

Addendum to John 14.

From Exodus 25:8 we see the physical antitype from the Old Covenant that points to the spiritual reality that Christ revealed to His disciples regarding the “sanctuary” of God for those who were associated with the New Covenant.

“Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.” (Ex 25:8)

It was a “sanctuary” which means that it was to be a holy place. This was a dwelling place for God to occupy. That is very obvious from the context of the passage. A comparison can be made with the New Testament passage that tells us about the dwelling place for God under the New Covenant that we see in John chapter fourteen.

Under the Old Covenant, there was one central location that was to be positioned in the midst of the encampment of the people and there was a division or separation of the people from the very presence of God. In contrast, under the New Covenant, there are many dwelling places rather than one central location. We find a similarity: the physical sanctuary was in the midst (core) of the encampment of the people and the spiritual sanctuaries (dwelling places) will be in the core (inner most being or spirit of the believers). We understand that these “many dwelling places” where God dwells are individual Christians. Just as God came to dwell in the tabernacle, He comes to dwell or abide within each born-again child of God and receives each one unto Himself so that He and they are in the same place. Another contrast between the Old and the New is that the Old had an element of “separation” between God and the people, in the New there is a “oneness” in that we are united with Christ by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the people were to take the materials that they voluntarily contributed and prepared the actual physical structure and all the furnishing. This was to be done in a specific way. This “way” was the pattern of what God had shown Moses while he was on the mountain. In Hebrews chapter eight we learn that this pattern was “a copy and shadow” of what is in heaven. If we are looking at this in a parallel fashion with the information in the New Testament regarding the abiding place of God, we would logically assume that the dwelling place for God in each individual Christian must be prepared from what each person has brought and contributed and it is to be put together in the prescribed “way” so that it is like the heavenly reality.

Who is capable of putting all of this together? Paul tells us in Philippians 2:13 “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” We know that “His good pleasure” or His will is that each believer is to be transformed into the image of His Son as we see in Roman 8:28-29. We also know that the pattern or the specific or prescribed “way” these “many dwelling places” are to be fashioned is Jesus Christ Himself who said in John 14:6 “I AM the Way.”

Hughes and Laney have the following observation in *The Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary* about verses 2 and 23: “Jesus will prepare a dwelling place for those who believe, and he and the Father will dwell with the obedient believer on this earth (14:23). The preparation of the place is certainly not heavenly carpentry but relates to Jesus’ ascension and sending forth of the Spirit to take up his dwelling place with believers, whether now on earth, or later in heaven.”

From Ephesians 3:16-19 we see

¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in

the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (NASB95)

The fact that we have been (are being) strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man allows Christ to dwell in our hearts by preparing our hearts to make them suitable for a divine dwelling place. If the heart of unregenerate man is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” then it is not a suitable residence for God. This realization might cause some to think that they need to “clean up their lives” before they come to God for salvation. We know that will not work since it is not possible for man to do that in his own strength. At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit is present in the life of a believer and that presence of the Holy Spirit is evidence of salvation (Rom. 8:9). This is a result of the work of the Cross.

Christ is present in our hearts by His own Spirit. It is the presence of Christ which prepares (makes ready or makes fit) the heart to be a suitable dwelling place for God. Alexander MacLaren’s Commentary stated it this way: “*It is Christ in the heart that makes the heart fit for Christ to dwell in the heart. You cannot do it by your own power; turn to Him and let Him make you temples appropriate for Himself.*” It would appear that a distinction is being made between Christ being present and Christ dwelling in our hearts.

Let’s now look at the statement “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Most of us take this to mean that we believe that Christ is in our heart, it is something we possess by faith. We can look at this statement in a slightly different way and see that it can simply mean that because we believed and trusted in God’s provision for our salvation (by faith) that we were saved and because we have been saved, Christ dwells in our hearts. However, the word “dwells” carries a meaning beyond the mere presence of Christ which is the situation of every believer. Paul was going a step further in that the Greek word translated as “dwells” has the concept of Christ “settling down and being at home” in our hearts. (We might state this as He is “not just visiting” but has “taken up residence.”)

This idea may be what is meant when Jesus told His disciples in John 14 “If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode (translated as mansion in John 14:2) with him.

Additional notes – most translations render the Greek words ἐτοιμάζω (prepare) τόπος (place) ὑμῖν (you) as “to prepare a place for you.” The addition of the preposition “for” changes the meaning. Since the Greek construction places the important or emphatic words before the modifier words the literal translations could easily be “to prepare you a place.” That could then be rendered as “a place for you” or “you as a place.” If there is any “parallelism” intended between this passage (John 14) and the Exodus 25 passage, then we would conclude that the dwelling place is “for God” and not “for us.” The “many dwelling places” would then mean that God resides in each believer – which would be in agreement with our understanding that each believer is the “temple” of God.

The awkward sentence structure with possible alternate meaning is also found in the passage involving Abraham and Isaac as they are approaching the place where Abraham was going to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. In Genesis 22: 7 and 8 we see the following:

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

And Abraham said, My son, **God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering:** so they went both of them together.

The simplest argument is that God did provide for himself a ram that was actually offered in place of Isaac. Deeper insight might see that God “provided Himself as the Lamb” which was the ultimate (to end all) burnt offerings.