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"A Ready Answer"

by Charles E. McCoy



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Spiritual Temple – Dispensationalism asserts that another Jewish Temple in Jerusalem is a must in God's program,¹ but I doubt this will ever happen. Let's examine some background on this issue.

Abraham worshipped God wherever he was, but during the Mosaic era God commanded Israel to build a portable "Tabernacle" (Exodus 25) where He would meet with them. God's acceptance of this structure was demonstrated (Exodus 40:34,35). It was not until David compared his own lavish palace with this 400-year-old Tabernacle that *he* decided (not God) that a permanent stone "Temple" was needed and decided to build one. God responded, through the prophet Nathan, to the effect that He had never seen the need for or commanded the building of such a structure (2Samuel 7:1-7). However God allowed David's son, Solomon, to build it and demonstrated His acceptance of it (1Kings 8:10,11) as He had done with the earlier Tabernacle. After the dedication ceremony, God warned Solomon that disobedience would bring the Temple to ruin (1Kings 9:1-9). Both Isaiah (66:1,2) and Jeremiah (ch. 7) warned people against putting too much emphasis on this physical building, but to no avail. The Babylonians destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C., with Ezekiel noting that God's spiritual presence had departed before the Babylonian destruction (Ezekiel 9-11). A second Temple was built by Zerubbabel following Judah's return from Babylon, and a third by Herod the Great was begun in 20 B.C.

No Divine spiritual presence had appeared in the second or third Temples, as had occurred when the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple were inaugurated. When Jesus appeared, He challenged the leaders in Jerusalem with the idea that his own body was the actual "Tabernacle" where God's presence was meeting with Israel (John 1:14; 2:18-22). Rather than offer any hope (or need) for a future, restored Temple after 70 A.D., the Apostles' teaching was that the growing Church was the new "Temple" under construction, with every believer a "living stone."²

Jews without Jesus are lost – Since Israel was not known for being any more righteous than other people (Deuteronomy 9:4-7), knowledge brings accountability (Amos 3:2; Luke 12:47-48) and Israel had many advantages (Romans 3:1-2; 9:1-5), how should we view Jews that do not acknowledge Jesus? Are they still somehow special in God's eyes and have their own "private path" to the kingdom of heaven? Decide for yourself - what did Jesus say in John 5:21-23 and how might it bear on this issue (also see: 1John 2:23)? What did Jesus say about Jews who

opposed/rejected Him in John 8:24,34-39? How did Stephen summarize Jewish religious practice over the centuries in Acts 7? How did Paul explain the future prospects of Jews who rejected the Gospel (Acts 13:46)? What did Paul say had often been the impact of Judaism on other nations in the ancient world in Romans 2:25? Who was John referring to in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9?

The Gospel Redefinition of "Israel" – However, God's faithfulness to bring Messiah through the lineage of the Patriarchs (i.e. national Israel) does not require that their fleshly descendants continue to have a central role apart from the Promised Messiah *after* His appearance. I believe that national/Mosaic Israel's main function was to be the people group from which the Messiah would arise! With His arrival, Jesus' comments reveal that big changes were coming. In the Gospel of *Matthew*, we find use of Old Testament material that portrays Jesus as a new "Israel," who also came out of Egypt into Canaan (2:13-15), and was glorified by a "mountain-top experience" with God – that, along with Jesus superseding the Law/Prophets, was the message of the Transfiguration (17:1-9). This one man, Jesus, was a "new Israel" from which a new nation would emerge through the *spiritual seed* of His twelve Apostolic "sons" (the Word they would spread) and these guys were designated as new Patriarchal heads of the nation (19:27,28) and foundations for the glorified temple/city (Ephesians 2:19-21; Revelation 21:14).

Prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Isaiah had laid out the situation in terms of a parable concerning a vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). Jesus, just prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, picked up that same imagery (Matthew 21:33ff), but added a chilling conclusion that his listeners understood – national/Jewish Israel was losing their special claim on the kingdom of God and it would be given to a new "fruit-producing nation" (Matthew 21:43). What is this "new nation" Jesus referred to? It is the new Israel that arises upon Him and His 12 Apostolic sons – the Church. Keep in mind what God said He wanted in a nation/kingdom at Sinai (Exodus 19:5,6) – a covenant-keeping kingdom of priests and a holy nation! Well, that didn't happen at Sinai, because those folks didn't want to "draw near" and hear God directly – they preferred to send Moses up to God, while they built and worshipped an idol and prepared to return to Egypt (Exodus 32). Thus, holiness often took a holiday and the priesthood was given to Aaron's family. Israel later tried to imitate earthly monarchies/kingdoms and paid a big price for it. But, following the Messiah's appearance, we find Peter addressing the mixed Jewish & Gentile church in Asia Minor with terminology reminiscent of Exodus 19 and elsewhere in the old Testament - as a spiritual house, a holy/royal priesthood/nation, and God's own possession (1Peter 2:4-10) exactly what God had wanted Old Testament national Israel to be! (to be continued)

¹ 2Thessalonians 2:4 "Temple" here taken in the Jewish/Levitical sense (*ieros*), rather than in the more likely New Testament sense as the "church" (the *naos* - 1Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1Peter 2:4,5)

² Zechariah 6:12-15; 1Corinthians 3:9-17; 6:19; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1Peter 2:4,5