

THE CHURCH

EPHESIANS | WEEK 4: JAN 31, 2016

EPHESIANS

One of the most explicit descriptions of the church as the temple in the NT.

The context of this passage is the beginning fulfillment of the latter-day temple prophecies from the OT. Verse 17 quotes a restoration prophecy from Isaiah 57:19.

EPHESIANS 2:15-18: PART 2 (HUMANITY) OF PAUL'S STORY

The Isaiah quotation supports Paul's preceding point, that Christ's death and resurrection reconciled Jews and Gentiles to God and, thus, to one another. If Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God because they are in the one Christ, then they are also reconciled to and have peace with one another (2:15-16). And if they are part of Christ and a new creation in him, they are also part of the 'one Spirit' and have open 'access' to the Father (2:18).

This open access in the Spirit is interpreted in verses 19-22 to be the temple of God and of the Spirit, the 'cornerstone' being Christ.

CORNERSTONE OF THE TEMPLE: PART 4 (CHRIST) OF PAUL'S STORY

Christ set himself as the 'cornerstone' of the temple through his ministry, death and resurrection. On this 'cornerstone' together with the 'foundation of the apostles and prophets', the church began to be built.

That at times Christ can be referred to as the 'cornerstone' of the temple and, at other times, the temple itself is not inconsistent. The former picture underscores that he is the foundation of the eschatological temple, while the latter affirms that he is the substance which the OT temples foreshadowed.

EPHESIANS 2:15-21: PART 1 (CREATION) OF PAUL'S STORY

Thus, the images of being 'in Christ' (i.e., 'in him', 2:15), 'in one new man' (2:15), 'in one Spirit' (2:18), and 'into a holy temple' (2:21) are all equated with one another. They refer to the one reality of dwelling in the presence of God in the commencement of the new creation. The inclusion of 'temple' in these parallel descriptions of new creation is now natural to understand when it is recalled that the OT temple was a small model of the entire universe.

ISAIAH 57: PART 3 (ISRAEL) OF PAUL'S STORY

The Isaiah 57 quotation is a prophecy of Israel's return from captivity, which Paul understands to have begun fulfillment in Jews and Gentiles turning in faith to Christ, the true Israelite inheritance. It is no coincidence that the verses preceding Isaiah 57:19 also speak of Israel's

restoration in terms of them returning to dwell in God's temple as a new resurrected creation (Is 57:13b-15).

Part of the point in Ephesians is that Jews and Gentiles fulfil the Isaiah prophecy by 'moving', not to geographical Israel but to Christ, the true Israel, the true temple, the zenith of the Law, and the true circumcision.

ISAIAH 56

The background of Isaiah 57 shows that Paul has in mind not merely the temple as a metaphor for the church, but that the church is the initial phase of the building of the final temple that will appear at the end of the age. The promise of the return to dwell in God's restored temple in 57:13-15 picks up the same promise from chapter 56:3-8. Isaiah 56:6 even says that Gentiles will 'minister' to the Lord in the temple as priests, which Is. 66:18-21 makes clearer.

EPHESIANS 2:21-22

Emphasizes the ongoing nature of the new temple's construction. We saw a similar notion of the building or growth of the temple in 1 Corinthians 3.

The temple will continue to expand until God's presence will pervade the entire earth at the end of the age (cf. Eph. 4:13).

References:

Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.