

**Text:** Ac 21.30

**Proposition:** You can shut the door of your temple to God; beware lest he shut the door of his temple to you.

For today's message, we return to the arrest narrative in Acts 21.

I want to focus on one "throw-away" detail found in verse 30.

Ac 21.30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, **and immediately the doors were shut.**

One line in one commentary brought on some thinking about the significance of this detail.

"This is the last scene dealing with the temple in Acts."<sup>1</sup>

The temple is mentioned a few more times in Acts, but always in reference back to this event. Not only is this the last visit to the temple in Acts, it is the last visit to the temple in the New Testament.

The last statement might not seem that significant, since the epistles aren't narratives. However, the only specific mention of the temple in the epistles is 1 Cor 9.13...

1 Cor 9.13 Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the *food* of the temple, *and* those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar?

"The altar" receives a few more mentions in the epistles, but we have to say that after this incident, the temple disappears from the New Testament. It receives no mention in the book of Revelation at all, though there are references to "the altar" in heaven.

In addition to these, there are some verses where the English uses "temple" where the Greek is referring to "the holy of holies" – the ναός – the place ordinary people were not able to enter.

So, what is the significance of this last visit to the temple? What is the significance of shutting the door of the temple?

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 652.

**Proposition:** You can shut the door of your temple to God; beware lest he shut the door of his temple to you.

## I. Paul “in the temple” (Ac 21)

Read Ac 21.26-30 (notice mentions of “temple”)

- A. In the temple to begin his vow (26)
- B. In the temple completing his vow (27)
- C. Falsely accused of desecrating the temple (28)
- D. Basis of the Asian Jews’ false charge (29)
- E. Expulsion from the temple, the doors shut (30)

“The doors were shut (ἐκλείσθησαν, 3rd pl. aor. pass. indic. of κλείω). A host of speculative reasons has been suggested:

- to prevent further contamination (Barrett 2.1021; Bruce, *Acts of the Apostles*, 450);
- to specifically protect from the stain of a murder (Robertson, *Pictures*, 379);
- to be a symbolic of rejection of Paul and his message (Bock 652; Johnson 382).

What can be said is that it was probably done by the temple police as a common-sense act, given mob violence. The bigger point is that the Jews considered the place desecrated until the offender is dead (Witherington 656).”<sup>2</sup>

## II. The centrality of the temple in Jewish life

- A. Edersheim begins his book, *The Temple, It’s Ministry and Services*, with this sentimental view:

“In every age, the memory of Jerusalem has stirred the deepest feelings. Jews, Christians, and Mohammedans turn to it with reverent affection. It almost seems as if in some sense each could call it his ‘happy home,’ the ‘name ever dear’ to him. For

<sup>2</sup> L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 249.

our holiest thoughts of the past, and our happiest hopes for the future, connect themselves with ‘the city of our God.’ We know from many passages of the Old Testament, but especially from the Book of Psalms, with what ardent longing the exiles from Palestine looked towards it; and during the long centuries of dispersion and cruel persecution, up to this day, the same aspirations have ‘breathed in almost every service of the synagogue, and in none more earnestly than in that of the paschal night, which to us is for ever associated with the death of our Saviour. It is this one grand presence there of ‘the Desire of all nations,’ which has for ever cast a hallowed light round Jerusalem and the Temple, and given fulfilment to the prophecy—‘Many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.’”<sup>3</sup>

## B. The familiarity of the people with the temple

1. Three annual feasts: male Israelites required to attend
  - a. Passover (Unleavened Bread)
  - b. Feast of Weeks (Pentecost, Firstfruits)
  - c. Tabernacles (Day of Atonement)

All these centered around elaborate sacrifices conducted in the Temple, circumstances might prevent Jews at a distance from attending annually, but generally Jews were familiar with the temple and its precincts.

2. Weekly Sabbath keeping
  - a. Of course, away from Jerusalem in the synagogues
  - b. In Jerusalem, it was a *holy convocation* (Lev 23.3)
  - c. On the Sabbath, in the temple, a day of choirs and music

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<sup>3</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Jesus Christ* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1959), 23–24.

### 3. Daily sacrifices

- a. Evening and morning
- b. The offerings of the people

The only place these could occur in Judaism was the temple.

### C. A Summary Statement

“It is important to note that with the return from exile under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel there originated, **not a nation, but a temple community**. The dream that with the return the political reinstatement of the house of David would take place was soon brought to naught. The borders of this ‘priestly state’ were small, initially including only Jerusalem and the mountainous area of Judea. The essentials for binding a nation together, such as an own territory and political independence, were not available to the Jews any more. All that remained was the temple-community. Therefore it is understandable that the temple-cult quickly became the centre of the life of the Jewish nation. Even in the time of the Maccabees, when national independence was won back for a short while, the importance of the temple did not diminish—rather, it became even greater when Judas rededicated the desecrated sanctuary in 164 BC. In the reign of Herod, and especially under Roman rule, the temple was the symbol of the one area in which the Jews, in practising their religion, enjoyed autonomy to a great extent.”<sup>4</sup>

## III. The Lord and the Temple

- A. When Moses built the Tabernacle in the wilderness, God signified his approval with a manifestation of his glory
  1. The glory of the Lord on Mt Sinai (Ex 24.16-18)
  2. The Lord’s promise concerning the tabernacle (Ex 29.43-45)

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<sup>4</sup> A.B. du Toit, “Life in Obedience to the Torah: Jewish Belief, Worship, and Everyday Religion in the First Century AD,” in A. B du Toit, *The New Testament Milieu* (Halfway House: Orion, 1998), Sec 16.6.1.1621.

### 3. The dedication of the tabernacle (Ex 40.35-36)

B. When Solomon built and dedicated the temple, God signified his approval in the same way (1 Kings 8.10-11)

C. Ezekiel's vision

1. The Lord took Ezekiel to Jerusalem, in a vision, he sees the glory of the Lord there (Ezek 8.4)
2. As the vision progressed, Ezekiel witnessed the glory of the Lord move from the holy place to the threshold of the temple (Ezek 9.3)
3. As Ezekiel watches, the glory moves with the cherubim to a position above the east gate of the temple (Ezek 10.18-19)
4. Finally, Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord depart from the Jerusalem (Ezek 11.22-24)

These visions communicate God's disapproval of the nation because of its idolatry. What followed was the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and seventy years of exile.

D. Of course, after the exile, the leaders of Israel rebuilt the temple

1. When they laid the foundation, the people rejoiced (Ezra 3.11-13)
2. Some years later, they completed the building, and rejoiced again (Ezra 6.14-16)
3. This temple, Herod rebuilt into one of the wonders of the ancient world
4. Yet we never hear of the glory of the Lord returning to the temple, though the Lord himself walked within its precincts

## IV. The verdict of God on the temple

A. Paul's last visit to the temple (Ac 21.26-30)

1. Here is the apostle to the Gentiles, acknowledging his national upbringing and the God of his fathers
2. Here is the apostle to the Gentiles falsely accused of disrespecting his God and the temple
3. Here is the apostle to the Gentiles thrust out, expelled from its precincts

4. And here... “immediately the doors were shut” (30)

## B. The Lord’s verdict on the temple (Mt 24.2)

Mt 24.2 And He said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.”

In AD 70, Titus destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, taking the temple furniture as trophies to Rome.

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** You can shut the door of your temple to God; beware lest he shut the door of his temple to you.

We are not talking about the loss of salvation, but there are two senses in which people should think about the symbolism of the shut door.

First, there comes a point when God will take “No” for an answer.

- The lost man who defies the gospel does not have forever to change his mind.

Gen 6.3 Then the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh...”

Second, there comes a point when the Lord can remove believers from their place of service.

1 Jn 5.16 If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this.

Our God calls us to a faithful life before him, but we see that he will discipline those who will not follow him. May we find in him great delight in knowing and serving him all our days.