



The Thirty-First Century of His-Story: A Promise and a Picture of Christ Together With His Church

As much as the people of God would like to live forever under a godly king who brought earthly peace and prosperity to the nation, such life was still corrupted with sin and death. The life that the church had enjoyed under King David and now under Solomon was only a taste of something far better that God has in store for her. The king under whom they experienced peace was only a picture of the Prince of Peace who was yet to come, and who would conquer the real enemy, Satan. It is a beautiful and wonderful picture that the people of God will cherish and cling to as they wait for Christ to come in person.

The coming years before the glory of Christ shines forth will be dark and frightening for the church, and God has one more picture to give to his people to sustain them through this time: the temple. The temple is a picture of the church herself in covenant fellowship with her God. God will use King Solomon to build this temple and decorate it to express the great glory and beauty of this reality of God with his covenant people. When this temple is complete, the Old Testament church will have everything she needs to await the coming of Christ and recognize him when he comes. She has three precious gifts to carry her through the painful and frightening walk deep into the coming dark valley: 1) the promise of the seed who would crush the head of the serpent to destroy the power of sin (Genesis 3:15); 2) the glorious picture of Christ as prophet, priest, and king; and 3) the beautiful picture of the church fellowshiping with God in the temple. The next 500 years or so will be a painful and frightening walk deep into this dark valley. During the last 400 years even the speaking of God through prophets goes silent and the church is left only with that promise of the gospel, the picture of Christ, and the picture of the church.

The thirty-first century begins midway through the glorious reign of Solomon. Two outstanding events that take place during this period are the building of the temple and the apostasy of ten northern tribes who forsake the picture and the promise of Christ when they say, "What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse" (1 Kings 12:16). It spans the reigns of eight kings and queen Jezebel, and ends midway through the reign of king Jehoshaphat when he seeks peace and fellowship with the wicked king Ahab, who was ruling the ten apostate tribes.

By the time the thirty-first century began, Solomon was known far and wide for his wisdom and the glory of his kingdom. The people were happy and at peace. "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (1 Kings 4:25). As a picture of Christ nourishing his people with truth and wisdom, Solomon "spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree

that *is* in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” (1 Kings 4:32–34). During this peaceful time Solomon set in motion the great desire of his father David, to build a temple unto Jehovah God who had revealed to the church his plan of salvation from the bondage of sin in Christ.

David had devoted the later part of his reign to the gathering of materials for the building of this temple. The design of this temple did not come from the wisdom of man, but came from God himself who made David “understand in writing by *his* hand upon me, *even* all the works of this pattern” (1 Chron 28:19). God inspired David to record every detail, from the room dimensions to the size of the court and details of the tools used by the priests, and David gave these to Solomon along with all the gold and silver needed. Now Solomon organized the project and had the neighboring king Hiram supply timber and craftsmanship. Everything was well organized, and no detail was overlooked in this important work. “And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe *nor* any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building” (1 Kings 6:7).

Minute details and dimensions were important for the earthly temple, and they were also important for the spiritual temple that was measured in the visions of Zechariah 2, Ezekiel 40–42, and Revelation 11 and 21. The earthly temple was a picture of the wonder of God dwelling in covenant fellowship with each and every child of God living together as members of the body of Christ. Every covenant child is important, and not one will be lost or forgotten. The measuring and attention to detail is to show the great value, the glorious extent and prosperity of what is being measured.

When the temple was finished, Solomon continued with building projects. He built the king’s house, a navy to explore the world and bring back treasures from afar, and cities for defense and storage for all the wealth that poured into the kingdom. As a picture of the church, the only kingdom of God under the rule of Christ, Solomon’s kingdom exceeds every earthly kingdom. “So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year” (1 Kings 10:23–25). God will gather his people from every nation of the earth, and every member of the body of Christ will give of him or herself to serve. For anyone who is really able to see the blessedness of life within the body of Christ, the queen of Sheba says it all when she says “Happy *are* thy men, happy *are* these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, *and* that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice” (1 Kings 10:8–9)

The picture is indeed beautiful, but it is limited by the fact that it is but a picture.

But

“But King Solomon loved many strange women” (1 Kings 11:1).

After describing the beauty and glory of the picture in chapter 10, chapter 11 begins with the very small but significant word *But*. This word signals a contrast, not simply between the good in Solomon with the bad, but rather between the weakness and limitation of the *picture* of Christ with

Christ himself. Solomon was a seed of the woman, but he was not the promised seed who would crush the head of the serpent. Solomon had great wealth and wisdom, but these things could not touch the power of sin. Ironically, for the man who had everything his heart could desire, sin raised its ugly head in Solomon in the form of covetousness, “which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). We read simply “But king Solomon loved many strange women.” This desire for something God had forbidden him opened the floodgates to further idolatry and sin, which swept Solomon farther and farther from the experience of covenant fellowship with God. The church must not live in the picture, but must look forward to the reality of life with God in Christ. It was time for the picture to fade.

Even though Solomon floundered in his sins and their consequences, God assured him that he would be faithful to his promises. The kingdom would be rent in two, but the line of David would continue until the promised King, who would be able to destroy the power of sin, was born (1 Kings 11:13). God now records the history and the means he used to erase the picture so that his church would increasingly direct their attention to the reality of the coming Savior. We read that it was Jehovah who stirred up adversaries against Solomon (1 Kings 11:7). These adversaries began as individual men who gradually gathered likeminded men around them and waited for the right opportunity to strike and begin to erode and dismantle the glorious picture of Christ, his wisdom, his spiritual riches, and his glory.

Shortly after Solomon’s death, Jeroboam made his move, and God used him to drive away the majority of the nation whose heart was not looking ahead to Christ, but left a small remnant with the house of David. God made it clear to Jeroboam that all this history was under the sovereign control of God and served his purposes in Christ. The majority in Israel under the rule of Jeroboam quickly followed his leadership into a false and apostate worship of Jehovah through his own altar and an image of a calf.

The temple in Jerusalem continued to attract the godly in Israel, and a steady trickle of people fleeing the apostasy of Israel came to Judah and joined the people of God in their worship and looking forward to the promised Savior. But even in Judah apostasy was taking hold, and the kings did not all serve their role well as a picture of Christ fighting against sin. Rehoboam as the king did nothing to fight against the sinful developments of idolatry and homosexuality in Judah (1 Kings 14:23–24). Rehoboam’s son Abijam was not much better, “Nevertheless for David’s sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem” (1 Kings 15:4). King Asa did much as a godly king to fight against the sins of idolatry and homosexuality that had flourished under Rehoboam, but his power was limited to a superficial suppression of these sins.

While God preserved his church in Judah, a succession of wicked kings in Israel after Jeroboam drove the nation of Israel deeper into apostasy and farther from the promised salvation in Christ. In a number of places, we read that there was continual war between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. This warfare served to insulate the church from the influence of apostate Israel until King Jehoshaphat foolishly “made peace with the king of Israel” (1 Kings 22:45), so that they could unite their forces against Syria. The battle ended with the death of wicked King Ahab in Israel, and brought the apostate church dangerously close to the church, leaving her vulnerable to the attempts of wicked Athaliah to destroy the line of David and the promised Christ. This history, however, belongs to the next hundred year segment.

Before we close with this hundred year span of history, I want to reflect a bit on the significance of the temple that had been built. The temple as a symbol of God's dwelling with his people in covenant fellowship was the only physical symbol that continued until the promised Savior came and performed his saving work. Even though the nation of Israel came to an end with their captivity, and the ark of the covenant and much of the furnishings were lost forever, God commanded that the temple be rebuilt by those who were allowed to return to Jerusalem under Cyrus and Darius. All the other elements of Israel's life as a nation were means to the end of life eternal with God, so that picture of life with God would stand as a beacon of light and hope in an increasingly dark nation. It served this role until Jesus himself made clear that he is the eternal temple when he said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). At that point there was no longer a need for an earthly temple.

God gives the temple a great deal of attention in the books of the prophets, but the attention is shifted to something far more glorious than a physical building. The prophet Ezekiel was taken in a vision from Babylon back to the destroyed temple to measure every detail of the temple (Ezek. 40–48): "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 for ever," (Ezek. 43:7). After taking detailed measurements to underscore the great significance of God's dwelling with His people, we read, "*It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there*" (48:35). Time shifts to eternity, and we read in Joel, "But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood *that* I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion." (Joel 3:20–21) Jeremiah looks forward to the saving work of delivering his people from the bondage of sin and the gathering of the nations into one body at the throne of Jehovah. We read, "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit *it*; neither shall *that* be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (Jer. 3:16–17).

Zechariah uses language to describe the new and heavenly Jerusalem as "Jerusalem shall be inhabited *as* towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. ... And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee," (Zech. 2:4–5, 11). The spiritual reality is made clear in Christ, of whom we learn, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*" (Heb. 9:9–12). God's full and complete revelation of the significance of the temple comes in the book of Revelation: "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, *and be* their God" (Rev. 21:3). Finally we have no more need even of the picture of the temple in heaven: "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Rev 21:22).

The temple that had been rebuilt by the returned captives was enlarged by Herod the Great shortly before Jesus was born, but finally destroyed completely in AD 70 under the leadership of the Roman general Titus. Since the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in the seventh century, the temple site

has been for some 1300 years under the Muslim Dome of the Rock. This false religion may imagine that having a mosque over the site of the temple of Jehovah God is significant, but they, as well as Christians who are offended by Muslim control of this site, fail to see that the true and eternal temple is the body of Christ, a temple of living stones, each and every elect child of God with Christ as the head. With Christ at the right hand of God, the people of God have no more interest in the temple Solomon built other than as a glorious picture of the blessed covenant fellowship the church begins to enjoy now.