

## The New Temple

*"There will not be left here one stone standing upon another."* Mark ch.13 vs.1-2.

Recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels(Matthew, Mark & Luke), this is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, and with it, the magnificent Herodian temple. This prophecy had its literal fulfillment when the Roman armies laid waste Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

But is that all ? Are there not, underlying this briefly recorded episode, deep spiritual truths, so that we may look for meaning beyond the literal fulfillment of the prophecy, meaning relevant to our situation today ?

Look at the background. Jesus had resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. Chapter 10 of Mark records the beginning of the journey and the events and teachings associated with it, and follows Him to the gates of the Holy City. Chapter 11 records His entry into the city, and tells how He went into the Temple and "Looked around at everything." The rest of that chapter, and chapter 12 give an account of the events centred in the Temple. The concern of Jesus was for His Father's House. It was here in the Temple that He came into mortal conflict with the religious leaders of the Jews, and spoke the parable of the wicked tenants.

Then chapter 13 begins, *"As He came out of the Temple."* Jesus would never physically enter the Temple again. He had subjected it to His piercing scrutiny and judgment, and He, who was the Glory of the Temple, walked out never to reenter. One cannot but be reminded of Ezekiel's vision of the Glory of the Lord departing from the Temple in Jerusalem. ( Ezekiel ch. 10 ) The Temple functioned for another 45 years or so, but in God's economy its relevance ceased when, on that day, Jesus came out of it. On that day the Glory departed and "Ichabod" was written over it.

Jesus, I believe, knew the significance of that "coming out", but His disciples did not. They were still deeply impressed with this massive and splendid structure before their eyes. It spoke of permanence, of the venerable religious traditions of their fathers, of wealth and earthly influence and glory. *"What wonderful stones ! What wonderful buildings !"* they exclaim. They were proud of it. They could not then perceive that the Glory had just left it.

These events have their spiritual parallels today. Jesus comes to look around the Church, His Father's House, to subject it to His piercing scrutiny, to try and to test, to see and expose its true character. In that context read and meditate again about the cleansing of the Temple. What would Jesus find today of commercialism, buying, selling and money-changing ? Read the parable of the wicked tenants and think of the vineyard planted by the Lord at Pentecost, and what we have done with that vineyard. The barren fig tree too has its relevance, and the nit-picking theological arguments of ch.12 vs. 18-24 are still with us, and Jesus' warning about the religious experts in 12:38-39 still applies.

Jesus came out of the Temple, a Temple which had failed. He walked out of something that had once been of God, but was now a sterile religious system, a monument to formalism and ritual without life. And so I see Him walking out of much of what is called "Church" today.

I also see that we are so like those disciples. We do not perceive what is happening. We do not realise when the Glory has gone. but we are impressed and awed as they were, by what we can see -- the mega-churches, the fastest growing churches, the opulent buildings, the big budgets the evident success.

How great the surprise and shock of the disciples to hear Jesus respond to their exclamations of wonder and amazement by these devastating words, *"There will not be left here one stone standing upon another that will not be cast down."* Jesus verdict on the Temple and the whole system it represented is also His verdict about all our man-made religious buildings, institutions, denominations and organisations. *"The Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands."* (Acts ch.7 v.48.) *"The haughtiness of man shall be humbled and the pride of men ( and how proud we are of our churches and denominations, our flourishing organisations ) shall be brought low, and the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day."* Isaiah ch.2 v.17.



Shock, surprise, disbelief may be our reaction, as it was of the disciples, as they heard that fateful pronouncement of the Lord. We cannot imagine that those things which we see, admire and even love are destined for destruction.

What the disciples were unable to see then was that another, and very different Temple, was about to be built, not a visible physical building, not a humanly conceived and planned organisation or institution, but "*A Spiritual House*" ( *1 Peter 2.vs.4-5.*), built by God by His Spirit, composed of "*Living stones*", a Temple of people, joined together in and by the Lord Himself, who would dwell amongst them.

The death knell of the Old Covenant, with its "Earthly sanctuary", had sounded, and the New Covenant, which was all from heaven, was about to be inaugurated by the Cross, the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, and that little group of as-yet-unperceiving disciples was to be the nucleus of the New Temple.

Today, I believe, Jesus is bringing disciples of His out of the temple of our man-made churches and denominations. Those who are brought out may still be incredulous that the great and seemingly successful churches and organisations of Christendom are to be dismantled and brought to naught. But, as they stand "Outside" with Jesus, they are the promise of a renewing and a restoring. The future is with them and not with the "Wonderful buildings."

At that point, only Jesus knew of the New Temple and its nature. First must come the agonies of the Cross, the dark nights and days in the tomb. the glorious resurrection. the ascension and pouring out of the Spirit. The next few days were to see the annihilation of the hopes, plans and dreams of the disciples. They were to be brought to the utter end of themselves. In a sense, within them, not a stone was to be left standing upon another. And out of that self-shattering cross experience, that ruin of all their dearly-held earthly schemes and ambitions, they were utterly humbled to await "*The promise of the Father*", and at Pentecost the New Temple was created from heaven, "*Not made with hands*" but by the sovereign work of the Spirit.

The Church. "*Made with hands*". in all its multifarious systems, denominations and organisations, its "*Wonderful stones. Wonderful buildings*", ----- or the "*Spiritual House*", not made with hands, but created and built by the Lord Jesus Himself through the Spirit. We have our choice. But know, that twixt the former and the latter stand suffering, rejection by religious leaders, the Cross and the dark night of the tomb before glorious resurrection joy, and a fresh infusion of the Spirit's power, and a New Temple for the habitation of God in the Spirit.

Where will you stand ? In the "*Wonderful buildings*", under the prophetic sentence of the Lord, or outside with Him as forerunners of the renewed Temple of the latter days ?

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