Ephesians 2:19-22 (Edward B. Dennett) 56975

The House of God Traced Through the Scriptures, Church, The Final Aspect of the (2:19-22)

The final aspect of the Church as the house of God on earth is that presented in this scripture;—namely, that of the temple. From 1 Corinthians 6 we learn that the body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and from 2 Corinthians 6 that believers collectively are the temple of the living God; but the temple in Ephesians 2 differs from these in that it is not yet completed. The apostle says that the saints "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Thus they were built together as God's habitation, but the temple was in the process of building—it was growing.

This shows very clearly that the temple, in this aspect, includes all the saints of God of this dispensation, from the day of Pentecost until the Lord's return; whereas, the house or the habitation of God, as has been before explained, is regarded as complete at any given time. So indeed with respect to the Church as the body of Christ. In Ephesians 1:22-23, we read that God hath put all things under the feet of the risen Christ, and hath given Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. In other scriptures, where the body of Christ is mentioned, it is composed of all believers existing at any given time; but in this place it is viewed as comprising all the saints of the dispensation—the Church in its totality and completion. The temple "growing" therefore reminds us that Christ is still building His church, and that He will continue to build until the time of His patience ends in His rising from His seat, when He, having now ended His work as builder, will fetch His bride, and will present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

If we now turn once again to Revelation 21 we shall find the same two aspects—the Church as the bride of Christ, and as the tabernacle (not here the temple) of God. "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, their God" (Rev. 21:2-3). The first heaven and the first earth had now passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth had come into existence at the Word of God; a scene in which righteousness could eternally dwell. The new creation, in a word, both within and without, had been consummated. The Church, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, which had been associated with Him in the heavens, in the perfect enjoyment of the intimacy of His love, now descends upon the new earth, and in connection with this it is that the proclamation is made, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men," On earth it had been His habitation through the Spirit, and now, completed as the temple, it has become His tabernacle for eternity, a special privilege, which the saints of other dispensations—"the men" of this scripture, blessed to the full, and perfectly, as they will be—are not permitted to share. They surround the tabernacle, and God will thus dwell with them, and bring them into the enjoyment of relationship with Himself as His people, and He will manifestly be with them, and be their God.

The question may be raised as to the significance of the different appellations on which we have touched—house, temple, and tabernacle. The term "house," as will be apparent to the most simple reader, always carries with it the idea of a dwelling-place. The Church as the house of God is thus His habitation—His habitation on earth, as cannot be too frequently recalled. The thought connected with "temple" in the three places in which it is found (1 Cor. 3; 1 Cor. 6; 2 Cor. 6) is that of holiness; as for example, "The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." But what constitutes the holiness of the temple is the fact of the divine presence, and then, together with that, there may be perhaps associated the further thought of what is due to the One whose temple it is. God, who inhabits the temple, is holy, and those who form it must be holy, as indeed we read in the Psalms, "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, forever." And again, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Then there is doubtless a very special reason for the use of the word tabernacle in Revelation 21 The language used supplies the key. Turning back to Leviticus we read, "I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. 26:11-12). This was the desire of God's heart—a desire which for the time was frustrated by the sin and iniquity of His people. Thus He "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh" (see Josh. 18:1), "the tent which He placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand" (Psa. 78:60-61). And after that Solomon's temple had been built, the Lord spake by Jeremiah concerning it, "Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth" (Jer. 26:6). The Lord was faithful to His word, for His people "mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary... And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God," and so on. (2 Chron. 36:16-19). After seventy years the remnant that returned from Babylon built again the house of the Lord; but when He suddenly came to His temple (Mal. 3:1), His people refused and crucified Him, and finally this temple, together with Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Romans.

God could not therefore dwell in the midst of His people, as He desired. Accordingly we find the prophet Ezekiel, speaking of a future time when Israel shall have been restored to their own land, and when the true David shall be king over them, delivering this message" My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Ezek. 37:27); and this promise was not more than partially fulfilled. It is evident therefore that the term tabernacle in Revelation 21 has reference to these scriptures; that, in fact, the first outward expression of God's purpose to have His eternal habitation in the midst of His people is seen in Israel's encampment; that His tabernacle in the wilderness, surrounded by the twelve tribes, was both a type and a prophecy, and that once again the more perfect habitation of the millennium became also a figure of His perfected tabernacle in eternity.

The scene therefore in Revelation 21 is the consummation of God's eternal purposes of grace, and hence the full result of the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ. John the Baptist had announced our Lord as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; and here we find that the work is done. Hence we read, "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." Sin having been put away, death, its bitter fruit, with all its sorrows, has also disappeared; and thus God has forever wiped away the tears of His people. A further consequence, moreover, is that He can now dwell in this perfect way in the midst of the redeemed. He is now all in all; He Himself in all that He is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, fills the scene, the eternal source of the eternal happiness of His glorified saints.

Such is the final revelation of the Church as God's dwelling-place. But during the thousand years, after the Church has been caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, God will once more dwell upon the earth. The temple will first be rebuilt in unbelief, and not be owned by the Lord (see Isa. 66:1-6); but this will be superseded by one built by divine directions, and according to divine measurements. (See Ezek. 40-42.) To this God returns, as seen in vision by the prophet: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with His glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the Lord came into the house, by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house." (Compare Ex. 40:35; 2 Chron. 5:14; Acts 2:2.) "And I heard Him speaking unto me out of the house; and the man stood by me. And He said unto me, Son of man, the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever, and My holy name, shall the house of Israel no more defile," and so on (Ezek. 43:2-7; see also Exek. 44-45).

We thus see that God has had, and will have, His habitation on earth in every age or dispensation on the ground of redemption. Having brought His people out of Egypt, He spake to Moses, saying, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Thence onward, as we have traced from the Scriptures, He continued to dwell on the earth. The temple took the place of the tabernacle, the Church superseded the temple, the temple will once more be rebuilt in the millennium; and last of all, when the former things have passed away, and all the purposes of God in grace and redemption have been accomplished, the Church is seen on the new earth as the tabernacle of God. The same thought, in one aspect, is expressed by the house in every dispensation; namely, God's joy in surrounding Himself with His redeemed people, and God's delight in being the source of their joy and the object of their adoration and praise. His habitations on earth, however, are but the anticipations of His perfected house in the eternal state—of that temple which is even now silently growing, as stone after stone is laid in their appointed place upon the living Foundation, and which, when completed, will, after the close of all earthly dispensations, become His tabernacle throughout eternity.

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