

GOD'S PRESENCE THROUGH FIRE

Adam and Eve had eaten from the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil.' Their disobedience introduced sin to creation and the Lord sent them out of the garden. Positioned at the entrance of the garden, a cherubim armed with flaming swords now prevented the re-entrance of a fallen Adam and Eve into God's holy presence (Genesis 3:24). It's an intense moment. The perfect union between God and His creation had been separated.

They were separated from the Garden, but they were not abandoned. The Lord would choose to make His presence accessible, at first, through the family of Abraham, then one day, through all nations. Throughout the old testament, we see the Lord's presence come and go through the physical manifestation of fire.

As Moses is tending to a flock of sheep, he comes face to face with the presence of God through a burning bush (Exodus 3:2). He is chosen to lead Israel out of 430 years of Egyptian captivity and into the Promised Land. Physically guided by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22), Israel miraculously crosses through the Red Sea into the wilderness of Shur. As Moses is given the ten commandments at Mount Sinai, the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on top of the mountain (Exodus 24:17).

God's power, holiness, and presence are on display through fire.

When Moses finished building the tabernacle, it was filled with the glory of the Lord. The presence of the Lord had a resting place amongst His people as a cloud by day, and fire by night (Exodus 40:34-38).

In 957 BC, King Solomon finished building the permanent temple. Fire came down from heaven, consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1). God's presence had a permanent place. Until it was destroyed in 597 BCE, and again 70 CE. Even though the temple was more permanent than the tabernacle, it was not a final resting place for God's presence. It was still temporary.

Jesus ushered in a radical idea that God's people extended beyond Israel to include the Gentiles. He also foreshadowed that he would not be with them forever, ultimately pointing to his crucifixion. But this wasn't the end, because he would send a Helper.

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." –John 16:7

Why would Jesus leaving them be an advantage? While he was on earth he could only be in one place at one time, but the Holy Spirit would carry on Jesus' ministry over the entire world at all times. As the church began to form at Pentecost, the Helper that Jesus promised (John 16:7; Joel 2:28-30) came upon the people.

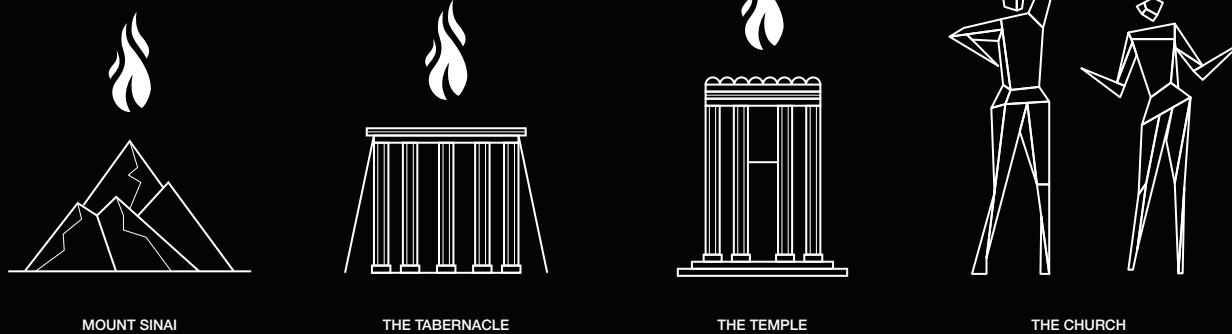
"And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." –Acts 2:3-4

The picture of fire shows us that the very presence and glory of God transitioned into God's people, the church. As the image bearers of God, we now carry the Holy Spirit (fire) inside of us. We are the new tabernacle, the new temple, the new, permanent dwelling place of the Lord God.

The very power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us (Romans 8:11). The fire that guided the Israelites through the wilderness now guides us today. The fire that consecrated the temple and made it holy now makes us holy in the eyes of the Father.

"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?...For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." –1 Corinthians 3:16

God's power, holiness, and presence are now on display through us.



MOUNT SINAI

THE TABERNACLE

THE TEMPLE

THE CHURCH