Study of ACTS

TALE OF TWO TEMPLES

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A study on ACTS

SHAVUOT

Setting the scene is important, when we read through the writings of Luke and the other Gospels we can see how timing was so important to Jesus and the message he was trying to portray. ACTS is a second part of Lukes account of the early birth of Christianity, his first being a testimony of the life of Jesus Christ, and he sets the scene straight away.

In ACTS 1 the disciples are anticipating the next moment of radical change, they were anticipating the fulfilment of the prophecies from Isaiah, Ezekiel and Joel. They were waiting upon the New Temple of the Messianic Kingdom filled with the presence of God, not knowing the time of such just aware of the promise. And so they are waiting...

During this time the weeks are passing by and they are waiting, Jews have not long celebrated Pesach or Passover as we know it in English. The celebration of a journey from slavery to freedom, and of taking responsibility for yourself, the community and the world. We land at Shavuot, the feast of weeks celebrating the completion of seven weeks, forty-nine days after Passover. Shavuot is a pilgrimage festival, so people from all tribes of Israel have made their way to celebrate in Jerusalem.

Every Jewish celebration has a theme, the topic for Shavuot are the stories of when the Torah was given by God to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai on Shavuot itself. Every year on the holiday the Jewish people would renew their acceptance of Gods gift, and God ‘re-gives’ the Torah, the Jewish people respond by saying “We will do and We will listen”. The sages compare it to a wedding between God and his people.

So this is the scene, Jews from all tribes have travelled into Jerusalem, celebrations have begun for the wedding between God and his people, people are committing themselves to the teachings of the Torah, now ACTS 2 begins. Because Pentecost is the Greek translation for Shavuot.
Normally for Christians this conjures up images of a massive outbreak of the Spirit of God, the rawest moment when the disciples experienced the fullness of God for the first time. However, for a Jew, Pentecost was a time of celebration committing themselves to the teachings of the Torah. During this time a violent wind breaks out and fills the whole house. This is not the first time that the presence of God is described as a “wind”, in Genesis 1 the first time we hear about the “Spirit of God” it is described in Hebrew as ‘Ruach” which means wind also. Then following the wind, tongues of fire came to rest on the disciples and they were filled with the Spirit of God. Again, this isn’t a ‘new’ God, fire was used many times as a symbol of the presence of God. Importantly for the setting of the scene, the most relevant of which is in Exodus 19:18, “Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire”.

A study on ACTS

PENTECOST
This is an important moment for us to recognise that everything that we read from Acts 2 onwards, is not the work of a “new God” this is the moment we transitioned from the Old Temple to the New Temple, the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

The Messianic Jewish people had an understanding that Jesus as Messiah was going to bring a new covenant, raise up a new temple with a reunified Israel under the reign of their new King (Jesus Christ). The prophets had long said, Ezekiel 43, “The Glory of the LORD filled the temple”, Haggai 2 says, “Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory”.

Acts 2, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit….And there dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven”

n.b. Isaiah 11 and Ezekiel 37 both give prophetic messages regarding the reunification of the Israelite tribes. In ACTs it was important that the filling of the new temple took place at Shavuot because Jewish men from all across the earth were there to celebrate the first time the encountered the covenant with God under the reign of Moses.

This Pentecost (or Shavuot) was like none other because this was the arrival of the new Temple, the body of Christ, the covenant family of Jesus Christ.
TALE OF TWO TEMPLES

From here on out my focus is not going to be on speaking in tongues, or the other manifestations of the Holy Spirit, those discussions are better left from another time. What Luke very cleverly began to weave in and out of his second account was a tale of two temples, the old temple and the new temple. Acts chapters 3-5 begin to outline the behaviour of the men that have been effected by the New Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ and how they behave after being filled by the spirit of God, their lives and body becoming the very dwelling place of God.

God had not changed, it was the same God that landed on Sinai, that came to Moses in the burning bush, that filled the Holy Temple in Exodus 40 with Fire by night. However the authority in which people were able to walk with Christ had changed. The old temple relied on a Priest to be a “go between” for the people, but here now Jesus was the High Priest and it was through him that people could become a living Temple, the New Kingdom of God was mobile and vocal.

Interestingly Lukes inclusion of how the new followers of the ‘New’ Kingdom began to sell their possessions and give to the poor was a contrast to the old Temple. Of all the subject matters, of all the events Luke decided feeding the poor was worth giving a nod to. You see if we Read Deuteronomy 14-15 in the Torah (also keeping in mind the time of year this happened, the Jews had just resubmitted themselves to the Torah) there is a long section of how the Israelite people should already be treating the poor. Deuteronomy 15 says, “Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land” . The people in the “New Kingdom” were simply carrying out tasks that the old Temple had neglected, they were fulfilling what it meant to be a living Temple filled with the presence of God.

Even the death of Ananias and Sapphira after not being open and honest within the community, is an almost the same story found in Leviticus 10 for the death of Nadab and Abihu who offered a profane fire before the Lord and they died before the Lord. Luke is making a massive effort to display to the reading audience that this is the same God, with the same heart, same values, the composer in this symphony has not changed. Jesus says in Matthew 5v17, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill”

Acts shows us the constant struggle between the two temples, the old and new. Peter heals and preaches, and the main issue is where does your authority come from, not what he is doing but in who’s name. It is worth noting that this battle is still going on today between the Jews and the Messianic movement of christianity.

The important point:

The NEW Temple of Jesus’ community is now where people encounter God’s generosity and healing presence is the theme we must take from Acts 1-7.
A LIVING TEMPLE

So why is any of this important, these are my three points:
• Do we realise that our salvation has come because of a direct influence of this moment
• Do we realise that we are a living Temple filled with the presence of God
• Do we realise the authority on which we operate

Heritage is important, for us in a western culture it can be easy to miss the significance of events that were based in a Jewish setting. We have to take encouragement in the words of Gamaliel, Acts 5 38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; 39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

And so here we sit 2019 years later on still singing the name of Jesus, just as the prophets spoke of the New Kingdom. This as much as anything else from a historical point, Acts was written by Luke 1920-1940 years ago and therefore we have to pay attention to this. This Messianic movement was real, a real event, having a real impact, and our lives have been effected today because of the things that we read here in scripture.

If God meant simply to convey the idea that the Spirit lives within us, He could have used words such as “home,” “house,” or “residence.” But by choosing the word “temple” to describe the Spirit’s dwelling, He conveys the idea that our bodies are the sacred place, in which the Spirit not only lives, but is worshiped, revered, and honoured. Therefore, how we behave, think and speak, and what we let into the temple through our eyes and ears becomes critically important as well, for every thought, word and deed is in His view. Even though He will never leave us, it is entirely possible to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Instructing the Ephesians to not grieve the Spirit, Paul told them to “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31-32). When we live by the Spirit, we will no longer gratify the desires of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:16).

“By what power or by what name have you done this?”
8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. 11 This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
EPHESIANS 4: 30-32

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.