



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Ephesians 3:14-21

SUMMARY:

Solomon's prayer dedicating the Jerusalem Temple was a high point in Israel's history. God responded by filling his house with glory. Echoing that event, Paul tells the believers they are God's dwelling place, then he prays for the believers as God's Temple, especially that they would grasp the dimensions of the church as God's multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-generational household. Realizing that we are God's NT Temple has major implications for us.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven & on earth is named. ¹⁶ I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, ¹⁷ & that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted & firmly established in love ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length & width, height & depth... ¹⁹ & to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do above & beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us— ²¹ to him be glory in the church & in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever & ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21 CSB)

I. Solomon's Great Temple prayer (2 Chron. 6:13-14); Paul's Great Temple prayer (Eph. 3:14-21)

- "Then Solomon...knelt down in front of the entire congregation of Israel, & spread out his hands toward heaven. ¹⁴ He said: 'LORD God of Israel, there's no God like you in heaven or on earth...' (2 Chron. 6:13-14) "When Solomon finished praying, fire descended...& consumed..."

the sacrifices, & *the glory of the LORD filled the temple*.² The priests could not enter the LORD's temple because *the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD*. " (2 Chron. 7:1-2)

- "The Christian calling has a fundamental continuity with...the Temple expressed in *Solomon's dedication prayer*...In Eph. *Paul prays*...The church is...significant of [what Solomon's] Temple is...a shadow." [A. Konkel, *1 & 2 Kings*, 186-188]
- "The great 'Temple Prayer' of...Ephesians (3:14-19)"—Samuel Chadwick
- "Paul prays for the church...[He echoes] Solomon's great prayer at the dedication of the Temple."—Robert MacArthur
- **[Connection: Eph 3:14-19 gives us 'tracks' for our prayer; but, ask: where are those 'tracks' leading?]**

II. Links Between Paul's Prayer & the Temple (Eph. 2:21)

- 3:14-19 "is a passage rich in *temple imagery*."—Grant Macaskill
- "There are *obvious connections between the temple* [Eph. 2:21]...and *the prayer of Eph. 3*"—Grant Macaskill
- "Eph. 2:19-22 ['A temple in the Lord'] serves as the primary context of the Eph. 3:14-19 [prayer]."—Robert Foster,

1. "For this reason"—because the church is God's Temple (Eph. 3:1, 14; 2:19-22)

- a. "For this reason"...we're carried back...to *the spiritual temple*...in Eph. 2...This [is] *the key to the*...[prayer]"—John Eadie
 - o "So, then, you are...fellow citizens with the saints, & members of God's household,²⁰ built on the foundation of apostles & prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.²¹ In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a *holy temple in the Lord*.²² In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22 CSB)
- b. "For this reason" (Eph. 3:14) "resumes the thought broken off in Eph. 3:1 & we are carried back...to *the spiritual temple* ...in the conclusion of Eph. 2 [2:21]. The prayer must be regarded as immediately following that section & its architectural terms & allusions...clearly understood. *This connection*...[is] *the key to the*...[prayer]." [J. Eadie, *Ephesians*, (1861) p. 246]
- c. In "Eph. 3:14–19...Paul...is praying...in light of the reality that God has made *the church to be his new temple* by the Spirit. {The digression in Eph. 3:2–13 interrupts the prayer report, so that Eph 3:14–19 [prayer] is based on what Paul has revealed in Eph. 2:19–22.}" [Timothy Gombis, "E 5:18," TYNDALE BULL., Vol. 53.2 (2002) pp. 261-2]

2. Christ's personal indwelling for God's corporate dwelling place

- a. "...strengthened...in your inner being through his Spirit,¹⁷ & that *Christ may dwell in your hearts*..." (Eph. 3:16-17)
 - o In Eph. 2 the believers are God's *dwelling place*, growing into a holy temple (Eph. 2:21-2); "The prayer now is...that in them...such a temple may be realized [that] 'Christ may dwell in their hearts' [3:17a]." [John Eadie, *Ephesians*, 254]

3. 'Rooted & Grounded/founded' (Eph. 3:17b)

- a. 'Rooted & grounded [*founded*]' (Eph. 3:17b) "The allusion is...to the solid base...of the spiritual temple...in Eph. 2." [John Eadie, ...*Ephesians*, (1861) p. 246] "built on the *foundation* of...apostles & prophets" (Eph. 2:20)

4. Apprehend the Dimensions—the Prayer's Central Point

- a. The Symmetric Structure of Eph. 3:14-21 [John Paul Heil]
 - ¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before *the Father*¹⁵ from whom *every* family in heaven & on earth is named.
 - ¹⁶ I pray that he may grant you...to be strengthened with *power* in your inner being through his Spirit,
 - ¹⁷ that *Christ* may dwell in your hearts thro' faith...that you, being rooted &...established *in love*,
 - ¹⁸ may *have the strength to comprehend* with all the saints...*the length & width, height & depth*
 - ¹⁹ & to know *Christ's love* that...passes knowledge, so...you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

- **20** Now to him who has **power** to do...beyond all we ask or think according to the **power** that works in us—
 - **21** to **him [the Father]** be glory in the church & in Christ Jesus to **all** generations, forever & ever. Amen.
 - [John Paul Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love...*, pp. 25, 149] **Note:** Symmetry, centered around Eph. 3:18
 - **Note:** The prayer's central thrust is *not* the Spirit's power nor Christ's love; rather, *it is the dimensions*
 - "In his prayer for...Christians in Eph. 3, Paul reminds us of *God's love & strength* at work in our lives"—Karol Ladd
 - "Both...[parts of Eph. 3:14-21] focus on *God's power* working in the lives of believers, & on *his glory*"—Edna Johnson The dimensions of what? Of Christ's love? Of God's Wisdom?
- b. Consider "the dimensions language in Eph. 3:18...It is perhaps...significant that these adjectives *modify no substantive noun* [in Eph. 3:18], leaving the reader wondering 'the breadth, width, height & depth of what?' Many simply take this to refer to Christ's love in the following verse (e.g. NIV [CSB]...insert "the love of Christ" after the dimensions)...It is at minimum possible...there may be a...*allusion here to the dimensions of the new temple...*" [A. Mark Stirling,
- *TRANSFORMATION & GROWTH... IN EPHESIANS*, pp. 139-140]
- c. "**length & width/breadth, height**"—architectural dimensions refer to:
- "These architectural terms...are applicable to a building... [The] figure of a temple still loomed before the writer's [mind]." [John Eadie, *Commentary on...Ephesians*, p. 261]
 - "There are *obvious connections between the temple theme & the prayer of Eph. 3...*The dimensional language of Eph. 3:18 has obvious associations with the measuring of the Temple in Ezek. 47-48." [Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ*, pp 152-3]
- d. "**length & width/breadth, height**"—in Scripture these architectural dimensions refer to:
- God's House—Tabernacle/Temple & their furnishings (Ex. 25-27; 2 Chron. 3-4; Ezek. 40)
 - "The dimensions language in Eph. 3:18...[is] *the same language used in Ezekiel's description of the altar in the [endtime] temple in Ezek. 41:22. We may take [this] point...further...noting that the highest prevalence of this dimensions language in the LXX is in Ezek. 40-47 where it is used to refer to the dimensions of the new temple...*It is at minimum possible...there[is] an...allusion here to the dimensions of the new temple, especially as the prayer culminates in a prayer for fullness." [A Mark Stirling, *TRANSFORMATION & GROWTH*:, pp. 139-40]
 - God's City—Jerusalem (Zech. 2:2) & New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:16) This suggests:

III. Apprehend with **all the saints** the dimensions of God's spiritual temple (Eph. 3:18)

1. Christianity not individualistic

- "Paul's concern for unity [manifests itself] with the mention of 'all the saints' (Eph. 3:18). While the text is about individuals knowing [comprehending], it is *not about individualistic knowing...* Christianity is corporate...only as people comprehend together can they experience what God has for them." [Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, p.]

2. "with all the saints"—Comprehend in Community

- "Reflection [on God's Word] & [its] life-application must be filtered through the authoritative witness [of] Scripture. This is best done in the context of fellow-believers, always remembering that we 'have strength to comprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth & length & height & depth' (Eph. 3:18). Truth and our understanding of it are in the realm of 'all the saints,' not just the individual believer. The believing community provides the safeguard & keeps our reflections balanced & on track." [J. Wilson, *Guide to Theological Reflection*, pp.]

3. "With all the saints"—linked to God's temple

- "There's a strong connection between seeing the [Jesus] community...as 'God's temple' [Eph. 2:21] & speaking of the community as 'the saints' or 'God's consecrated people.'...The 2 ideas of the community as 'the saints' & as 'God's temple' are clearly related &...mutually reinforce one another." [Paul Trebilco, *Self-designations & Group Identity in NT*, 137]

4. *"With all the saints"*—multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-generational, etc.
 - The *dimensions* "may be *pointing back to the...temple in Eph. 2:21*. If this is the case the 'comprehension'...in Eph. 3:18 is to be *made in concert with the multi-racial saints* [described] there. By extension what may be in view are the dimensions of the [end-time] temple depicted in Ezekiel & Revelation." [Richard Cozart, *This Present Triumph...*, p.]
5. *"With all the saints"*—locally & universally
 - "At this point...all the saints come into view. When Paul prays for one congregation, he has other Christians in mind as well (2 Cor. 11:28). While the primary focus will be *all local Christians*, the scope is wider & indicates a *universal perspective*. Paul doesn't distinguish between the Ephesian Christians & all the (other) saints: they all need [& are needed]...to comprehend. Supplication beyond the confines of a particular community is... expected of... Christians... They are members of [God's] household...(Eph. 2:19). Paul prays that the readers 'may have strength to comprehend with all the saints...the breadth [etc.]...' (Eph. 3:18). They are part of this larger entity beyond the confines of their congregations." [C. Stenschke, in S. Porter (ed.) *Paul &... Social Relations*, pp. 201-202]

IV. Prayer for Filling God's Cosmic Church-Temple (Eph. 3:19)

1. **Prayer's Climax**— "*...so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*" (Eph. 3:19b)
 - "The prayer...builds toward Eph. 3:19 as a climax ['that you may be filled with all the fullness of God']." [Robert L. Foster, "*A Temple in the Lord Filled to the Fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19)*," *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 49 (2007) p. 86]
2. **As God's Glory filled the Tabernacle/Temple** (Ex. 40:34-35; 2 Chron. 7:1-2; Ezek. 43:5; 44:4)
 - "The LORD's *glory filled the tabernacle*. Moses was unable to enter because...*glory filled the tabernacle.*" (Ex. 40:34-35)
 - "When Solomon finished praying...*the glory of the LORD filled the temple.*"² The priests were not able to enter the LORD's temple because *the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD.*" (2 Chron. 7:1-2)
 - "The *glory of the LORD filled the temple*...I looked, & the LORD's *glory filled his temple*...I fell facedown." (Ezek. 43:5; 44:4) ? "I saw the Lord seated on a...lofty throne...his robe's hem *filled the temple*...[May] his *glory fill the whole earth.*" (Is. 6:1, 3b)
 - "*'Fullness'* has obvious associations with the divine Glory...which in Isaiah's vision '*fills*' both the *Temple* (symbolized by the hem of his robe in Is. 6:1 [which '*filled the temple.*']) & the world (Is. 6:3 May '*his glory fill the whole earth*')... That '*fullness*' is a synonym for glory is supported... throughout Eph. 1." [Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the NT*, p. 150]
3. **Now Paul Prays that the Church, God's Cosmic Temple, will be filled** (Eph. 3:19b)
 - "At the culmination of the prayer in Eph. 3:19...is the [petition] that the readers would be 'filled with all the fullness of God'. [Scholars] argue...in favor of *understanding this verse in continuity with Eph. 2:22 & that what's...in view is the filling of the new temple of the church...*" [A. Mark Stirling, *TRANSFORMATION & GROWTH: (2012)* pp. 139-140]
 - In "Eph. 3:14–19...Paul...is praying strategically...in light of the reality that God has made *the church to be his new temple* by the Spirit. He prays that God would work powerfully...'that you may be filled to all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19b)...Though the church as...[God's] dwelling place...is already a reality, *it is not yet fully realized &...need[s] being manifested with ever increasing effectiveness.*" [Tim. Gombis, "*E 5:18...*," *TYNDALE BULLETIN*, Vol. 53.2 pp. 261-2]
 - "In Eph. 3:18-19...the Ephesians are not yet filled entirely. The author prays...that [they] may be filled until all the fullness of God...The *church is described as a mini-cosmos*...The filling of the church...is an ongoing process." [T. B. Halvgaard, "*...Fullness in Paul...*," in S. E. Porter (ed.) *Paul & Gnosis*, p. 178]

V. Paul's Doxology—"to him be glory in the church..." (Eph. 3:20-21)

- **20** Now to him who is able to do above & beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us— **21** *to him be glory in the church* & in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever & ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20-21 CSB)
- “Eph. 3:21...is the only place in the NT that mentions the *glory of God ‘in the church’*.”—Tim. Gombis
- “The church has a role in [God’s] cosmic plan... *The church does not exist for itself but for God & his glory*”— van Aarde
- “Ultimately, the church exists for the glory of God...to...share His glory among the nations, & reflect His glory in word & deed. *The church is a Body made in His image, sent on His mission, to be His glory.*” —Milfred Minatrea
- “More than any other NT writing, *Ephesians highlights the role of the church* in God’s...eternal plan...*a community in which God’s glory can be seen*, & one devoted to the praise of that glory (Eph. 3:21).” [Tyndale, *NLT Study Bible*, 2001]
- “The goal...is that [believers] be filled to the fullness of God—God glorified in them...as the church increasingly becomes the Temple of God (Eph. 3:19b-21).” [Abraham Kuruvilla, *Ephesians*, p. 100]

VI. Implications of the Church as God’s Temple

1. Tabernacle/Temple –Central Reference Point for God’s People

- “The tabernacle was dynamic sacred space [with]...a centralizing quality...Wherever the camp of Israel was temporarily established...it served as *the center of reference in the life of Israel*... [Later,] Jerusalem or the Temple itself [were viewed] as being the center of the world...[The] 3 times a year pilgrimage [to] the Temple in Jerusalem...reflect[ed its] *centrality in the life & world[view] of the nation*.” [William R. McAlpine, *Sacred Space for the Missional Church*, pp. 91, 96-97]

2. The Church is **God’s Temple** (Eph. 2:21; 1 Cor. 3:16)

- “Don’t you yourselves know that you are God’s temple & that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16)
- “The phrase ‘*Don’t you know...?*’ [1 Cor. 3:16a] implies that the concept of *believers as the new Temple* of God, the place where God’s Spirit dwells, was *a fundamental component* of the apostolic instruction. This is confirmed by Eph. 2:18-22.” [Hank Voss, *Priesthood of All Believers &...Missio Dei*, 30]
- “*You [pl.] are God’s temple*” (1 Cor. 3:16) “The building...belongs to God...[it is] God’s Temple. The church does *not* belong *to any apostle or teacher*, but to God alone.” [E Schnabel, “...*Jesus’ Followers...*” in J. P. Harrison, *NT Church*, 108]
- “The church alone is the place where Christ rules over his kingdom & gives certain gifts for the building of his living temple.” [Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*,]
- “Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, ‘Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern...shown to you on the mountain.’” (Heb. 8:5) Moses wasn’t free to innovate/modify etc.
- “The church...is...created by the Spirit to participate in God’s mission in the world...The *church’s nature, ministry, and organization must be put in the correct sequence*. The ministry of the church needs to serve the nature of the church; the organization needs to serve the ministry of the church.” [J. T-K Chai in Van Gelder, *Missional Church in Context*, 238]
- A missional church “always includes organizational forms, but organizations need to *serve, not...determine, the nature* of the church. They...need to serve the ministry...in all its diverse functions.” [Darrell Guder, *Missional Church*, pp. 71-72]

QUESTIONS:

Please read through Paul's "Great Temple" prayer & praise ('doxology'): Eph. 3:14-21.

1. 3:16-17 are a pair of requests; what tasks is Paul asking the Spirit & Christ to do? How might these tasks be related to one another?
2. 3:18-19 are also a pair. Paul prays that the believers "may have the strength" to do two things. What are the 2 things? [1.] ? [2.] ?
3. 3:18 talks about dimensions—"breadth/width, length, height, depth;" what is the object of these dimensions? Compare Eph. 3:18 in different English NT versions (e.g. ESV, CSB, NIV, etc.) Do you see any differences?
4. If you have easy access, do an online search of the Bible for the terms—"length, height, breadth (width)" or "long, high, wide." In the Bible, what do these dimensions typically describe? What does this suggest Paul has in mind in Eph. 3:18?
5. Can you detect the symmetric structure of this passage (Eph. 3:14-21)? Focus on the key terms "Father," "every/all," "Christ," "love." Notice that, tracing these successive terms takes us from the 'outer layers,' towards the prayer's center. Based on this, what is *the central element* of Paul's prayer? [Is that the element we typically focus on?] Discuss
6. Looking at Paul's "Great Temple Prayer," in the context of the Church as God's Temple (Eph. 2:19-22), what does this imply? Some readers might apply the prayer strictly to themselves as individual Christian believers; what are they missing? What additional considerations are suggested by viewing Eph. 3:14-21 as Paul's "Great Temple Prayer"? Discuss.