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Herod's Temple: The Worldly Church

Author Rev. Daniel G. Caram in Spiritual Understanding

The construction of Herod's temple began approximately fifteen years before the birth of Christ and was still being modernised during the ministry of Christ. In John 2:20, the Jews said to Jesus: "Forty and six years was this temple in building..." Actually, some accounts claim that Herod's temple was still being refurbished forty years later at the time of the siege in 67-70 AD.

Herod the Great was credited as being the most famous architect of the ancient world. Herod was a ruthless and power driven man who desperately wanted to be king of the Jews. The temple project was Herod's means of trying to atone for his many crimes against the Jews. This is often the mind of those who offend in the kingdom – they try to placate their sins with their great zeal and sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).

The temple of Herod was far more grandiose in appearance than even Solomon's Temple. It was a megastructure whose courts equaled about twelve football fields. It was built to accommodate huge crowds. Josephus (a Jewish historian) described the view of the sanctuary as one that "dazzles the mind." The white marble and the gold plating on the temple had the appearance of a snowcapped mountain from a distance, and from a closer view, it was blinding to look at. Even Jesus' disciples were greatly impressed as they admired the magnificent gifting of this temple (Luke 21:5-6).

Indeed, this was quite an impressive work. This was the place that caught the attention of the nations as they came to worship. This was the place where everything was happening. Notwithstanding, this seemingly flawless masterpiece had some serious spiritual impediments

The Uncircumcised Builder

Let us first consider the man who founded this great work, Herod the Great. Herod was an Edomite from the descendants of Esau. An Edomite spiritually speaks of one who has compromised his inheritance. A Christian can lose his inheritance through disobedience, immorality, or just sheer disregard for God's commandments. The apostle Paul describes Esau in Hebrews 12:16: "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Herod, who was in the line of those who had lost their birthright, was driven with such a passion to win the multitude.

Something that we must consider about the leader or founder of any work is the fact that the work is only going to be as good as the leadership. This temple would not stand the test of time, and most of its community ended up forfeiting their birthright to foreigners – the Gentiles!

Five Things Missing from Herod's Temple

Although this temple seemed to be faultless and had the approval of all that worshipped there, a few things were missing from this temple. Josephus (although not a spiritual man) records at least five things that he perceived were missing:

1. The Holy Fire
2. The Ark
3. The Spirit of Prophecy
4. The Urim and the Thummim
5. The Shekinah Glory of God

Another flaw that we might note is that none of the measurements of this temple were given by divine revelation. It was produced with human measurements by human wisdom. Also, Jesus labeled this temple as a house of merchandise – an emporium, a bazaar. It had turned in to a place of greed and materialism (See John 2:16, Matthew 21:13).

Yet, let us make no mistake about this "house" that was called by God's name. This house that Herod built was given a greater witness than all of the other dwelling places combined. The One Who called Himself "Greater than the Temple" visited this place (John 12:6). Jesus walked in this house, taught in this house, prophesied in this house, and He healed in this house. Jesus also entered this temple twice, overturning the tables of greed and avarice. God always gives ample opportunity for His people to make their choice.

The Worldly Church of the 21st Century

As we consider today's worldly Christian church, there seems to be some very similar parallels with Herod's temple, for example, the emphasis on extravagant building projects. We have heard tales of projects running in excess of twenty-five million dollars, with the excuse that God's people deserve the best. In some cases, the building program replaces the

the missions program. The whole emphasis is on the "material" church—materialism and prosperity.

The Quest for Numbers

Another emphasis in today's worldly church is to reach people. The goal often becomes bringing in the multitudes even if it means abandoning the very sanctity that makes the church different than the world. It can be compared to becoming like the carnal Corinthian church in order to relate to carnal people. It is like becoming a drunk to reach the alcoholic. It is lowering the standards on morality, divorce and remarriage, music, and separation from the world, so that the world might feel at home in the church. The measurements in Herod's temple were all human dimensions. However, please note that what we are calling the worldly church does not include all of Christendom, but rather, only the part of the church that seeks to imitate and identify themselves with the world.

The Holy Fire

Josephus observed that one of the missing ingredients in this temple was the "Holy Fire." Undoubtedly, he was alluding to the fact that the altar in Moses' tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon were initially ignited from heaven. That fire was to be perpetually maintained. (See Leviticus 6:13, 9:24). The holy fire speaks of the holiness of God. It speaks of the fiery trials that perfect our faith and make us holy. The baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire was given to the church to purge iniquity from His Church (Matthew 3:12). This is not the message that is preached in the worldly church. In fact, there have been seminars given on church growth, and one of the cautions is to never speak on holiness. Never speak on anything that convicts people or condemns their lifestyle. The emphasis is to reach people, but for what purpose?

If we cannot lead them into the paths of righteousness, they will never endure the shaking that is coming, nor will they be a part of the "glorious church" that will reign in the Millennium.

The Ark of the Covenant

Josephus also notes that the Ark of the Covenant was missing from Herod's temple. During the dedication of Solomon's temple, the Ark came into its resting place in the Holy of Holies. It is recorded that the only thing that the Ark contained was the tables of the law: "There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of Egypt" (2 Chronicles 5:10). The Ten Commandments were missing from this lauded and applauded enterprise of man. Most worldly Christians today could not even tell you what the New Covenant is all about. The New Covenant is the law written upon the fleshy tables of the heart (Hebrew 8:1-12, 10:16-17). Jesus interprets this for us in His Sermon on the Mount. The New Testament demands a higher standard because of the available grace. Those who walk in the Spirit fulfill the righteousness of the law. To those who love Christ, His commandments are not grievous!

The Spirit of Prophecy

Another missing feature from Herod's temple was the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Christ (Revelation 19:10). The true spirit of prophecy brings conviction and exposes the false and the superficial. From the time of Samuel, the spirit of prophecy just flowed through the temple (or tabernacle) worship.

It was so revealing that even King Saul was slain in the Spirit—exposed naked. As the apostle Paul declared, the spoken word was like a two-edged sword that exposes and divides soul and spirit (See 1 Samuel 19:23-24). Even the prophecy in the early church brought great conviction to those who came into the service. They proclaimed: "God is in you of a truth!" Much of the false prophecy given today in the church of the world is self-exalting—promises of great ministry, words that justify our failings, words that accommodate a second or third marriage, and a promised vindication from all our accusers.

The Urim and the Thummim

Josephus also observed that the Urim was missing from the high priest's garment. The Urim and the Thummim was a fixture that enabled the priest to give anointed counsel. Counsel is not something learned in a counseling or psychology class. True counsel is one of the Seven Spirits of God. It reveals the mind of Christ for any given situation. It does not judge according to the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears, but it conveys the true mind of the Spirit of God. Today, some churches are filled with seminar principles and psychology. Even what is dubbed Christian psychology is purely humanistic, and can never get to the real root of the problem. The real problem in man is a nature that needs to be crucified. Psychology skirts the real issue and teaches man how to coexist with the problem. When a church loses the true anointing, or rejects the true anointing, they always end up with a false anointing or covering.

The Shekinah

Lastly, Josephus notes that the Shekinah was missing from this temple. The Shekinah is a Hebrew term that means the manifest presence of God, or the glory cloud. We can understand the term as we consider both Moses' tabernacle, an

d Solomon's temple. Both of these dwelling places manifested a visible glory of the Lord. Since the days of these physical temples there have been revivals that have witnessed the cloud of glory. Indeed, the last day church has a promise of great revival and a remaining glory (2 Corinthians 3:8-11).

Isaiah describes the last day church, "And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory shall be a defence.

And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" (Isaiah 4:5-6). Condition of Today's Church Herod's temple was void of these things mentioned by Josephus. Yet as we have previously stated, Herod's temple had the greatest witness of all of the tabernacles and temples, in the person of Christ—He Who was the living Ark. I think the same is true even in the worldly church of the 21st century. Christ visits His church and dwells there in limited degrees (Psalm 78:41). Not too long ago, my wife and I turned to a Christian television station and we were trying to figure out what kind of a program we were watching. It was strange to say the least—strange music, strange worship, strange antics, and a strange message. The program turned out to be a church service, but the anointing was unfamiliar. Yet, we are realising more and more that this is what the modern day church has become.

The emphasis is on tangible blessing and materialism. The true message of heart circumcision and holiness is despised. The vision is to reach the world by compromising God's laws and standards. There are not more barriers between the world and the church. The church wants to imitate the world, dressing like the world, and immersing themselves with all the worldly sit-coms, music, and other things.

Many of God's people are impressed with the crowds, with all of the excitement and glitter, the pseudo achievements, and the stereophonic boom. But isn't it time that we begin to ask ourselves: "What are the measurements of this house that I am a part of? Where are the standards? Where is the holy fire? Where is the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

Where is the message of victory over sin? Is this the house that has the promise of being glorified in the end, or shall this place end up like Herod's temple with not one stone left upon another?"

The House that Stands

As Jesus was concluding His Sermon on the Mount, He drew an analogy of two houses. One represented the people who had heard the Word and not obeyed it. This house came down with a great crash. The other house represented those who had heard His Word and kept it. This house endured the storm. In these last days, there shall come a storm against the church of Jesus Christ that will separate the true from the false.

Only that which squares to the Cornerstone (the doctrine of Christ) will stay intact (Isaiah 28:16-17). Let us take heed from the lessons that we have learned from Herod's temple, and take our measurements from our Lord and Saviour. Christ will have a church in these last days that will exemplify Him and will manifest His glory!

taken from: <http://zionteacher.org/archives/2141>