

# The Temple

## Background

Moses is next. He brings the number of those called to three. Like Samuel, like Paul, he also hears his name mentioned twice. Although earlier than the other two, Moses needs consideration here because his calling and his life also mark the beginning of the Temple. A voice calls him from a burning bush. The elements of this theophany suggest aspects that will characterize the core of Temple worship: fire, holy ground, bare feet, face covering, and ministry.

But first, the need to hunt down clues for the future Temple in the previous ages. Shortly after his calling, Abraham seeks to establish a covenant with this God whom he has encountered (Genesis 12, 1-9). The agreement is ritualized by sacrificing an animal. The death of the animal would signify the penalty for breaking this contract. It was a life or death agreement. The animal is cut in two. Fire flows between the two sections, confirming the covenant (Genesis 15, 7-12). The scene suggests an early connection between sacrifice and commitment. Also, fire is given significance. Ritual seals the covenant.

Jacob's dream at Bethel leads him to make an important observation. After receiving a dream of angels moving up and down upon a ladder, he wakes and exclaims, "Truly the Lord is in this place" (Genesis 28, 10-16). That simple remark creates a connection to the call of Moses. Moses sees a bush burning but not consumed. A voice from the bush instructs Moses to remove his sandals because he is "on holy ground" (Exodus 3, 1-5). Holy ground would supply the basis for developing a temple. Israel would eventually recognize a temple could signify holy ground. Holiness would eventually evolve from holy visitations to something holy placed inside a container. Faith saw holy ground established by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant and the unique Presence located between two angels placed on both sides of the Ark. Between those two golden angels, the invisible God was present. Because of that Presence, the top of the Ark would eventually become known as the throne of God.

It was God who instructs Moses to set up a tent so that Divine may dwell among this chosen people. The desert period witnesses the hammering out of Israel's identity. It also relates Divine instructions on how they should honor their God. The tablets plus the Presence leads to a need for a worship system.

The desert also provides the occasion for tracing the beginnings of a priesthood. Priesthood initiates the first steps toward a formal form of ritual worship. The ministry of priests became important also for understanding the ministry of the Levites. The Levites were called to assist the priests in temple responsibilities. The work of both priests and Levites were essential for the celebration of the ritual. The Temple of Jerusalem will create more fully a site for the liturgical presence of God. Therefore, that

future Temple and its surroundings will determine sacred space as an atmosphere for the ritual meeting of God and Israel. Two elements will then become essentials for Temple worship: proper ritual and a qualified priesthood. The Lord had described these elements and therefore they become requirements to be observed. And here is where bare feet come in. Moses was instructed to remove his sandals because he was on holy ground. The Temple became holy ground. Therefore, priests were expected to perform Temple rituals in bare feet. They were standing on holy ground.

Certain things basics to the Temple in Jerusalem arose during the time in the desert because, the Lord dictated the furnishing of this special tent. Its worship should echo the worship of God in heaven. Only such an atmosphere of holiness would allow the Holy One to dwell in an earthly sanctuary. The Book of Exodus proclaims the Divine command: "Build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them. In making the Tabernacle and its furnishings you must follow exactly the pattern I shall show you" (Exodus 25,9). Therefore, constructing and arranging the Dwelling, would be responding to Divine commands. Unlike the later Temples of Solomon and Herod, this Tent Temple would be put together and paid for by the people. No king had yet been anointed. The covering may have been a tent but it expressed the faith of Israel. God ordered it but the people put the plans into action.

During desert times the tent, transformed into a temple, needed to be set aside because of its holiness. It now required reverence. It contained something intensely holy. Moses no longer needed to climb a mountain to meet the Lord. All such meetings would now be held under this tent. Set aside, it became now the Tent of Meeting. It was where the Lord and Moses held conversation. God's presence and sacred space had undergone a change. It was now grounded. No longer up in the air, this tent people could see and therefore locate where the Divine dwelt. Grounded but not dug deeply into the earth, the Dwelling moved with the people. The ground itself would no longer make a particular place holy. This special tent resting upon the ground would make any piece of earth holy. The Divine Presence transformed a tent into a temple.

A description of the desert Temple is described more completely in the Book of Exodus. A topic waiting for us next time. Its purpose was to create an air of holiness. This holiness would be expressed later in a manner of degrees. One small example from the Temple of Jerusalem may demonstrate the principle being formulated in the desert. The degree of holiness could be seen by the movement from activities outside to inside. The altar of sacrifice was placed outside the Temple building. The altar of incense was inside. When the Temple of Jerusalem was built, the holiest part of the whole complex was inside. The Jerusalem Temple was modeled on the palaces of the time. Various courtyards decided who could approach holier areas. The language of the developed Temple created an air of kings and their courts. The Temple of Solomon consisted of a series of courtyards with requirements of who could stand where during worship. The Temple highlighted God's mystery, protected by distance which was seen needed for reverence. Direct audience with royalty was never open to everyone. Especially not for

Someone acknowledged as the King of Kings. The Divine throne room was farthest away.

The Tent of Meeting holds special significance for Christians. It supplies a stitch that ties together desert times with the birth of Jesus. St. John's Gospel announces the birth of the Lord in his prologue. The high point of this introduction comes when the Evangelist proclaims "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1,14). The literal translation of the text is "The Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us." This phrase connects the first Temple of the Old Testament with the new Temple of the New Testament. This new identity becomes confirmed in the same Gospel when Jesus proclaims "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days." (John 2,19). The Gospel writer clarifies this remark by observing, "Actually he was talking about the temple of his body"(John 2,21). The Divine Dwelling evolved from a Tent of Meeting to a Temple, to a physical body, to a Resurrected body, and finally to a Eucharistic body. St. Paul takes this awareness even further for those who are joined to Christ: "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within — the Spirit you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6, 19).