

The Tabernacle of Witness

In his talk before the Jewish council, when he was on trial for his life, Stephen said, "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen." Acts 7:44. It is in the twenty-fifth chapter of Exodus that we find this given; and clearly the remainder of that book is devoted to the description of the tabernacle its furniture, and the service pertaining to it.

The principal article in the tabernacle was the ark containing the tables of the law, the Ten Commandments. It was called "the ark of the testimony," for the commandments are frequently called the testimonies of God. Testimony is witness, and the law is called the testimony, because it is a witness of God's presence. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," and "God is love," therefore the law is God's life. So the tabernacle that contained the witness, or the testimony, was called "the tabernacle of witness."

It was from above the ark of the testimony, between the cherubim that were upon it, that God said He would meet with Moses and commune with him of all things that He would give him in commandment unto the children of Israel. Exodus 25:22. And it was there that the glory of God was specially manifested. In Psalm 80:1, we read: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell *between* the cherubim, shine forth!" And when Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, threatened to destroy Jerusalem, Hezekiah the king, in his extremity, went up into the house of the Lord, and spread Sennacherib's defiant and blasphemous letter before the Lord; "and Hezekiah prayed, "O LORD God of Israel, *the One* who dwells *between* the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear." 2 Kings 19:14-16

It is in Exodus 25:8 that we find the reason why the tabernacle was built. God told Moses to have the people bring offerings of gold, silver, and brass, fine linen, etc. and said, "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." In one sense this was a great honor; for, as Moses said, "What nation is there so great, that hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for?" Deuteronomy 4:7. Yet when we consider the matter further, the command to build the sanctuary, together with the statement of the reason why it was to be built, is one of the most sorrowful things to be found in the Scriptures. "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them!" What a sad thing! That God's people, whom He had delivered from bondage for the express purpose of dwelling not simply among them, but in them, had to have a house made with hands in order that His glory might be seen among them. Thus the tabernacle was at once a witness of God's presence and of the unfaithfulness of the children of Israel.

"The Most High dwells not in temples made with hands." "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; where is the house that ye build unto

me? And where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath my hand made.” It is evident that the tabernacle built by Moses could not be the real dwelling-place of God, and every Jew ought to have been impressed by that truth every time he looked at it. Solomon knew it well, for at the dedication of the temple that he built, which was far larger and grander than the first tabernacle, he said, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” 1 Kings 8:27. What then is God’s dwelling place? He Himself indicated it when, after asking, “Where is the place that you build unto Me? And where is the place of My rest?” He said, “But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17. The human body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. 1 Corinthians 6:19. This is the true dwelling place of God.

When Jesus was asked for proof of His divine mission, He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it up.” At that very time he was standing in the Jewish temple, and although he made no explanation, he expected the people to understand that, “he spoke of the temple of his body.” So evident is it that the human body, and no man-made building, is the temple of the Lord, that the Jews ought to have understood his meaning without any explanation. He was the temple indeed, because the law of God was within his heart (Psalm 40:8), not in dead characters, but as the Spirit of life, in the Living Stone. Therefore it is that He is “the faithful and true witness.” To us the Lord says, “Ye are my witnesses, and my servants whom I have chosen.” “You *are* My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.” “I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and *there was* no foreign *god* among you; therefore you *are* My witnesses,” says the LORD, “that I *am* God.” Isaiah 43:10, 12

When the Lord is given full possession of his temple—his people—then they also, as well as Christ, are his witnesses to the world.

When Moses erected the tabernacle, “then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:34, 35. Even so it was at the dedication of Solomon’s temple: when Solomon had made an end of praying, “the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord’s house.” 2 Chronicles 7:1, 2. That was a representation of how it should be with God’s people, His real temple. Thus it was with Christ, for “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The people saw the glory of the Lord upon the house (2 Chronicles 7:3), at the dedication of the temple. The Lord says to his people, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is

risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee; and his glory shall be seen upon thee.” And even as the Lord said, “My house shall be called an house of prayer for all nations,” so will it be with his true temple, his people, when their bodies are dedicated to him. For he says, “The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” “And nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He hath glorified thee.”

There are marvelous opportunities and privileges for men who will take them! “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.” It is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth, and when the Spirit fills men they have power to be tabernacles of witness. There was no man in the tabernacle when the glory of God filled it; even so when Christ, the quickening Spirit, dwells in the heart by faith, and we are, according to the riches of his glory, “filled with all the fullness of God,” self will disappear, and he that abides between the cherubim will shine forth.