

# “They Speak of Me”

*A guide to seeing the glory of Jesus in John's Gospel (Part 1- Where do I meet God?)*

By Jeremy McKeen

The first part of John's grand project to reveal the glory of Jesus begins with his gospel and culminates with the book of Revelation. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John sets out in his gospel to show Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament types and shadows, as the greater Prophet, Priest and King, and most importantly as the very LORD God of Israel who has come to earth in grace as the promised Messiah, so that we might believe in Jesus and cry out with Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (see Jn.20:28,31).<sup>1</sup> In part 1 of this study we will discover how we meet God in Jesus, the final tabernacle/temple of God.

## THE TABERNACLE / TEMPLE

John begins in chapter 1 by saying, “The Word [God] became flesh and dwelt among us” (see John 1:1,14). The Greek word for “dwelt” is literally the phrase, “to tabernacle.” John is making the claim that Jesus is the true tabernacle and temple, but such a claim must be adequately proven. This is precisely what John sets out to do in the rest of his gospel. But to see why this is such a radical claim, we need to first understand what the purpose of the tabernacle/temple was. Second, we need to see how John proves his claim by comparing its layout and various elements with the person and work of Jesus.

### The Purpose

The Old Testament tabernacle was referred to as “the tent of meeting” (Ex.33:7). It was the place where someone met God in a special and unique way to receive forgiveness for sins and experience the joy of His presence. If you wanted to meet with God, and appropriately worship God, everyone knew that there was only one place to go – the portable tabernacle in the wilderness, which later became the permanent temple in Jerusalem. So, the tabernacle and the temple represented God's desire to dwell in the midst of His people where His people would encounter His glory of grace and truth. When John tells us, “We have seen his glory ... full of grace and truth” (Jn.1:14) and records Jesus' claim to be the final temple that would be destroyed but be resurrected 3 days later (see Jn.2:19), John is claiming that everything the tabernacle and temple was meant to be is now fulfilled and found in Jesus.

The one place to meet God is now through Jesus. This is why Jesus says to the woman of Samaria, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (Jn.4:21). Jesus is the new and final meeting place between God and man. But how can this radical claim be proven?

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to several men for many of these insights and connections. These include but are not limited to: Dr. Warren Gage, Dr. Edmond Clowney, Dr. Timothy Keller, Dr. Don Carson, and Dr. Dennis Johnson. This pamphlet is meant to bless and build up Christ's church and in particular point Jewish people to the promised Messiah. It is a work in progress and thus any suggestions, further insights, and/or corrections are most welcome.

## **The Layout and Elements**

**12 Tribes:** If you were a Jew in the days of the tabernacle, the first thing you would notice is that all twelve tribes of Israel would encamp around the tabernacle as it journeyed through the wilderness, representing the diversity of people brought together in the Lord. So, its no coincidence that when Jesus, like Moses comes down from the mountain, He gathered twelve diverse disciples who “encamped” around him as Jesus journeyed through the land of Israel.

**The Altar of Sacrifice:** If you were to approach the tabernacle itself, the first thing you would see would be the altar of sacrifice which represented that sinful man could only come before a Holy God through a blood sacrifice. The Priest would lift up a lamb, a pure firstborn lamb that would be offered up in death on this altar. This was the way one would be reconciled with God, because the death of the lamb represented a Substitute who would one day come to truly take God’s judgment for sin away. When we move through John’s gospel, we quickly see that he is moving us through the various stages of the tabernacle. For when John the baptizer sees Jesus, he cries out, “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). And all throughout John’s gospel we learn that Jesus “must be lifted up” (see Jn.3:14; 8:28; 12:32). God has now provided the final Lamb, not just to take believing Israel’s sins away, but anyone’s sins, from any nation in the world who would believe in Jesus as their final Substitute. In other words, Jesus is the final sacrifice that removes the penalty, power, and one day presence of sin.

**The Laver:** After the altar of sacrifice; one would encounter the Laver, located between the altar and the door into the Holy place. The Laver was a well-like basin of water where the priests would cleanse themselves and purify themselves, representing the purity that God requires before entering into His presence. In John 2, Jesus turns the water jars of purification into wine representing his blood that will completely purify us from sin. Furthermore, in John 4, an immoral woman goes to a well to draw water, and what does Jesus offer her? Living water that doesn’t just cleanse her hands, and satisfy her physical thirst, but will cleanse her heart and satisfy her spiritual thirst. Finally, in John 5, Jesus provides a man the healing that the waters of Bethesda couldn’t bring him. In other words, in Jesus, we are truly cleansed, satisfied, and healed before God.

**The Shewbread:** After the Priest would be cleansed, he would enter into the Holy Place and immediately to his right was called “the Shewbread” or “the bread of presence” and there were always twelve loaves, which served as a reminder of God’s provision to feed the multitude of tribes in the wilderness and meet all his people’s needs. As we keep turning in John gospel, we come to John 6, and what does Jesus do? He miraculously feeds the multitude in the wilderness, and how many baskets of bread were left over? Exactly twelve baskets full were left over, emblematic of the Shewbread and the precise provision for his disciple’s needs. Jesus then declares that He is “the Bread of Life” (Jn.6:35). In other words, in Jesus, God now perfectly provides for his people’s needs, and Jesus is the true Bread that has come down from Heaven to satisfy our ultimate spiritual need of a reconciled eternal relationship with God.

**The Lamp Stand:** Still in the Holy Place, the Priest would see immediately to his left, a lamp stand, which was a 7-branch candlestick, similar to the current Jewish Menorah. This would be the only light that would enable the priest to see where He was going because the tent would cover everything. It would always be kept burning, which represented the guiding truth of life that God would always provide for his people. Continuing in similar fashion, we would expect to find something of Jesus and light as we move through John's gospel, and that's exactly what we find. Jesus announces, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn.8:12). And then continuing in chapter 9, Jesus gives sight to a blind man showing that He alone has the power to bring light out of darkness, the mark of God's power. In other words, in Jesus, we encounter "the truth that will set us free" (Jn.8:31).

**The Altar of Incense:** Before the Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place, he would come to another altar. This was the altar of incense where the priest would pray on behalf of the people he represented. What do we find in John 17? Jesus prays his high priestly prayer, where he makes intercession for his people before he dies.

**The Holy of Holies:** As the Priest went through the large curtain and entered into the Holy of Holies, he would have seen the Ark of the Covenant, which included the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod that budded, and manna from Heaven. The top of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat, where the High priest would sprinkle blood for the sins of the people once a year. On the top of the mercy seat were two golden angels sitting, one at the head and one at the foot of the Ark, and they faced each other, but they were looking down at the top of the box, representing the wonder the angels have that the Holy God of Heaven has a merciful plan of redemption for mankind (see 1 Pt.1:12).

The question then, is where is John's Holy of Holies? How does John prove that Jesus has replaced the most sacred place in Israel's history where God's glory dwelt? In John 20, Jesus has already died, been buried and we read that Mary, an immoral woman who Jesus had forgiven and restored, "stooped to look into the tomb," and what did she see? It says, "She saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet" (Jn.20:12). Jesus is the new Mercy Seat. After fulfilling the Law in our place, and pouring out his blood for our sins on the cross, the true Manna from Heaven, was resurrected as he had promised. The true Staff of God budded with new life, never to die again. The Final Temple was "rebuilt," never to be destroyed again.

Now, in Jesus, the immoral prostitutes become "a holy priesthood" (1 Pt.2:9) and are able to approach the Holy God of Israel at anytime, because at Jesus' death, the curtain in the temple was torn in two (Luke 23:45), erecting "a new and living way" to God (see Heb.10:20) God meets us no longer at a particular place but through a particular person, namely Jesus. This is why Christians no longer point people to a temple; we point people to Jesus, who is the true Tabernacle and Temple of God. He is the final Temple where all the nations will one day gather to worship for we're told, "I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev.21:22). Where can we meet God to receive a life of forgiveness, joy, and assurance? We must look nowhere else but to Jesus Christ.