

Temple Symbolism

Commentary for July 1, 2018 — Illustrations of Spiritual Reality

God uses symbolic language and metaphors to represent reality and illustrate truths in ways that direct communication cannot. This is especially true for those who lack background in a particular knowledge area. Such illustrations allow truth to be thought about in ways not realized before. Sometimes symbols and metaphors are elaborate and detailed. Temple symbolism is one such elaborate set of symbols.

The symbolism of the Tabernacle and Temples is the subject of this month's article "God's Temples, Present, and Future." It is introduced by the "[July 2018 Newsletter](#)," which you should read first for context. The illustration of the Tabernacle/Temple is teaching that begins in Genesis with Eden and ends in Revelation when a structural Temple will no longer be necessary. Symbolic teaching ends when it has served its purpose.

The Great Power of Symbolism

Symbolism that tells us about reality has the greatest power. Those who originally heard Christ's parables did not understand them. Those who read the parables generations later in Scripture, are told the truths expressed by the fictional parables and their tremendous power is revealed in their truth. Yet parables originally hid truth from some so they could yield the great truth to those chosen to receive it.

"And the disciples came, and said unto him, 'Why [do] you speak to them in parables?' He answered and said unto them,

'Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever has not, from him shall be taken away even that he has. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.'"

• *Matthew 13:10–13*

Jesus explained further, quoting a passage from an Isaiah prophecy. He said it was being fulfilled before them at that moment. All of Matthew chapter 13 contains parables. I consider parables to be "open secrets" where the basic information is held back but the truth is available if the key to each parable is given. For us today they are explained in Scripture. (One commonly misjudged parable is "[The Real Meaning of Lazarus and the Rich Man](#).")

God does not lie (Numbers 23:19; Hebrews 6:18), but He does tell some and not others. He decides to withhold information until He selects to whom and when His divine truths of Scripture will be understood. The information God requires a specific individual or an entire generation to know is always available. This is done so that all children of Adam will understand that God is indeed fair, even though it does not seem to be so to us. (Read "[Forgiving God](#)" which will explain.)

The Tabernacle/Temple Symbolism Reaches across Space and Time

The Tabernacle/Temple symbolism covers space because it defines areas that are holy, more holy, and most holy. The most holy area is where divinity has its greatest presence. The holy of holies in the Israelite Tabernacle/Temple was where YHWH's glory was present. Sacrifices also were extended metaphors, temporarily covering sin, not eliminating it or making the sinner righteous. The sacrifices foreshadowed the work of Christ for Israel and all mankind. They had to be performed in a specific place by particular men at precise times:

“Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burnt offerings in every place that you see: But in the place which YHWH shall choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

• ***Deuteronomy 12:13–14***

When the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians and later by the Romans in 70 AD, each time the people came to understand that they could still worship God, even without the Temple. Of course, people were forbidden to sacrifice anywhere but at God's appointed places, but they could pray and worship God anywhere.¹

The Holy Days Were Symbolic

The **“feasts of the Jews”** as the apostle John calls them (John 5:1, 6:4, 7:2), were prophetic symbols of God's plan of redemption that provided a prophetic sequence, a timetable of sorts, of future events.² The events of their observance were to be done where God chose the Tabernacle and Temple to be located.

The animal sacrifices were illustrations of man's separation from God and partial approach back to Him. God required for His people and nation of Israel to do them. He required them to be done at the Tabernacle or Temple.

As you will read in this month's article, earthly Eden, the Tabernacle, the Temples, and even the heavenly Temple — all — are symbolic of a greater truth of where God's real presence will be located in the future, close to when God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:25–28). It is our inheritance to understand all symbols in the future and why they were necessary. For now we must accept things as God has established them. We are, after all, but little children:

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

• ***1 Corinthians 13:9–12***

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¹ [“Synagogues and Ekklesias”](#) tells of the development of synagogues and their historical relationship to *ekklesias*.

² See [“The Sacrificial System of Israel.”](#)