

## What Is a Temple?

### Commentary for September 1, 2013 — ... as God Defines the Term

The article for September 2013 is "In Search of King Solomon's Temple" by Professor George Wesley Buchanan. Starting with his thoughts about Ezekiel's description of a future Temple of God,<sup>1</sup> Buchanan demonstrates that the vision was a reality that Ezekiel fully understood. Ezekiel saw water coming from the visionary Temple just as he saw it flow out of the Solomonic Temple. Read first the "[September 2013 Newsletter](#)."

### Definition of "Temple"

So what is a temple? The definition from [www.Dictionary.com](http://www.Dictionary.com) is standard:

1. an edifice or place dedicated to the service or worship of a deity or deities.
2. (*usually initial capital letter*) any of the three successive houses of worship in Jerusalem in use by the Jews in Biblical times, the first built by Solomon, the second by Zerubbabel, and the third by Herod.
3. a synagogue, usually a Reform or Conservative one.
4. an edifice erected as a place of public worship; a church, especially a large or imposing one.
5. any place or object in which God dwells, as the body of a Christian. [for example] **1 Corinthians 6:19.**"<sup>2</sup>

Most dictionaries will include these definitions. But what is the biblical usage and meaning of the term Temple? The word *hekel* is the common Hebrew term for Temple. Other terms refer to more specific parts of the Temple complex. *Hekel* first occurs in the Old Testament referring to the tabernacle sanctuary at Shiloh in the narrative about the birth of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel chapter 1). In verse 9, "temple" is first used:

**"So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple [*hekel*] of YHWH."**

• **1 Samuel 1:9**

The only other time the "temple" at Shiloh is referenced is in 1 Samuel chapter 3:

**"And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple [*hekel*] of YHWH, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; That YHWH called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. ..."**

• **1 Samuel 3:2-4**

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ernest Martin understood that the millennial Temple also would be at Shiloh, and its outer environs would extend to encompass the City of David and Jerusalem of the New Testament period.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Concordant Literal Version:

**"Or are you not aware that your body is a temple of the holy spirit in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price. By all means glorify God in your body."**

For the vast majority of the other 78 uses of *hekel*, a physical structure is meant, whether meaning the successive temples of YHWH in Jerusalem (the only divinely approved location), God's temple in heaven (2 Samuel 22:7), or temples built to pagan gods (or dedicated to YHWH, but illegitimately in Samaria, northern Israel). The word *hekel* is used, along with other terms. You can distinguish which temples are meant by yourself.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Purpose of a Temple**

Definition #5 above needs to be expanded, although it is technically correct. The example given of 1 Corinthians 6:19 is a Christian example. The normal understanding of what a "temple" was in ancient times is that of **"any place ... in which God dwells."** For pagan temples the idea is that a temple is "any place in which a god (small g) dwells." That place can be a cavern, a grove of trees, a temporary structure like the Israelite tabernacle, or a permanent structure or building that we normally think of as a "temple."

The purpose was not to physically house the deity, but it was a place where the god dwelt or came to communicate intimately with the priests, petitioners, and worshippers. It was the purified sacred place where heaven and earth were connected. The gods received gifts from the priests and worshippers. In return, the gods gave to the people gifts such as rain, good crops, a healthy and expanding population, and victory over their enemies.

In Appendix 2 of Dr. Martin's article "[The Temple Symbolism in Genesis](#)," I refer to an article by John Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology" which lists 15 descriptive motifs for Near East temples. Others have expanded on Lundquist's list.<sup>4</sup>

Read what YHWH says He thinks about an earthly Temple:

**"Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spoke I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build you not me an house of cedar?"**

**• 2 Samuel 7:6-7**

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<sup>3</sup> Here is the entire list where *hekel* is used. It almost always means "temple" in the KJV: 1 Samuel 1:9, 3:3; 2 Samuel 22:7; 1 Kings 6:3, 5, 17, 33, 7:21, 50, 21:1; 2 Kings 18:16, 20:18, 23:4, 24:13; 2 Chronicles 3:17, 4:7-8, 22, 26:16, 27:2, 29:16, 36:7; Ezra 3:6, 10, 4:1; Nehemiah 6:10-11; Psalm 5:7, 11:4, 18:6, 27:4, 29:9, 45:8, 15, 48:9, 65:4, 68:29, 79:1, 138:2, 144:12; Proverbs 30:28; Isaiah 6:1, 13:22, 39:7, 44:28, 66:6; Jeremiah 7:4, 24:1, 50:28, 51:11; Ezekiel 8:16, 41:1, 4, 15, 20-21, 23, 25, 42:8; Daniel 1:4.

Ten of the Twelve Minor Prophets use *hekel*, referring to illegitimate or pagan temples, or the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem. Hosea 8:14; Joel 3:5; Amos 8:3; Jonah 2:4, 7; Micah 1:2; Nahum 2:6; Habakkuk 2:20; Haggai 2:15, 18; Zechariah 6:12-15, 8:9; Malachi 3:1.

<sup>4</sup> Lundquist's article is in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George F. Mendenhall*, ed. by H.B. Huffman, et al. (Winona Lake, IN, 1983), pp. 207-219. James L. Carroll expanded and modified the list of criteria in, "[A Revised Temple Typology](#)" in *Hagion Temenos*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stephen Ricks, ed. (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005). Both authors write from a Mormon perspective, but their evidence and conclusions apply to temples anywhere, and to the Jerusalem Temple.

YHWH did not need a temple, but He allowed Israel to construct one nonetheless through David's son. This gave Jerusalem a great deal of added importance. It was not only the political capital of the kingdom, but a **sacred center** for the tribes of Israel as well. It gave the people focus geographically and religiously. Unfortunately, the focus of the centrality was lost after Solomon's death; all according to God's plan.

The Jerusalem Temple (as for all temples, whoever constructs them) also served the purpose of being a center of **teaching** about God, because a major function of the priests and Levites was to educate the people about the nature and purpose of the Levitical priesthood and cult,<sup>5</sup> and what could be learned about God through His Law and Word. It was the place where the revelation from God was to be given to the people through the Levites and priests. Unfortunately this did not often happen, therefore God raised up righteous prophets to teach and convict the people of their sins.

**The center of the Law of Moses** was the Temple. It was the place where the religious and civil law of the people of Israel was preserved. The Temple maintained the religious teaching preserved by the priests and Levites (see for example, Deuteronomy 17:18). That Law was read and taught from the Temple.

**Sacrifices** were acts of a person's relationship with God. All sacrifices except Passover were to occur only at the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Everyone who desired to make a sacrifice as a thank offering to God, a sin offering for sins against God, or a dedication according to the Laws of Moses, all must be done in Jerusalem at the Temple. The national daily sacrifices also were done there. The priests must perform most of the rites. No longer could sacrifices be done by individuals (as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did) who were not Levitical priests. The sacrifices also were communal meals. Many of the sacrifices were consumed not just by the priests, but also by the petitioners to God and their families.

**Festivals** centered around the Temple in Jerusalem, helped regulate community life, and kept people informed about the calendar for planting and harvesting. The calendar was determined by visual sightings of the heavens from near the Temple. The feasts and festivals which God commanded Israel to observe brought many pilgrims to Jerusalem during the spring and fall. This expanded the population of the city greatly and provided a regular "shared experience" of rejoicing, education, and cohesion of the community.

The Temple was central not only for religious and political reasons, but also for economic reasons. **Prosperity** is one beneficial result of the Temple because it was located at the capital of Jerusalem. The festivals brought crowds of pilgrims with money to the capital. Jerusalem not only became an economic center, but it became a hub of commerce and a source of prosperity for the entire nation. Money circulated from outer parts of the kingdom to the center, which in turn then circulated back to the outer regions.

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<sup>5</sup> The term cult is an accurate term, not a negative or a pejorative one. Israel was a people separated (made holy) to be a kingdom of priests to the nations of the world. Exodus 19:5-6:

**"... you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."**

**Initiations** took place at the Temple in Jerusalem. Practices by the Levites and priests such as handling the Temple environs, cleansing the structure, the altar, and the sacrificial implements had to be taught. Priests (and kings) had to be properly anointed, instructed, and dedicated to YHWH. All these were done according to a process given by Moses. The Sanhedrin further defined the process. Jesus was dedicated at the Temple following Mary's time of purification after He was born (Luke 2:22–24). Jesus' dedication as an infant is one example of an initiation ritual for individuals. So was immersion for purity before coming before YHWH with a sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

**YHWH's abode** in heaven was represented by God's Temple on earth. Both are temporary. God's abode in heaven is temporary as were (and will be) all earthly Temples of God. Remember, New Jerusalem is still under construction (John 14:1–4) as new believers are added to God's Book of Life (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 15, 21:27, 22:19). Only New Jerusalem will transition to the new earth from the old heaven (Revelation 3:12, 21:2).

**God's Plan** was taught at the Temple. This was done by the story told by the Tabernacle/ Temple physical structure along with its furniture (again, see Dr. Martin's "[The Temple Symbolism in Genesis](#)"). God intended mankind to be separated from His presence. The Temple represented such a situation. God through Christ will bring every human being ever born to God's presence in the Holy of Holies, most will be taught about salvation through Christ during the great white throne judgment and learn what you have learned (Ephesians 1:13–14). In other words, the Temple modeled creation in stone.<sup>7</sup> The history of mankind is the story of each of us playing our part in the saga of God's plan. Every person will be able to learn something from our salvation experience.

**"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will."**

**• Ephesians 1:11**

So, what is the true purpose of the Temple? It is to reveal God. A physical temple cannot do such a thing. A spiritual Temple of God can do that. YOU are that spiritual Temple. You have a role in helping God fulfill His plan.

**"... YOUR body is a temple of the holy spirit in YOU, which YOU have from God, and YOU are not YOUR own? For YOU are bought with a price. By all means glorify God in YOUR body."**

**• 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, Concordant Literal Version**

David Sielaff  
[david@askelm.com](mailto:david@askelm.com)

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<sup>6</sup> This is why "living water" was always necessary for every Tabernacle stop in the wilderness, at Shiloh, and at the Temple location in Jerusalem. Living water represents the Holy Spirit from God and Christ (John 4:10–15ff; 7:38–39).

<sup>7</sup> Only later was it to be understood that the Temple structure also described the general outline of God's purpose in the eons of time in creation (Hebrews 1:2 and Ephesians 3:10–11).