

THE NEW TEMPLE IN EPHESIANS

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‘Temple’ Language in Ephesians

Christ’s individual body took the place of the New Temple:

^{2:13} But now **in Christ Jesus** you who were once afar off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ, as the New Temple, took down the dividing wall of hostility separating Jews and Gentiles which was physically part of the Temple. The dividing wall was erected because of passages in the Mosaic Law forbidding non-Jews from being part of the worship assembly:

^{2:14} For he is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the **dividing wall of hostility** in his body ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances that of the two he might create in himself one new humanity so making peace, ¹⁶ reconciling the two in one body to God through the cross bringing the **hostility** to an end in it.

Christ now brings Jews and Gentiles into himself by the Spirit to make them part of the New Temple in him. In order to experience God, people no longer are to go to the physical building in Jerusalem, but to the Christian community to see our reconciled relationships:

^{2:19} So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God ²⁰ having been built upon the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets (Jesus Christ himself being the **chief cornerstone** ²¹ in whom the **whole structure** is joined together) and growing into a **holy temple** in the Lord ²² into which you are also built for a **dwelling place** of God in the Spirit...^{3:6} to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel...

In the language of the New Temple (3:14 – 21), Paul therefore prays for God:

(1) to strengthen us as living parts of this Temple	^{3:16} that He would grant you...to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self,
(2) to make us, individually, great habitations for Christ	^{3:17a} so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith
(3) to make us aware of our full size, using Ezekiel’s language of New Temple measurements (Ezk.48).	^{3:17b} that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,
(4) to fill us corporately with all His fullness.	^{3:19} that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul also understands spiritual gifts as an aspect of being God entering His New Temple (4:7 – 10). He quotes from Psalm 68, arguably misquoting it intentionally.

Psalm 68 celebrates the activation of the first Temple of David and Solomon. It pictures the ark of the covenant, as the throne of God, going into the Temple in a huge procession. ‘Why do you look with envy, O mountains with many peaks, at the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely the LORD will dwell there forever...They have seen Your procession, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.’ (Ps.68:16, 24). Psalm 68 sees this as an ‘enthronement’ of God where God marches at the head of a victorious procession of ‘captives’ and receives gifts from humanity: ‘You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men’ (68:18, see also v.29).

In Ephesians, Paul applies Psalm 68 to Jesus as the victorious king leading captives in his victory procession: ^{4:7} But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives,’ and he gave gifts to men.

⁹ Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.’ What is strange about this quotation is that Paul misquotes Psalm 68. The strangeness does not pertain to the shift from the second to the third person, which is understandable, but rather to Paul’s substitution of the word ‘gave’ in place of the word ‘received.’ The Hebrew word is not ambiguous in this, so Paul seems to have force-fitted his own wording into the quotation to make it fit his argument and subject material. How can he do this?

Paul uses Psalm 68, not because the Psalm is ‘really about’ Jesus Christ indwelling his people and making them the new Temple, nor because Paul believed that Psalm 68 was fundamentally a ‘prophecy’ of what was to come. In fact, the Psalm goes on to say, ‘Because of Thy temple at Jerusalem, kings will bring gifts to Thee’ (v.29). So the Psalm is historically particular: it refers to a physical building in the physical city of Jerusalem. Yet, Paul quotes from it because he is seeking to achieve an intertextual effect comparing two institutions (old Temple, new Temple) that are similar and dissimilar. While there is the similarity between the two institutions (God dwells in both), there is the dissimilarity as well: When the Jerusalem Temple was indwelled by God, He *received* gifts; but now that God indwells his living Temple, the body of Christ, he *gives* gifts. There is a shift in emphasis corresponding to a movement from lesser to greater. Thus, Paul intentionally misquotes the Psalm because he is achieving a literary and theological effect through intertextuality. What is significant about Psalm 68 is not that every single detail of the Psalm is ‘really about’ the new Temple. Paul is not collapsing the two institutions, which are historically different. Nor is he collapsing Psalm 68 into his own writing or experience. He keeps a historical, literary, and theological distance between the two.

Therefore, spiritual gifts are an expression of Jesus as king in our midst. He is capturing us, and giving us back to each other as gifts. He did this beginning with the apostles. So every Christian fellowship needs to examine spiritual gifts in some way in order to understanding how generous Jesus is.

‘Light in darkness’ is language that the Jews used to describe the Temple. To wit, Jesus declared himself to be ‘the light of the world’ while being in the Temple (Jn.8 – 10). Because we are now ‘in Christ’ as a ‘New Temple,’ it follows that we are ‘the light of the world.’ Hence Paul says:

^{5:8} Now you are **light** in the Lord; walk as children of **light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the **light** consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), ¹⁰ trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of **darkness**, but instead even expose them; ¹² for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. ¹³ But all things become visible when they are exposed by the **light**, for everything that becomes visible is **light**. ¹⁴ For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ The evangelistic role ascribed to the church is notable: What is exposed by the light and made visible is not simply *illuminated*, but *becomes light* as well, just as we are *light* in the Lord.

Since the Temple is the place where the worship and praise of God occurs, it is no surprise that Paul sees the Christian community as a living symphony of worship and praise:

^{5:18} And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.

Finally, Paul’s awareness of Isaiah, and Isaiah’s vision of the New Temple in a New Jerusalem under the reign of the Messiah reinforces the understanding of the Christian community as the New Temple. Isaiah, especially in Isaiah 40 – 66, saw the New Temple/New Jerusalem as the place from which the reign of the Messiah would emanate into the Gentile world. At three strategic times, Paul quotes explicitly from Isaiah, demonstrating that he is clearly aware of the Isaianic vision and sees Jesus as the Messianic figure anticipated by Isaiah. Paul even conflates multiple verses in Isaiah (Is 26:19; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1) to say in Eph.5:14, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ At other times, Paul’s conscious awareness of Isaiah is not identified by a literal quotation, but a broader thematic connection, but his awareness is fairly obvious nevertheless.

Passage in Ephesians	Passage(s) in Isaiah	Topic
1:3 – 14	40:3 – 6; 43:1 – 21	God redeems His people in a new exodus redemption
1:19 – 23	9:1 – 7; 11:1 – 10	Rule of the Messiah, son of David, quotation of Ps.110:1
2:1 – 10	25:6 – 7	God will bring life out of death
2:11 – 22	57:15 – 19	<i>Explicit quotation</i> ; peace to those near and far, new Temple
3:1 – 13	56:3 – 7	Gentiles will be included in the renewed Israel/new Temple
5:7 – 14	60:1 – 11	<i>Explicit quotation</i> ; Arise, light shines in darkness, nations drawn into the New Temple/New Jerusalem
6:10 – 24	59:14 – 19	<i>Explicit quotation</i> ; God's warrior will wear the armor of righteousness to bring justice and righteousness to the world