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The Final Temple

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[On this foundational study Dr. Clowney based the address of the same title which he gave at the Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy in 1971 and which has been published in *Prophecy in the Making*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1971), pp. 71-88.]

From the baroque columns of Bernini's altar at Saint Peter's to the podium of the largest drive-in church in California, the church has been so identified with architecture that most people give no other meaning to the word "church." Tourists therefore expect to find Christian shrines and sanctuaries at sacred sites in the holy land.

But Christians have not always sought these shrines as tourists. Once they came as pilgrims, and again they came as Crusaders. The bitter vision of a Christian holy war still scars the memory of nations of the Near East. Today we cannot conceive of making war to possess a Christian sanctuary. (Whether that measures a real gain in theology or only a loss of conviction might be difficult to determine!)

Yet how are we to understand the Israeli struggle for independence and nationhood? From a furnace of affliction a people with the ancient name of Israel has come to the ancient land of promise. Jerusalem is again their possession.

The Old Testament people of God were formed by God's covenant as a theocracy. They were called to holy war and to festive celebration at the holy place where God set his name. Is modern Israel called—at whatever cost in political relations with the Arab states—to clear the sacred rock and build a new temple?

Many Christians would answer, "Yes." They believe that the restored worship at such a temple has a central place in the prophetic future that is part of the Christian hope.

We must consider soberly and prayerfully what the Bible teaches on this question. We dare not trifle with the mysteries

of God's Word, and surely the tensions of a situation about which so few of us are well-informed calls for responsible discussion.

Differences may remain among us that will lead to further study and discussion. But above all let us be found faithful in our witness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the blessed hope of his return. With reverence, then, let us approach the theme of the temple in Scripture, seeking to be taught of God.

I. The Meaning of the Temple

To seek the meaning of the temple, as the Old Testament presents it, is to inquire not into the history of religions but into the history of redemption. It is commonly assumed that the critical reco...

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