

"Presence" The Wailing Wall

For the Jews, the most holy place in Israel is the Wailing Wall. Formally known as the 'Western Wall' because it forms the western side of the Temple Mount. In biblical times this was originally the site of King Solomon's temple, destroyed about 588 BC by the Babylonian armies (2 Kings 24:13; 25:9 -21) and then rebuilt on a smaller scale by the returning exiles under Ezra's leadership (Ezra 3:7-13; 6:15-16). This temple was later remodeled and expanded by Herod the Great shortly before the New Testament picks up the historical account of God's people. Herod's structure was the one standing during Jesus' day when he foretold of its final destruction:

(Mark 13:1-2 NIV) As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" {2} "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Jesus' prediction of the temple being destroyed was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus destroyed both the city of Jerusalem and the temple. Some of the rubble left from this great destruction is still present to this day.

When Herod renovated the second temple, he reinforced the temple plaza on all sides by massive walls, up to six stories high. Although perhaps only half of that height is visible above ground today, the Western Wall is still very impressive, especially the 165 foot section know today as the Wailing Wall. This location has had a very rich history, but should it still have any religious significance?

Jews from all over the world come to this wall to pray and to insert small paper 'prayer lists' into crevices in the wall. This is where they feel still has the greatest 'presence' of God. An initial observation is that the wall is divided into a men's section to the left, & a women's section to the right. The orthodox Jews were dressed in the traditional black broad-brimmed hats and long black coats, while others approach the wall wearing 'regular' attire. Even soldiers come in briefly and then return back to their duty. Some will cover themselves with a large white 'scarf', while others do not. All the men entering the 'sacred' area of the wall have to wear a hat; including tourists. If you were not wearing a hat, small white paper skullcaps were provided. Knowing the sacredness of this area to the devout Jews, I felt very much like an intruder entering into their 'holy place' before God.

Having nothing left of their holy temple, the Jews have come to regard the Wailing Wall as the ultimate symbol of their Jewish heritage. In these ancient stones lie their religious and national identity, their long history of persecution, their heritage of exile, and their hope for future redemption. They pray, weep, and wail here. Some of the prayers sound more like chants with a swaying of

the entire body, while others quietly lean with their foreheads against the wall and pray. The 'wailing' goes back 2500 years ago to the days of Mordecai and Esther when the Persian King Xerxes ordered the death of all the Jews within Persia.

(**Est 4:1-3 NIV**) When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. {2} But he went only as far as the king's gate because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. {3} In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Throughout history, the Jews have experienced much rejection and loss at various times.

Why is this so important to the Jews?

In Solomon's dedication of the original temple, he said (1 Ki 8:27 & 2 Chr 6:18 NIV)

"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!"

God picked the Jews, the descendants of Jacob, to be his chosen people. God reserved special blessings for 'His' people, but with the blessings, also expected a special obedience. To the Jews alone had come the promise of a land, and a name, and of an everlasting kingdom. When the glory of the Lord filled the temple, God was literally present in their midst. (1 Ki 8:10-13; 2 Chr 5:13-14; 7:1-3)

(**Ezek 10:4 NIV**) Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD.

(**Ezek 43:5 NIV**) Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

Do we long to have the presence of God in our life? Have there been times that we have experienced the kind of sudden, unexpected pain or loss that needs to know where God can be found at a moment's notice? Do you ever wish that you had a place where you could go and always know that God would be there to meet you? To the Israelites, the temple and God's presence was one and the same. When they prayed, they prayed toward the temple to be facing God. To them, the temple was very much the presence of God. (1 Kings 8:27-30; 2 Chr 20:9; Dan 6:10; Jonah 2:7)

(**1 Ki 8:27-30 NIV**) "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! {28} Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. {29} May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. {30} Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place.

(**2 Chr 20:9 NIV**) 'If calamity comes upon us, whether the sword of judgment, or plague or famine, we will stand in your presence before this temple that bears your Name and will cry out to you in our distress, and you will hear us and save us.'

(Dan 6:10 NIV) Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

(Jonah 2:7 NIV) "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple."

But when they allowed the influence of foreign gods to be brought into their lives and worship, God withdrew His presence from the Jewish nation.

To this day, I don't think the Jews realize that their persecution has been because God turned away from them because they failed to obey His laws.

(2 Ki 24:20 NIV) It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence.

(Micah 3:12 NIV) Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field; Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.

They were unable to see the blessings that He replaced the Old Law with in Jesus Christ and His church. When the Jews rejected God (and later His son, the Messiah), it was as if the temple's very cornerstone had been ripped from its place, causing the building to collapse under the weight of the people's sin. This literally happened when the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was ripped from top to bottom at the time of Jesus' death. (Matt 27:51) And they rejected the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ. (Matt 21:42-43)

(John 2:19-21 NIV) Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." {20} The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" {21} But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

Where is God's temple, or dwelling place, today?

Do we allow the temple of our bodies to be ripped apart because of the sin in our lives? Do we at times turn to an empty wall in search of God? Trying to live in the 'past', under the restrictions of 'laws', when we should have the joy & freedom in Christ Jesus! God is not restricted by stones & mortar, as when His presence filled the tabernacle. His spirit is now to fill the temple of our body.

(1 Cor 3:16-17 NIV) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? {17} If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

The wailing should end, and be replaced with the JOY found only in Jesus Christ.

(Psa 30:11 NIV) You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

(Matt 18:20) Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst.

See also: Rom 12:1-2
Rom 10:1-4