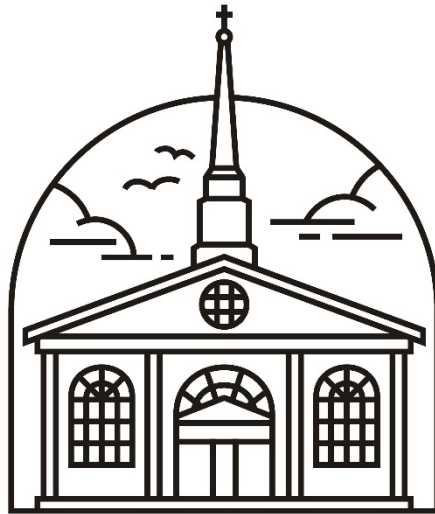


Origin of



the Church

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Lesson Four

Pre-Early Church Progression

Overview

The origin Church in the New Testament era did not have a fixed location. The early Church and the Jewish Temple are not synonymous. The temple was assigned a fixed place after years of a traveling structure that required set up and tear down during the nomadic leadership of Moses. Before Moses, man connected with God in the presence of nature, without a formal structure, highlighting the significance of visible creation as a way to celebrate the Creator.

The Jews are not the first people group to worship the God of Creation. Historical evidence supports the worship of the creator in African and Assyrian cultures, both of which pre-date the history of the Hebrews. The Bible also references the first occurrence that men “called upon the name of the Lord” in Genesis 4:26 at a time when Hebrew, Jewish, or Christian theology did not yet exist.

The history of Hebrew-Jewish worship can be separated into three time periods: The pre-temple period, the first-temple period, and finally, the second-temple period.

Pre-Temple Period

Stone Altars - The first place of worship to honor the God of creation in Hebrew culture is represented in the Old Testament as stone memorials, with the first erected by Noah following the flood. (Genesis 8:20) Abraham resets the practice after his inaugural encounter with the Creator. (Genesis 12:7-8) He returns the same location later (Genesis 13:4) and then establishes a new stone altar location in Hebron. (Genesis 13:18) In Genesis 22:9, the sacrificial site God selected in Moriah for Abraham to offer his son becomes the third altar and will become the future location site for the construction of the first physical temple. (Gen. 22:9)

Isaac and Jacob, the sons of Abraham, will continue the practice after each of them is introduced to the God of their father. (Gen 26:25- Isaac; Gen. 33:20 - Jacob) Moses had an altar encounter, which he named "Jehovahnissi," as a final precursor before the construction of the Tent Tabernacle. (Exodus 17:15)



The Tabernacle of Moses

The Tabernacle (Church in the Wilderness) - God provided architectural guidelines for the construction of an outdoor encampment that would provide a dedicated place to convene with Moses and those assigned to minister to the congregation of people. The design pattern included the fabrication of the tools and accessories needed to offer sacrifices upon the altar placed within the encampment. (Exodus 25:9, 26:1)

The Mishkan, which is Hebrew for tabernacle, was a portable structure designed to be carried and moved between locations. The "Tent of the Congregation" was designed to serve the spiritual needs of God's people. Traveling as a large community, it was impractical for each man or household to maintain individual stone altars, as had been the practice before the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. The Tabernacle offered a single altar for sacrifices serving the entire congregation. This was the first communal model that represented the faith and religious practices of the Hebrew people.

The Tabernacle was also constructed to house the Ark of the Covenant, which contained three sacred artifacts: the Ten Commandments, written on two stone tablets (Exodus 25:10, 16); Aaron's rod, which budded to confirm his family's selection as the priesthood for all the tribal families of Israel (Numbers 17:10); and an omer of manna, that was a symbol of God's provision as the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness (Exodus 16:33).

Everything related to the Tabernacle, including the Ark, was designed to be portable. The artifacts, tools, and furnishings of the Tabernacle were not permanent fixtures or attachments. Small ringlets were incorporated into the most sacred items to allow long staves to be inserted into the attached rings, preventing holy items from being handled by human hands. The focus on mobility in the physical construction of the Tabernacle is an important characteristic.

When the Hebrew-Jewish ancestors built stone altars along travel paths, it illustrated the mobility of worship. The emphasis of worship was not placed on visiting a specific location and then returning home to live life without interruption. The stone altars symbolized pauses and interruptions in life's journey that encouraged individuals to recognize their creator.

The Church in the Wilderness was led by a pillar of cloud, indicating when it was time for the congregation to continue their journey. (Exodus 13:21) Upon departure, the Tabernacle had to be dismantled, and upon arrival at a new location, it had to be reassembled. The instructions for setting up and taking down the Tabernacle were very specific, and the task was assigned to a selected family among the Levite tribe. (Numbers 1:50-53, 4:15-16)

In the pre-temple period, the mobile Tabernacle represents the readiness of the Church in the Wilderness to move when He required them to follow. The journey through the wilderness to the land God promised could not be made without carrying His presence with them.

First Temple Period 1200 – 586 BCE

The Church in the Wilderness arrives at the boundaries of the Promised Land forty years after the departure from Egypt. The Ark and the Tabernacle continued to be the centerpiece of worship and guidance for God's people during the days of the Judges, who assumed the role of leadership that followed Moses and Joshua. (Judges 20:27)

Eli inherited the leadership of the Aaronic priesthood serving in the Tabernacle (I Samuel 1:9) and was given custody of Samuel, who became his understudy in the priesthood (I Samuel 2:18, 3:1) and would eventually become the first prophet. (I Samuel 3:19-21)

The sons of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas were ungodly, noted in scripture as sons of Belial, wicked, and worthless. (I Samuel 2:12) The sons inherit the leadership of their father, and when the Hebrews instigate a war with the Philistines as they continue to settle their claim in the Promised Land, they lose four thousand souls in the conflict. It was an unexpected defeat. The sons of Eli send Levites to fetch the Ark of the Testimony from Shiloh (I Samuel 4:4) in the tribal land of Ephraim and bring it to the battlefield to ensure victory for the next battle round. The Hebrews lose thirty thousand footmen, and more importantly, the Ark was taken as a spoil from the battle, and the sons of Eli are slain. (I Samuel 4:10-11,*22)

The Tabernacle continued as an outdoor encampment for over 450 years after the Hebrews arrived in the Promised Land, including during the two years of their first King, Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. King David was the first Jewish leader who envisioned a fixed, permanent location to replace the tent Tabernacle. The Ark of Testimony was still in the custody of foreign hands in a place called Ekron when he became the second King of the Hebrews. (ISamuel 5:10, 6:1)

King David retrieves the lost Ark (II Samuel 6:17), but God will not allow his hands to build the edifice he envisioned to house and protect the Ark. God chooses David's son, Solomon, to build the temple, using the resources set aside by David and the design pattern God gave to him. (I Chronicles 28:11-19)

The Chronicle of its construction is captured alongside the history of King Solomon. He built the temple on the site where Abraham was prepared to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. (Gen. 22:9/*IIChrn 3:1)

The estimation of its completed construction is 1000 BCE. (I Kings 8:12-21) The Temple City became the signature of the Hebrews as an established nation. The physical structure represented the power and presence of their kingdom.

Jews in the Northern Kingdom built their own version of the Jerusalem temple under the leadership of their first King, Jeroboam. (I Kings 12:25-30)

Jews in the Southern Kingdom violated and compromised the use of the Temple with idolatry, building altars to Baal inside the Holy Place, during the reign of Manasseh. (II Kings 17:13-20, II Kings 21:1-10)

In 586 BCE, a little more than four hundred years after the temple was constructed, Nebuchadnezzar desecrated the Holy Place, and the people of Judah were placed under siege. (II Kings 23:26/ II Chronicles 36:14-17)

Nebuchadnezzar required all of the elite members of Jewish households, including religious leaders and educated families, to be taken into permanent custody. (II Kings 24:12-14) The Holy Temple was burned, and the sacred artifacts were confiscated. (II Kings 25:9-10 / II Chronicles 36:7-19) (*the loss of the Holy Ark of the Covenant is unknown)

The destruction of the temple and removal of the priests and Levites responsible for its oversight made it impossible for the Jews not taken into Babylonian captivity to continue the practice of religious rituals, including daily temple prayers.

In 550 BC, forty-seven years later, Cyrus, the Persian King gave a direct mandate to send Jewish families home to return and restore their homeland. (II Chronicles 36:22)

Zerubbabel organized the restoration and initiated the work by constructing a new altar. The altar and temple foundation were celebrated by restoring the practice of burnt offerings and honoring the annual feasts. (Ezra 3:1-4, 10-13) Observing that the temple walls remained burned and broken, Nehemiah would lead to the work to restore the temple walls. (Nehemiah 1:3, 2:5)

The completed temple was formally dedicated under the watch and leadership of Ezra as the prepared and ready scribe. (Nehemiah 8:1-6) The milestone in history was known as the Second Temple Period (516 BC - 70 AD). The restored Zerubbabel-Nehemiah temple existed until the time of the Messiah.

Second Temple Period 516 BCE – 37 CE

The post-exile period, also known as The Second Temple period in Jewish history, began at the time of the decree of King Cyrus to return the incarcerated Hebrews to their homeland roughly in 516 BCE. Zerubbabel and Nehemiah led the initial temple restoration, which began with rebuilding the Temple Altar, the symbolic foundation of the Temple. (Ezra 3:2)

The regional kingdom's geography changed often over time. The Greeks overtook the Achaemenid, or Persian kingdom, in 332 BCE. The Seleucid Empire, which is a Ptolemaic subset of the Greek empire, took control from 200-167 BCE after the death of Alexander the Great. The Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids empire was led by Jewish religious extremists, allowing the Jews to embrace nominal independence from 140-37 BCE under the Hasmonaean Dynasty.

In 63 BCE, the Romans became the new dominant empire, and by virtue of Roman control of the territory surrounding the Jews, they became subject to the Empire's assigned authority. Herod (the Great) was the first assigned client overseer in 37 BCE. Herod's reign ended in the 4th century (CE), and toward the end of his reign in the first century, he renovated and expanded the nearly 500-year-old rebuilt Temple of Zerubbabel/Nehemiah.

The second temple, also known as Herod's Temple, remained functional for nearly 600 years until the conflicts with the Romans, which resulted in the Jewish-Roman War and eventual siege of Jerusalem. The temple was destroyed by fire during the siege in 70 AD and remains un-restored to this day. (*Messianic Prophecy: Matthew 24:2)

