." You see the echo of that throughout the Old Testament.

Which, by the way, was even put into practice in the exodus. Do you know there were Egyptians who went with the Israelites out of Egypt? It's not like God was some kind of ethnocentric God who said, "Well, you know what? I'm not interested in anyone else." There were plenty of proselytes or plenty of people who were called sojourners who went with Israel and the blessing of God was upon them. Verse 48, "And when the Gentiles heard this," look at this, this is what I want for you in your quiet time this week. In your time with the Lord, I want you to "rejoice and glorify the word of the Lord." And, of course, they were just being saved. New converts, "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading through the whole region." That's such a great picture of the Gentiles being so thankful.

Here's a homework assignment, Ephesians Chapter 2. In Ephesians Chapter 2, verses 11... Let's just go to the end of the chapter. How do I have time for this? Yeah, I do. Come on. You're here, right? You got a Bible. Let's go to Ephesians 2. Here it was going to be a homework assignment. But it's good when you can do your homework in class, isn't it? It saves you some time. Weren't you glad about that in school? Here was a homework assignment. I'm going to let you do it now. Ephesians Chapter 2. This is the picture. This is



the feeling. This is the grateful pondering of the fact that the blessing of God expanded and traversed the borders of Israel and Jerusalem. Look at verse 11, "Remember therefore at one time you Gentiles in the flesh." Right? You're not descendants of Abraham, "called 'the uncircumcision,'" a very dismissive and pejorative way by what's called the circumcision, "which is made in the flesh by hands."

So many parallels there too even with the way that that rock in Daniel 2 was a rock that was not cut by human hands, the kingdom of God. It's something so much deeper than what you can see in someone's pigment in their skin or their DNA or, you know, the signs of their covenant promise of circumcision or anything, like the temple itself, the realities are the unseen things. And yet we get so fixated on the seen things. Nevertheless, you Gentiles remember, this what I want you to do for this week, verse 12, "Remember that you were at one time separated from Christ, you were alienated from the commonwealth," from the nation and all the blessings "of Israel, and were strangers," you didn't even know, "the covenants of promise," these guaranteed oaths of God about what he would do for the good of those penitent people. "Having no hope," that's the problem when you're outside, "and without God in the world. But now..." If you could just catch this, this would fuel your worship this week. "But now in Christ, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Verses 14 through 18. We ought to be getting along. There were problems in the early church with the Jews and Gentiles getting along and all the things, the vestiges of all the practices of the Jews. So he addresses that. But now get to the heart of this, verse 19, so many good things dovetailed together in this passage. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens." you're not outsiders. You, you Gentiles on the other side of the planet, you fellow citizens with the saints, "You're fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

Now here's this analogy. Not just a family. Look, it's a structure, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." This analogy now of a building. What kind of building? Well a building where you've got a cornerstone, where it's not going to work without this person, "Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." Now look at how it shifts, verse 21, "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a..." what? "A temple." Whoa! That structure, like that building and the reality of it is us without the trappings and the pillars and the brazen altar and the candelabra and the shewbread. Like we're it now, right? The whole structure joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord in him. Look at verse 22. "You also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Now the reality of that unapproachable God in the glorified Christ is going to rule in the middle of the New Jerusalem. But until then, like Paul, through a glass dimly, we experience the reality of relations with God through the third person of the Godhead, the Spirit now interacting, relationally connecting with us, dwelling in us, that picture of God's presence among us. That makes you more sacred than a building that was vacated by the glory of God when Christ died on a cross and the veil was ripped. And here they are as gatekeepers of this building, and a lot of things, by the way, change between 33 A.D. and 70 A.D. in the practices. Some of the extra-biblical writings about the weird things that were going on and people recognizing this is not the same anymore. Well, it wasn't the same anymore because



the Spirit of God went from that building, at least in the representation of what God wanted to rightly do in that building with all the perversion around it, and he took his Spirit and he brought it upon his people and he said, "Here's my temple now."

Here are a couple of passages for you, First Corinthians 3, First Corinthians 6. First Corinthians 3 says, "We as the church now become this temple of God." You should feel special about that, you want to feel good about being an outsider brought in, how in are you? Here's what the Scripture says. It's as though now you are the temple of God and here's the threat. "Anyone who destroys God's temple, God will destroy him." I know we're much maligned in our world. We're the scum of the earth, as Paul put it, and increasingly so in American culture today. You and I, the fundamentalist, bigoted, narrow-minded Christians. The Bible says those who are going after us, like in the Old Testament with Israel, "you're the apple of my eye," God takes it personally when people attack the Church. And then even more so you go home, get in your car, leave the parking lot, do your thing this week as you sit there at your desk, think about this, First Corinthians 6 says "Your body itself is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Corporately, First Corinthians 3, individually even, First Corinthians 6. Because God's Spirit dwells in you, and there's a lot of responsibility in that.

Here's the next phrase, you know this phrase, if you know the verse, "Therefore glorify God with your body." It's a call to not sin. To sin with your body he says, listen, "God dwells in you." Who? In who? In the people, as Isaiah put it, "of the coastlands." Right? He may have been thinking about, you know, Italy and Spain, but think about the idea. We're so far on the other side of the planet 2,000 years later. And right now there's more significant sacred interaction with the creator and the transcendent God with you sitting in your car at lunch, reading your Bible and praying than was anything going on over the shoulders of the Sanhedrin. That's an amazing thing. You ought to ponder that. You ought to gratefully ponder that, that the greatness and glory of God not only went to Haran and went to Ur and Egypt and Midian and Sinai, but Orange County in a parking lot in your workplace. That's an amazing thing that I hope gives you something to fuel your worship this week.

Well, this all started with a concern about the temple, which, of course, got him to think about the construction of this worship center. First of all, go back to now Acts Chapter 7 and let's get to the beginning of the passage that we read, verse 44. This all started with a discussion about the worship center. The worship center in the Old Testament when it was given, was in the desert, to Moses and in a tent. It says, "Our fathers," look at verse 44, "had the tent of witness," interesting phrase, "the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen." I already explained that when we were first read it, right? God gave him a pattern in Exodus and he came down and constructed it according to the pattern. Exactly. He didn't say, "Well, I think that room's too small. I think the curtain should be over here. I think we should orientate it toward the north and not, you know, toward the east." That's not what he did. He had to do it exactly as was prescribed.

And that worship center was called the tent of witness. Why? Because God was testifying, in many different ways, in one way, in that even the temple structure itself, I should say, the



tabernacle structure itself at this point was saying things about God. Saying things about what God was doing, saying things about God's holiness, saying things about God's otherness, saying things about God's redemptive plan, saying things even in the sacrifice about the gravity of our sin. All that was being said, and it would be said for centuries through the practice of the liturgy of the Temple.

More specifically, and probably what people thought of when they heard the word tent of witness was the tablets of witness, the Ten Commandments. Here's God's moral law. The first thing we have in terms of written revelation came from the finger of God on Mount Sinai and here are the rules. He says, "I want you to put them in that box and it's going to be in the center of this room and it's going to have these angels on the top of it. All of this is going to remind you that I have spoken." It was a testimony.

I put books on the reading list this week, several of them may be a little too imaginative, but to look at the echoes, the pre-echoes, if you will, of Christ in the Tabernacle, the pictures of redemption in the temple. I mean, there are so many great little books that remind us that this wasn't just a place to hang out and sing our worship songs. This was a picture of God testifying to the world of the problem of sin and the solution that would come in the Lamb of God. It's helpful, encouraging, enriching. I would spend some time looking at those books.

I would remind you that whenever you have a testimony of God, a self-disclosure of God, whether it's, as we started this morning, the thinking about who God is and making sure my mind adjusts to it and stays adjusted to it, or whether it's the things that he said that I must do, I need to make sure that I respond very carefully to that. I've got to thoughtfully say, well, if God has said this and I have no right to say differently, I have no right to adapt it or to somehow make it my own by tailoring it or curtailing it. I need to, let's put it this way, number three, I need to "Carefully Respond to God's Self-Revelation." God's self-disclosure, of God saying, "This is who I am, this is what I want you to do, here's how I want you to live." Now, think about all of those things he testifies to in the giving of the law and the giving of this worship center.

Carefully, people don't like to live the Christian life carefully. They say "God loves me, it's fine, everything's cool." We've talked about this throughout this series. The idea of the fact that when God speaks, we need to be, here's an old translation in English of some New Testament phrases, we need to be circumspect as we walk in this world. Walk circumspectly. What does that mean? I should be very careful where my next step is. Before I take another step, I should be very thoughtful about it. Some say, "Well, I don't live that way. Sounds like a scary way to live." Well, that is part of what it is to be a Christian the one you call on as Father, he's also a judge. So we ought to live our lives in fear during our stay, our sojourning on this earth. So I'm going to walk from here to next weekend and we're going to go through our lives. And we ought to be very careful about God's self disclosure, not only about who he is, but what he's asked us to do and what he's asked us to be and how he asked us to act and how he asked us to prioritize our lives.



Christianity is a revealed religion, it's God disclosing what he wants us to know. I mean, that's what revelation is, right? Things that wouldn't otherwise be known about God, God is saying, "I'm going to tell you about myself." These are going to be things that you must rightly respond to. Aaron, of course, was this first priest and he has sons and those sons say, "Well, that's cool, I want to do this thing, and so that's fine." They got all the regalia, they went through all the ceremonies of being sanctified as priests. And then they get out there and say, "Well, I'm going to do this just a little bit different. Let's tailor it and do it my way." Aaron's son's Nadab and Abihu. Remember this story? And they burned on the altar, something that the Bible called "strange fire." It's not quite right. And remember what God did. He gave them a promotion, right? "That was awesome. You improved on my revelation." Nope, he struck them down.

Maybe you missed this because it's just a short little verse, but Moses then talks to Aaron. Now remember, these are his nephews. And he says, "Listen, God just knocked our family members down, he just killed your son." I don't know what it'd be like to have both of your sons die in the course of their work trying to serve the Lord. And, yeah, they didn't do it quite right. But, I mean, come on, that's kind of harsh. And Moses talks to Aaron and he goes, "You just need to understand. No one is going to draw near to God and do it non-circumspectly," to use the words we've just brought up. "You better be super careful about these steps."

And it's interesting, the last part of that verse says, "And Aaron held his peace." Which shows that must have been hard to do, right? It's like, oh, I want to be mad like David when the ox cart stumbled and he had a guy that he really respected and he went out to touch the Ark and he died and David got mad, he was frustrated. You can see Aaron being angry at that. You can see the early church if you're friends with two people, maybe you're, I don't know, Scrabble couples with an Ananias and Sapphira and now they're dead. Right? Like, man, I don't know if I like this Christianity thing. There's no difference in the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. And when we studied that passage in Acts 5, what do we say? We're really thankful that we haven't been struck dead because we could have multiple times over and over.

But it was a reminder to the church, wasn't it? "My revealed will, you need to do it." Right? Whether it's how you approach worship in this scene in the Old Testament or whether it's how you tell the truth when you're speaking to one another, you better carefully respond to what God has said. Not only to think rightly about God, theology proper, but to think rightly about how we live, practical theology. How do we live this out? I know the reputation sometimes of our church or me or I don't know what, but is it we're the "doom and gloom church," you know. Bible thumpers. You do understand no one's trying to harsh your life out. We're just trying to be faithful to what God has said about himself.

Let me end with this passage. I didn't plan this either, but whatever. Let's go to Hebrews 12. Probably not a good line for any sermon. (audience laughs) But I just want to by way of comparison, because that's what we're doing. We're comparing something 2,000 years ago and how they thought about the temple. And we even go back to 3,400 years ago in the wilderness and the, you know, Nadab and Abihu scene and we're like, OK, what about now?

The comparison in these passages is one that should, not only as this text says, bring us a kind of trepidation about being careful, but a real profound kind of gratitude. Matter of fact, look at the first three adverbs in all the points this morning, "humbly," "gratefully," "carefully." I mean, those can all fit together and still be a joyful, peace-filled Christian life. But that's got to be our approach.

Drop down to the 18th verse of this chapter, Hebrews Chapter 12. They had something very tangible, very tactile, something they could smell and they could see. And it started there at Mount Sinai, "For you've not come to what may be touched. It's different in the New Testament, Spirit and Truth, a different... we're not going to a temple, we're not sacrificing animals. "We've not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest," the storm there at Mount Sinai, "the sound of a trumpet and a voice of the words that made the hearers beg that no further messages would be spoken to them." Remember that in Exodus? We don't want to hear it, you go up and talk to him for us, Moses. "For they could not endure the order that was given them," and stuff like, man, this is really hard, "like if a beast touches the mountain, it'll be stoned," dead. I don't like it, it's too restrictive and too many warning signs and too much razor wire and barbed wire. "Indeed, so terrifying," verse 21, "was the sight that Moses himself said, 'I tremble with fear.'" Well, that was rough.

Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 22, "But you've come to" something else, something that transcends that "Mount Zion." That tabernacle, that temple that might have been the Lord's footstool, but you've come right into where God really lives, you have a real relationship with a real God. "To Mount Zion," that was kind of spiritualized word that kicked in when we were talking about the thing that Jerusalem and the temple represented. You've come there, you have a relationship with a God who dwells in unapproachable light. You've come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. Right? You have that connection with that scene that's spelled out in Revelation Chapter 4 and 5, a real living room of God, the dwelling place of God, whatever that is, that invisible place. But it's mind-boggling and you've come there, you have a relationship with that God.

The heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly one. You've come to "innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn," Christ himself, "who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator," the only way we can get in is because the high priest has gone in and made a way for us, "the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood." Think about that. Sprinkled blood, that was all a part of the ceremony with the hyssop branch and the blood all over the altar, "that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. While death, usually people are like, "Who killed him. I want to kill them." Abel dies. Right? And Cain is concerned about retribution. Well Christ dies and no longer are we concerned about retribution. It's amazing. Of course, it's better than the blood of Abel, which was brought up earlier in the writings here in Hebrews.

So what do we do? Well, number one, if you're a non-Christian here today, "See to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking." If you're feeling convicted about the truth of Christianity,



well, then you ought to respond, you ought to repent, you ought to put your trust in Christ, you ought to throw yourself on the mercy of God. "For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven?" The comparison, the comparison of lesser to greater. This Mount Sinai was amazing. But this is way more, way more clear. Way more serious. Way more heavy.

Verse 26, "At that time," back then in the Old Testament, "his voice shook the earth, but now he's promised," right? We read this in Second Peter 3. "'Yet once more I will seek not only the earth but also the heavens.' This phrase, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of things that are shaken -- that is, things that have been made," earthly things. "in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain." They can destroy all of the temple and Titus can burn it and desecrate it and it can be gone. Just like Nebuchadnezzar did, it can be done. Just like Antiochus did in the intertestamental time, you can do a lot of damage to that place, but you can't do anything to the place where God dwells. And God right now is dwelling in his Church and in his people.

"Therefore," verse 28, "let us be," that's the whole point here, right? "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe." Do you see that? Why? Because our God is a consuming fire. One who is, in his own plan, redemptive plan, taking the hit for our sin. I think we can live humbly, gratefully and carefully. Right? And we ought to.

You world travelers have probably been in some pretty nice places. You go to certain countries, certain parts of the world and take your cameras or get your phone out and start snapping pictures, particularly of these like massive buildings and maybe a Shinto temple in Japan or a Buddhist temple in India. Maybe some massive cathedral in Europe. Some kind of elaborate, ornate mosque in Istanbul. And you go to these places and you pull out your camera and you see it and you are impressed by the architecture and you can smell the candles and the incense and it's just like, wow, this is an important place.

With the coming and reality of Christ and all that we just read there in Hebrews 12, the shift to what is real and transcendent and important, it's not going to be bound up in smells and sights and chants and people bowing down and shaved heads and robes. I mean, the reality of this is found in the sacred space of your kitchen table, of your desk at work, the front seat of your car in the parking lot at lunch with a Bible and a prayer list. It can be found in a chair in a tilt-up building in South Orange County. The reality of God saying to us, you can come into the throne room and find grace to help in the time of need. You can ride in, as Hebrews 6 says, on the coattails of the great high priest and you can enter in and have an "anchor for the soul." And you know that God is good on his promises because he's entered in "behind the curtain." And we're there, too. We have access.

If you feel left out and you think, wow, this should be a much better experience as a Christian than it is, I'm just saying I want to admit to you, I don't have an over-realized sense of where it's going. We're not there yet. We're getting to the place where the dwelling of God is going to be among men. But now there is something good and sacred and any building, any



architectural thing, anything that seems like impressive, it never is that conduit to God. That is not it. God is a God who has found his people as his dwelling place, and I hope you're one of the bricks, one of the stones that have been placed into this thing where God is active and where God is working, and it ought to lead to a humble, grateful, careful kind of life, that should fuel your worship this week, and I hope that it does.

Let's pray. God, we need our minds to be continually adjusted, We admit our weakness in our flesh of wanting to, as those people in Psalm 50, just to think that you're like us and bring you down to where we're at. We hear a lot of people in the name of Christ talking about you as a friend and a coach and a cool guy, who is just one of us. We need God, please, to have our minds recalibrated, adjusted and fine-tuned by the truth of your revealed word you have given us, these propositional statements by the miracle of prophecy. We've seen them now recorded.

We recognize that just changes so much about how we think and we just need it to be constantly in our minds, as Paul said, it's a safeguard, we repeat these things to each other and even to ourselves. So God gets us excited like the early church to say, Maranatha, we want you to come, we want the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. But for now, God, we will revel in the fact that we can sit on the floor of our closet and have a sacred encounter with the God who is. I pray that that would be something that will just draw us to those times of Bible reading and prayer and worship and thanksgiving. And then when we get out of that closet, maybe we get out of that car, go back into the office, get back to work and live a life that is carefully responding to what you've said. Make us a holy people, worshiping a holy God, walking in step with you this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.