

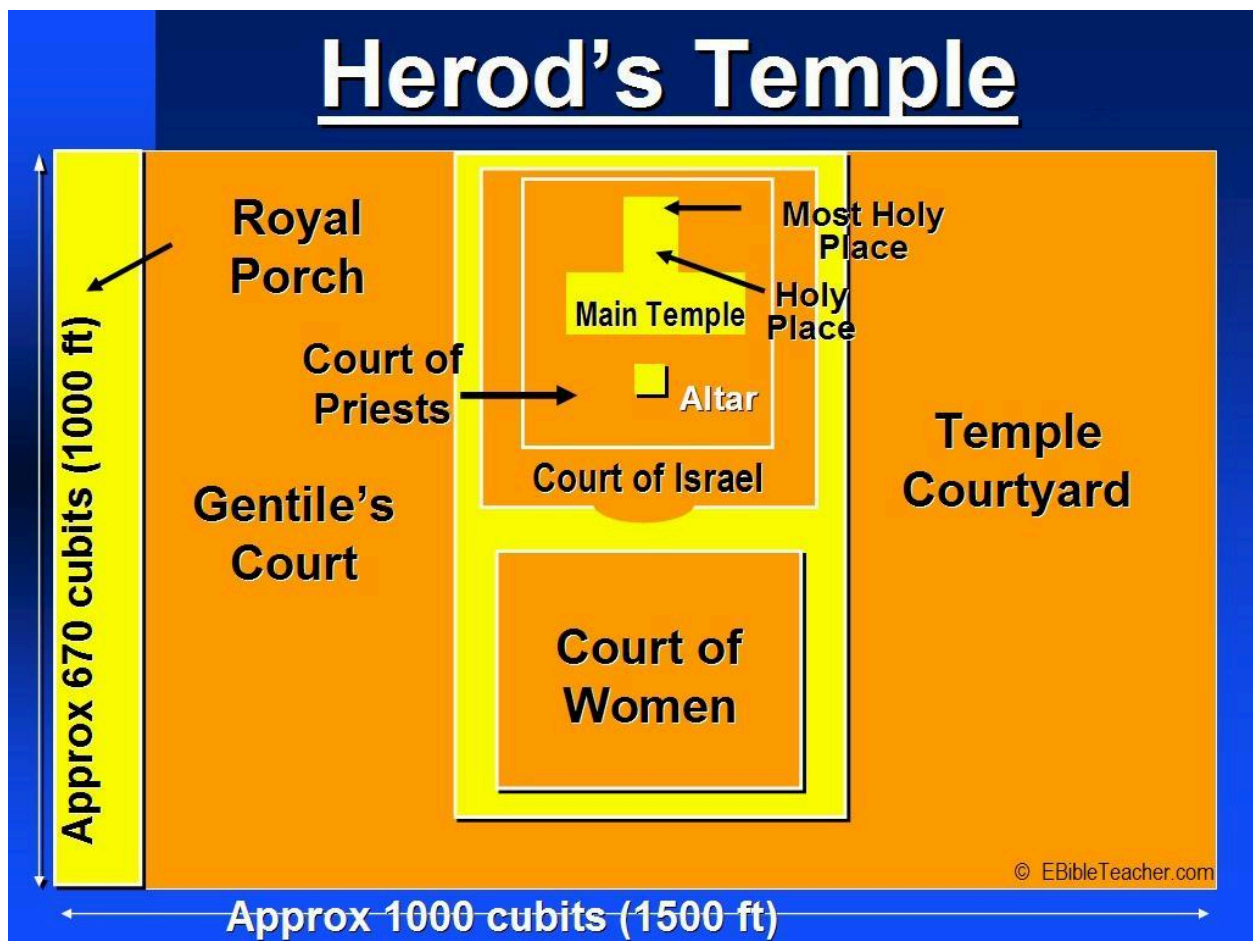
From the Crib to the Cross

1. Warm up: Tell us something good or something bad (large or small) that's happened in your life over the past week.
2. On Sunday Pastor Jeff mentioned a Simon & Garfunkel song, *Scarborough Fair*, that tells two stories in one song – a story of love and a story of war – creating a jarring contrast. Jeff observed that we encounter an equally jarring contrast when we read the dreamy story of Jesus' birth and lay it alongside the brutal story of his death. How is it possible that the one who was called Immanuel (God with us) ended up being led away by Roman soldiers to crowds chanting of "crucify him!" How is it possible that the one who was born to be the Prince of Peace ended up being executed as an insurrectionist? Let's dig deeper.
 - a. Jeff described a picture that hung on the wall of his childhood church depicting baby Jesus at about 12 months taking his first few awkward steps, his arms outstretched to keep his balance. The sun shining on him cast a shadow behind him, as his body and arms created the shape of a cross. How soon in his life do you think Jesus realized his time here was destined to end in a brutal death? How soon do you think his mother Mary realized it?
 - b. Early in his public ministry, Jesus described his mission and message like this: "No one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins. But one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." Mark 2:22. What do you think this means? What does the new wine represent? What do the old wineskins represent? And what do the new wineskins represent?
 - c. Midway through his public ministry, Jesus said: "I came to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! I have a baptism with which I must be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three." Luke 12:29. What do you think this means? And what does it tell us about how Jesus expected his message would be received and his ministry would end?
3. Jesus knew that his message was so combustible, so new, so profoundly destabilizing of the religious status quo, that it was going to provoke profound backlash. Jesus came to fundamentally change the way we see God. But for that new way of seeing God to take root, the old way had to end – and entrenched institutional religious leaders of the old way weren't going to give up without a big fight. To fully appreciate what Jesus offers us, it's important that we understand that old way of seeing God.
 - a. Jeff suggested that: "The old way of seeing God was incomplete. It was as much truth about God as primitive humans were able to receive in their time. But by the first century, we humans were finally ready to receive more. When a child is 5 years old, they can understand certain things, but only so far. When that same child reaches

- age 20, there's a whole lot more they can understand. It's the same with humanity as a whole." Do you think that's a fair way to describe the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament? If so, what value do we gain by studying the Old Testament?
- b. Galatians 4:4 says, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as children." What do you think the phrase "fullness of time" means? Why did God have to wait so long before sending us Jesus?
 - c. The old way of seeing God is vividly depicted in the architecture of the Old Testament temple, as shown in the diagram on p. 3. To refresh everyone's recollection, have someone talk through the various courtyards and compartments of the temple and describe who was allowed into each courtyard or compartment.
 - d. What does the architecture of the temple compound tell us about the old way of seeing God? Why were ordinary people not allowed to enter the temple building or the Holy of Holies? Why were priests necessary?
 - e. In your own life, have you ever lived with this old understanding of God, *i.e.*, fear of being close to God and of incurring God's wrath because of feelings of unworthiness? If so, how did that feel, and what factors implanted that old view in your soul?
4. The new and fuller understanding of God that Jesus came to share was clearly identified at his birth. Read Matthew 1:18-25, as printed on p. 4.
 - a. Note the statement in verse 22 that, "They shall call him Immanuel, which means God with us." How is that fundamentally different from the old way of understanding God as reflected in the Old Testament temple?
 - b. In describing the new view of how God wants to relate to us, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [i.e., Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." John 16:7. Then Jesus added, "When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide **you** into all the truth. . . ." John 16:13. So, according to Jesus' words, why was it advantageous for us that Jesus didn't stay on earth? According to his words, what is the role of the Holy Spirit and why is that way of relating to God so much better than the old way?
 - c. In I Corinthians 6:19, the Apostle Paul says, "Do you not know that **your** body is a temple of the Holy Spirit **within you**. . . ." What does that mean and how is that different from the old view?
 - d. At the dawn of the new age Jesus came to launch, God declares, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see vision, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon slaves, both men

and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” Acts 2:17. How is that different from the old way?

- e. In the new and fuller understanding Jesus shared with us, the promise is that **God wants to be with us** to guide us, comfort us, convict us, and empower us. Tell us about a time in your life when you vividly experienced the presence of God helping, guiding, and strengthening you.
- f. Why was this new understanding of God so threatening to the defenders of the old way – and why is it still in our day threatening to many religious leaders and institutions?
- g. When Jesus breathed his last on the cross, the Spirit of God tore open the curtain that sealed off the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple compound and Jesus cried out, “It is finished.” John 19:13 and Luke 23:44. What’s the significance of that?



Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, ²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call him Immanuel," which means, "God with us."

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.