

God is in the House!

By Mary Kane



Do you have a special place you like to go because you feel close to God when you are there? Most of my favorite places are outside. When I have the time, I love to go to Fernwood Nature Center in Buchanan, Michigan. In the peaceful quiet of the early morning, I enjoy walking the trails with God. On cool windy overcast days, I like to walk the beaches of Lake Michigan; somehow the lonesome deserted beaches draw me closer to His Presence. Another one of my favorite places is right outside my backdoor, on my own porch swing, by my patio garden. All three of these places have two things in common; peace and quiet and nature. The first place God met with man was in a peaceful garden. Since the beginning of time, God has been drawing His people to spend time in His Holy Presence. Despite our sin, He has consistently made a way for us to fellowship with Him. God's Word tells us to "seek the Lord while He may be found, draw near to Him while He is still near." If "God is there," I want to be there too.

Please pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and ask God to open your mind and heart to what He has to teach you for today. Now that our hearts and minds have been prepared, please read Ezekiel 48:35.

What name for God is recorded in this verse of Scripture?

"The Lord Is There." In Hebrew this name is rendered *Jehovah Shemmah*. In Ezekiel 48:35 the name *Jehovah Shemmah* is actually given to the city of Jerusalem. In this verse, God was reassuring His people that His Presence would be within the city of Jerusalem. Why did His people need this reassurance? We will answer this question later in this study.

Let's take a look back in time and research all the different ways God made His Presence available to His people, and what happened that made God promise His people *Jehovah Shemmah!* Our first stop is The Book of Genesis. Please read Genesis 2:8-25.

Where did God first meet with man?

God first met with man in the Garden of Eden. In Hebrew *Eden* means *luxury, delight, pleasure*. It also means *to delight oneself*. God made man a custom built place in which to live in perfect fellowship with Him. Man, however ruined this perfect relationship with God by choosing to sin. Fortunately for us, before God laid the foundations of the earth, He put in place a plan to redeem man from sin and restore his fellowship with Him. Part of the consequences of the Fall was that man could no longer live in harmony with God; man was cast out of the Garden of Eden. Since the Fall, God has provided a way for His Presence to be with His people. Let's turn to The Book of Exodus and read 25:1-8 to find out how God made a way to fellowship with His people.

What did God ask the people of Israel to build?

This tabernacle was built so the Presence of God could dwell among His people.

From what did they build this tabernacle?

Just like our modern day churches, this tabernacle was built from the offerings of the people. Unlike our modern day churches, however, the Israelites did not hire an architect to design the tabernacle. The plans were provided by none other than the Great I AM! In order for God to inhabit the temple, it had to be built according to His Holy blueprint. No creative license was allowed by the builders.

What if the people had refused to give an offering for the tabernacle?

Now please turn and read Exodus 40:34-38 and Leviticus 9:24.

What happened after the tabernacle had been correctly constructed, purified and erected?

The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle! Hallelujah! Throughout the desert wanderings, until the reign of King Solomon, God's presence dwelt between the cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant in a Holy tent!

Years later, after the children of Israel reached the Land of Promise, after the time of the Judges, King David began gathering supplies to build a permanent structure for God's Presence. God commended David for his desire to build a house for His Presence, but as David had been a man of war, God gave the privilege to David's son Solomon. David passed on to Solomon the materials he had gathered and the plans for the temple which he had received from the Holy Spirit (1 Chronicles 28:11-21). Upon becoming King of Israel, Solomon undertook the task of building the temple. The temple which took 7 years to build, was completed about 951 BC.

Now please turn to 2 Chronicles 7:1-3 and record what happened when Solomon finished his prayer of dedication for the temple.

Please record what was similar about the filling of the temple and the filling of the tabernacle.

Imagine for a moment what it would have been like to see the fire of God coming down from heaven! In comparison to a normal fire, were the flames brighter?...did the smoke smell heavenly?... did it roar more intensely? I think it must have!

Now please read Hebrews 12:29 and Exodus 24:17.

How is God described in both of these verses?

Please file away this information away in your head for an exciting application later in this study!

The temple regulated the very pulse of the Jewish culture. Different classes of Hebrew society were allowed varied levels of access to the temple. Common people were allowed in the outer courts, the priests and Levites were allowed greater access to the Holy Place, but the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was housed, was entered one time a year, with great trepidation and reverence, by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

The temple was everything to practicing Jews; it was the only place on earth where God choose to make manifest His Holy Presence. And because of His Holy Presence in the temple, the Hebrew people would never have dreamed of living outside of their inheritance in the Holy Land—it was unthinkable. To leave Jerusalem was to leave the Presence of God. The people of Israel loved their temple and treated it with utmost of respect. Even during the Exile, though hundreds of miles from their Promised Land, the Jews would still kneel three times a day and pray with faces towards Jerusalem.

Now please read Ezekiel 2:3-5.

For what task was Ezekiel's commissioned by God?

Why was Ezekiel sent to speak to the people of God?

According to Ezekiel, 6:3 what was about to happen to Israel?

Since the people of God would not tear down their High Places (places of idolatrous worship) God was about to destroy them by allowing Israel's enemies access to the Holy Land.

Keeping in mind all that we have learned about the relationship between the Presence of God, the temple and the people of God, please read Ezekiel 10.

What terrible event is described in these verses of scripture?

The Shekinah Glory of the Lord left the temple.

Now please scan Ezekiel 8.

What event preceded the departure of the Glory of the Lord (verses 10, 14, 16)?

The people of God had turned aside from worshiping the One True Living God to worship useless idols. They were worshiping created things instead of the Creator. Look in particular at verse 16; these 25 men sat with their backs to the Light of the World while they worshiped the “light of the world”—the sun god Ra! As a result of their unfaithfulness, God’s Glory departed from the temple and with it His hand of protection. Israel was taken captive and deported to Babylon. But, God left behind a remnant—the very poorest of the poor to stay behind in Jerusalem.

The unthinkable had happened: The Presence of God left the temple and the Hebrew people were taken from their Promised Land. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon laid siege to the city and conquered it. Nebuchadnezzar carried off the treasures of the Temple to place in his own treasury. Eleven years later (586 BC), after a siege of 18 months the Babylonian army set the temple on fire, completing its destruction. But God had not left His people without hope! While in exile, God sent His prophet, Ezekiel to speak to His people.

The name Ezekiel means, “Whom the Lord will strengthen.” Ezekiel is derived from two Hebrew words, one of which is *chazaq*. *Chazaq* means, among many other things, to hold strongly with, to strengthen, to prevail, be firm, resolute, courageous, urgent, to make bold. Tradition holds that Ezekiel was born in Sarera. His call from God to prophesy came during the 5th year of captivity of King Jehoiachin in Babylon. The prophecies of this book were preached, there [Babylon] they were

written, when the prophet himself, and the people to whom he prophesied, were captives there. "Ezekiel and Daniel are the only writing prophets of the Old Testament who lived and prophesied anywhere but in the land of Israel, except we add Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to prophesy."ⁱ Both Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied during the Babylonian captivity.

While the people of Israel mourned in Babylon for their losses; their land inheritance, their temple, and most significant, the departure of the Glory of God, Ezekiel was able to offer them a great hope.

Please quickly scan chapters 39-48, paying particular attention to the chapter headings if your Bible includes them.

What events do these verses describe?

The healing, rebuilding and restoration of the people, the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel!

Now please read Ezekiel 48:30-35 again.

Now we can understand a little more deeply what the promise of *Jehovah Shemmah* would have meant to the exiles! God was not going to leave His people desolate...He will one day return to fill His temple again!

Now, perhaps you are asking how this all applies to a New Testament believer. If so, I can't wait for you to turn to 1 Corinthians 3:16!

According to this verse, if you have accepted Christ as your Savior, what are you?

We are the temple of God—His Holy Presence resides in us just as it did in the temple of long ago!

Earlier in this study, do you remember when I asked you to file away in your heads for a later application the information about the fire of God's Presence? Let's apply it now! Please read Acts 2:1-3.

What happened in these verses?

God sent the "fire" of His Holy Presence to fill His Church!—the Body of Christ! And if you are a born again believer, that same Presence entered your spirit when you accepted Christ for your Savior. We literally are "on fire for Christ"!

I don't think we can even begin to imagine the blessing of having the presence of God's Holy Spirit within these human temples. The very remembrance of this fact should often bring us to our knees in thankfulness. For those of us who did not become Christians until we reached our adult years have vivid memories of what it was like to exist without the Holy Spirit. Thankfully, we will never have to return to that hopeless existence.

Perhaps in your life time the unthinkable has happened; like me, you turned away from God and decided to follow your own path and are now realizing that you are far from God. I want you to know that God has not left you—He is *Jehovah Shammeh!* He is There...He is there waiting for you to turn around and follow Him back home. Don't wait!

In closing, please consider the following progression:

- *Jehovah Shammeh*: "God is There" Ezekiel 48:35
- *Emmanuel*: "God is With Us" Matthew 1:23
- *Christos en humin*: "Christ is in you" Colossians 1:27

Christ is in us until we can once again dwell with Him in Paradise.

"The glory and happiness of heaven should consist chiefly in this "The Lord is there!"

Matthew Henry

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ⁱ *The Blue Letter Bible CD*, CD-ROM, version 2.11. Sowing Circle, 2006..