

God's Building

According to the revelation of the Old and New Testaments, God desires a building and God is a Builder (Isa. 66:1; Heb. 11:10). As a verb, *building* refers to the construction of something solid, permanent or fixed, and ordered. It refers to making something by joining parts, to making a structure, and to something being formed, developing, or increasing. The nouns *building* or *build* refer to the result of the action of building, i.e., what is constructed, but they can also have the sense of a body structure (in terms of its physical strength, shape, and size) and the constitution of a human body. This article focuses on God's building work in the Bible, looking at the divine involvement in producing a dwelling place on earth and examining the Hebrew and Greek words for *building* as well as other crucial words related to building. It begins by looking at God's building work in the Old Testament in terms of the structures of the tabernacle and the temple and at the figurative application of building to the children of Israel in terms of their growth, development, and establishing of the family or dynasty. It then explores the building up of the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, the spiritual fulfillment of the tabernacle and the temple. This building work is examined in terms of its foundation, the growth and transformation of the building materials, and the joining together of these materials through the proper functioning of all the members of the Body. The issue of this building work is the New Jerusalem as the mutual habitation of God and man and as the ultimate consummation of the tabernacle and the temple.

Building in the Old Testament

The Hebrew verb *banah* (to build) occurs in the Old Testament in both its literal sense, referring to a process of building something physical using inanimate materials, and in a figurative sense, referring to the growth and development of a group of people. The verb is associated with human subjects as well as God. The noun *binyan* (building) is rare, occurring only once in Hebrew (Ezek. 42:5) with the corresponding Aramaic word *binyana'* occurring once as well (Ezra 5:4).

The Building of Eve as a Type of the Church

Building is first spoken of in Genesis 2:22: "Jehovah God

built (*banah*) the rib, which He had taken from the man, into a woman and brought her to the man." However, the notion of building in this verse is obscured by most English translations, which utilize *made* (KJV, NIV, NRSV) or *fashioned* (NASB, TNK). However, the Hebrew word *banah* is distinct from other Hebrew words used in creation: *bara'* (create) in 1:1, *'asah* (make) in verse 26, and *yatsar* (form, or fashion) in 2:7.

The use of *banah* in Genesis 2:22 is very striking when considering Adam and Eve as a type of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32). In the Genesis account Adam finds no helper as a counterpart among all the animals (2:20). God then causes Adam to sleep and extracts a rib from his side, building this rib into a woman (vv. 21-22), to be presented to him, as "bone of [his] bones, / And flesh of [his] flesh," the same as Adam in life and nature so that he can be joined to her as one flesh (vv. 23-24). This prefigures the first coming of the Lord Jesus, who finds nothing that corresponds to Him among fallen humanity (apart from His salvation work). He is put to sleep in His death on the cross. His side is pierced, and out of His side flows blood and water (John 19:34). With these two elements—blood for judicial redemption and water, signifying the life of Christ to be dispensed into the believers, for organic salvation—the church is produced and built up to become the same as He is in life and nature, prepared for her presentation to Christ at His coming back (Eph. 5:27-30). The use of the verb *banah* in God's creation of Eve prepares us for a figurative application of the notion of building, which becomes increasingly significant later in the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament.

A Physical, Material Building

The verb *banah* occurs with building various solid and permanent physical and material structures in the Old Testament. In Genesis it frequently is associated with the building of an altar by God's people, such as Noah (Gen. 8:20), Abraham (12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9), Isaac (26:25), Jacob (35:7), Moses (Exo. 17:15; 24:4), Gideon (Judg. 6:24), Samuel (1 Sam. 7:17), Saul (14:35), and David (2 Sam. 24:21, 25). God's people, up to the time of their establishment in the land, mostly had a nomadic existence, living in tents. The building of an altar was an indication that what was solid and fixed in their life was their consecration to God. In

contrast to the altar, there was the building of larger structures not in the line of God's economy, such as cities, like the ones built by Cain and Nimrod (Gen. 4:17; 10:11), the tower of Babel (11:5), Pharaoh's storage cities (Exo. 1:11), as well as altars to pagan gods (Num. 23:14). As the children of Israel became more situated, they too participated in larger building projects. David built parts of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:9), and Solomon built his own house (1 Kings 7:1), the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem, and cities such as Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer (9:15), but the Bible focuses primarily on the building of the temple or sanctuary, the house of Jehovah (2 Sam. 7; 1 Kings 6—8; 1 Chron. 17; 22:19; 2 Chron. 2—6; 20:8). After the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, the verb *banah* is also used to indicate its rebuilding. The order of rebuilding or restoration begins with the altar (Ezra 3:2), the house (5:8), and then the city with its gates and walls (Neh. 3:1; 4:6).

It is interesting to note that the verb *banah* is not used in the construction of either Noah's ark or in the construction of the tabernacle; rather, *asah* is used. Examples include: "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make rooms in the ark and shall cover it within and without with pitch" (Gen. 6:14), and "according to all that I show you, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, even so shall you make it" (Exo. 25:9). Noah's ark was a temporary dwelling place to enable him and his household to pass through God's judgment of the earth by the flood. The tabernacle was God's temporary, movable dwelling place in the midst of the children of Israel in their sojourning in the wilderness. Once the children of Israel entered the promised land, the tabernacle was kept as the sanctuary in Shiloh (Josh. 18:1-10; Psa. 78:60) and at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39). However, it was eventually superseded by the temple, which strengthened, enlarged, and stabilized God's dwelling on the earth.

The Building of the People

Banah is used in a figurative sense in the building up of a household or family. Sarah considered that children by Hagar would build her up (Gen. 16:2). Likewise, Rachel considered that children by Bilhah would build her up (30:3). Ruth, like Rachel and Leah, built the house of Israel (Ruth 4:11; cf. Prov. 14:1). They left their fathers' households, joined themselves to Israel, and raised children for the continuation of the house. Conversely, a brother who does not participate in the levirate marriage to his brother's widow is reproached as one who does not build up his brother's house (Deut. 25:9). Even the word for *son* (*ben*), and the word for *daughter* (*bat*), are also related to or derived from the verb *banah*, reinforcing the notion that having and raising children contributes to the ongoing existence of a family and is building. God also ensures the continuation of a family line. He promises to

build a sure house for the faithful priest who does according to what is in His heart (1 Sam. 2:35), and He also promises to build a sure house for Solomon as He built for David, if he walks in the ways of David his father (1 Kings 11:38).

The concept of building a household or family is contrasted with the building of the temple in the dynastic oracle to David in 2 Samuel 7. While David desires to build a physical house as a dwelling place for God, God promises to build a house or dynasty for David (vv. 11, 19, 25-29), which will last forever (v. 16). Although Jehovah credits David with initiating the building of a house, or temple, it was David's seed, or descendant, who would build the house (vv. 12-13). David's seed is God's Son as verse 14 states, "I will be his Father, and he will be My son." God also promised David that He would establish his seed forever and build up his throne from generation to generation (Psa. 89:4, 29, 36). Initially and partially the promise was fulfilled in Solomon who built the temple, but ultimately this refers to Christ as the seed of David who builds the church as the house of God and who brings in His eternal kingdom (Rom. 1:3; Luke 1:31-33; Matt. 16:18).

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The exchange between Jehovah and David regarding the construction of the temple reflects God's concern for people more than for a physical building, which became more marked, especially after the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar.

Although there are verses indicating that God is involved in a physical building process, such as, "Unless Jehovah builds the house, / Those who build it labor in vain" (Psa. 127:1; cf. 78:69), "Jehovah has built up Zion" (102:16), and He is the One who builds the walls and the city of Jerusalem (51:18; 147:2), some verses like Psalm 127:1 can be applied in a general way to the people and to an ordinary house or a dynasty, as the following verses, which speak of the bringing forth of children, suggest (vv. 3-5). After the destruction of the temple Jehovah promises to rebuild the people: "I will build you again, and you will be built, / O virgin of Israel" (Jer. 31:4), and "I will turn the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel and build them up as in the former time" (33:7). Conversely, concerning those who "do not regard the acts of Jehovah / Or the work of His hands; / He will tear them down / And

not rebuild them” (Psa. 28:5). He also prophesies in Amos, “In that day I will raise up / The fallen tabernacle of David, / And I will wall up its breaches / And raise up its ruins / And build it up as it was in the days of old” (9:11; cf. Acts 15:16). This refers to the restoration of the kingdom and the family of David. Christ will come back as the real David and will rebuild, or restore, the kingdom of David His forefather in the millennial kingdom (Isa. 9:7; 16:5; Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5).

When the physical temple was built, there was some indication of its inadequacy, as Solomon prays, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heavens and the heaven of heavens are not able to contain You; how much less this house which I have built” (1 Kings 8:27; cf. 2 Chron. 2:6, which begins, “But who is able to build Him a house?”). Isaiah echoes the same sentiment: “Thus says Jehovah, / Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest?” (66:1). The next verse states, “For all these things My hand has made, / And so all these things have come into being, declares Jehovah. / But to this kind of man will

For God’s building, there is the need of the revelation of Christ as the proper foundation, the growth and transformation of the believers as the proper building materials, and the need for the fitting and knitting together of these materials.

I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” Isaiah 57:15 indicates that Jehovah dwells in the heavens (cf. Psa. 102:19; Isa. 33:5) and with the contrite and lowly of spirit, without mentioning the temple.

Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1 at his martyrdom as a polemic against the temple:

Yet the Most High does not dwell in that which is made by hands (χειροποιήτοις), even as the prophet says, “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has not My hand made all these things?” (Acts 7:48-50; cf. 2 Chron. 6:8)

Paul, who had witnessed Stephen’s martyrdom, repeats the same sentiment: “The God who made the world and all things in it, this One, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands (χειροποιήτοις)” (Acts 17:24; Mark 14:58; cf. Heb. 9:11, 24, referring to the heavenly tabernacle).¹

The Building of the Church in the New Testament

The Greek verb οἰκοδομέω (forty-two times), along with its compounds ἐποικοδομέω (seven times) συνοικοδομέω (one time), and its cognate noun οἰκοδομή (eighteen times), is used to refer to building in the New Testament. More than thirty-six times these words refer to God’s spiritual building. Both οἰκοδομέω and οἰκοδομή are compounds of two words: οἶκος (house) and δομή or δόμος, which also mean “house” (related to the word *domestic*). The nouns δομή or δόμος come from δέμω, “to build” (none of these words occur in the New Testament). God’s building in the New Testament is related to the building up of the church as the Body of Christ and the house of God.

In the following sections, we will consider three crucial matters related to God’s building: first, the need of the revelation of Christ as the proper foundation; second, the need for the growth and transformation of the believers as the proper building materials; and third, the need for the fitting and knitting together of these materials. These actions are carried out by the proper functioning of the members in mutuality, particularly in prophesying, speaking for Christ, speaking forth Christ, and speaking Christ into others. The building of the church ultimately fulfills the type of two great Old Testament symbols, the tabernacle and the temple.

The Revelation of Christ as the Foundation

The first mention of God’s building in the New Testament is in Matthew 16:18, when the Lord Jesus was revealed to Peter as the Christ, the Son of the living God. After this He continued to say, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.”

Here the Lord unveiled His desire to build the church, indicating that the proper foundation of the building of the church is the revelation of Himself. He indicated previously in the parable of a prudent man building his house upon the rock that it is essential in the construction of a building to lay the proper foundation (7:24). The essence of the revelation of Christ can be seen in the following quotation:

Christ is the One who actually builds the church as God’s house, God’s temple (Matt. 16:18; 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:21), in reality. Christ is also the element in which and with which the church is built...Christ builds the church by building Himself into us, i.e., by entering into our spirit and spreading Himself from our spirit into our mind, emotion, and will to occupy our entire soul (Eph. 3:17). This building, a mingling of God’s divinity with our redeemed, resurrected, and uplifted humanity, becomes God’s habitation and our habitation—a mutual abode (John 14:23; 15:4). Eventually, this building will consummate in

the New Jerusalem for eternity, in which God's redeemed are the tabernacle for God to dwell in and God Himself is the temple for His redeemed to dwell in (Rev. 21:3, 22). (Recovery Version, 2 Sam. 7:13, note 1)

Paul speaks of the foundation of God's building in two places in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 he states,

According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, and another builds upon (ἐποικοδομεῖ) it. But let each man take heed how he builds upon it. For another foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.²

Jesus Christ is the unique foundation upon which to build the church as God's building (cf. Isa. 28:16).

In Ephesians 2:19-20 Paul speaks about the saints, the members of the household (οἰκεῖτοι) of God, being built upon (ἐποικοδομηθέντες) the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Since the mystery of Christ was revealed to the apostles (3:4-5), the revelation they received for the building of the church is considered the foundation on which the church is built. This is reinforced by Revelation 21:14, which states that the wall of the New Jerusalem has twelve foundations on which are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

In other places Paul associates the apostles and prophets with the building of the church. Paul twice indicates that his apostolic authority is for building up (οἰκοδομῆν), not for ruling over (lit., overthrowing) the believers (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). He also unveils what transpired at the Lord's ascension with the giving of gifts—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up (οἰκοδομῆν) of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12).

Finally, Jude 20 speaks of building up (ἐποικοδομοῦντες) ourselves upon our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. The foundation (implied with the use of ἐποικοδομέω) upon which we build up ourselves is our most holy faith, which is objective faith, referring to the things in the New Testament in which we believe for our salvation in Christ. We build up ourselves by praying in the Holy Spirit based upon and in the sphere of this faith.

The Growth and Transformation of Materials for Building the Church

Colossians 2 links the thought of the foundation with the growth in life.

As therefore you have received the Christ, Jesus the

Lord, walk in Him, having been rooted and being built up (ἐποικοδομούμενοι) in Him, and being established in the faith even as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (vv. 6-7)

The notion of being rooted in Christ implies that we are plants and Christ is the soil. By absorbing the nutrients from Christ the soil, we grow up and are built up in Him. Here Paul links growth with the building up of the Body of Christ.

In Ephesians 2 Paul also connects the notions of growth and building, by saying, "In whom all the building (οἰκοδομῆ), being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21). *In whom* indicates the essence or sphere of the building—in Jesus Christ. The growth issues in a holy temple, the enlargement of Christ as God's temple.

In Ephesians 4 Paul again connects growth and building, saying that the growth of the Body is unto the building up (οἰκοδομῆν) of itself in love (v. 16). The growth of the Body issues in its being built up in love. Prior to this verse,

Christ must grow in us and produce the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for the building of God's habitation on earth. The building of God, the house of God, the church, is the increase, or enlargement, of Christ.

Paul stressed the matter of the need of growth in verses 13 through 15 by stating,

Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...no longer little children...but...we may grow up into Him in all things.³

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul links the two notions of growth and building with the notion of transformation. In verse 9 he says, "We are God's fellow workers; you are God's cultivated land, God's building." The church is God's cultivated land, or God's farm, to grow Christ and God's building to be His dwelling place. Christ has been planted in the church. According to verse 12, Christ must grow in us and produce out of us the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for the building of God's habitation on earth. These materials imply transformation. Thus, the building of God, the house of God, the church, is the increase, or enlargement, of Christ.

Natural materials such as wood, grass, and stubble will not remain on the foundation of Christ, not surviving the test of fire upon each one's work (vv. 13-15).

Gold may signify the divine nature of the Father with all its attributes, silver may signify the redeeming Christ with all the virtues and attributes of His person and work, and precious stones may signify the transforming work of the Spirit with all its attributes...Wood, in contrast to gold, signifies the nature of the natural man; grass, in contrast to silver, signifies the fallen man, the man of the flesh (1 Pet. 1:24), who has not been redeemed or regenerated by Christ; and stubble, in contrast to precious stones, signifies the work and living that issue from an earthen source and have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit. (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 3:12, notes 2 and 3)

In Matthew 16:18 transformation and building are linked together and growth is implied. Peter's name is changed from Simon to Cephas (Aramaic for "stone"), or Peter (Gk. Πέτρος, meaning a "stone"), indicating that he would be a transformed stone in God's building (John 1:42). This name change had a profound effect on Peter

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and no doubt influenced him in his writing in chapter 2 of his first Epistle, which also connects the notions of transformation and building. In verses 2 and 3 he talks about longing for the guileless milk of the word, growing unto salvation, and tasting that the Lord is good, and then he says that as living stones (λίθοι) coming to Him as the living stone (λίθος), we are being built up (οικοδομεῖσθε) as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood (vv. 4-5).

Christ is a living stone, and His human nature was transformed and transfigured from a clay vessel to precious stone. He makes us the same as He is, living stones. Through regeneration, we who were created of clay (Rom. 9:21) received the seed of the divine life, which by its growing in us transforms us into living stones to be built up together as a spiritual house.

The Fitting and Knitting Together of Materials in the Building of the Church

In addition to our transformation into precious materials through the growth in life, we need to be joined, or built,

together. Christ is the cornerstone, the head of the corner, and the Head of the Body, fitting and knitting the Body together through the richly supplied joints (the gifted members) and the operation in the measure of each one part (the perfected saints) as members of the Body to build up the Body.

Christ as the cornerstone is the means to join the believers as stones together. Ephesians 2:20 states that the Jewish and Gentile believers are "being built upon (εjποικodomhqeunte) the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." Christ joins the two walls together, one wall being the Jewish believers, and the other, the Gentile believers. The Lord Jesus, quoting Psalm 118:22, prophesied to the Jewish leaders, who should have been building the house of God, that they would reject Him as the cornerstone, the One who would join the Gentiles to them for the building of God's house (Matt. 21:42). The ultimate sign of their rejection was the crucifixion of Christ. However, in resurrection Christ became the head of the corner. Peter reiterated this in his testimony in Acts 4 and in his first Epistle (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:6-7). In his Epistle Peter identifies the rejected cornerstone as a living stone (λίθον ζῶντα—v. 4). Now, Christ the living stone as the life-giving Spirit within the believers has the ability to join together believers from various and diverse backgrounds.

In Ephesians 2 and 4 and Colossians 2 Paul deals with the fitting and knitting together of the parts of the building and of the Body.⁴ In Ephesians 2:21-22, in Christ as the cornerstone, all the building, being fitted together (συναρμολογουμένη), is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him the believers in the local church are being built together (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into a dwelling place of God in spirit. In 4:16, out from the Head, all the Body, being joined together (συναρμολογούμενον) and being knit together (συμβιβασζόμενον) through every joint (ἀφῆς) of the rich supply (ἐπιχορηγίας) and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up (οικοδομήν) of itself in love. In Colossians 2:19 Paul says that out from the Head all the Body, being richly supplied (ἐπιχορηγούμενον) and knit together (συμβιβασζόμενον) by means of the joints (ἀφῶν) and sinews (συνδέσμων), grows with the growth of God.

There are a number of crucial terms used by Paul in these verses related to the joining of the members together. The first, συναρμολογέω, is used only by Christian writers and means to join or fit together (σύν). It is a compound of ἀρμολογέω, which itself is a compound; ἀρμός means "joint," and λογέω is related to λογία (1 Cor. 16:1), which means "collection." Συμβιβάζω means "to bring together, unite, or knit together." It is a causative form of συμβαίνω (σύν "with" and βαίνω

“come, go”) meaning “to come together, to meet, or to happen.” The noun ἀφή comes from the verb ἄπτω, meaning “to touch, or contact,” and refers to the point of contact in the body, i.e., a joint or ligament. Συνδέσμων translated “sinews,” is a compound of σύν “with” and δεσμός “band” or “bond” from δέω meaning “to bind, fasten, or tie” (cf. bond of peace, Eph. 4:3; bond of perfectness, Col. 3:14).

The participles in these three verses, συναρμολογουμένη, συμβιβασζόμενον, and ἐπιχορηγούμενον, are all present circumstantial participles, modifying the main verb *grow*. This indicates that the actions of fitting and knitting and being supplied go on simultaneously with growing. As the members of the Body are being joined together, it grows; also as it grows, they are being joined together.

The Functioning of the Members in Mutuality for the Building of the Body

The building up is something carried out by all the members of the Body as they are perfected in their function, and it is done in mutuality, in love, and by prophesying.

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the Lord gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers for the perfecting (καταρτισμόν) of the saints unto the work of the ministry (εἰς ἔργον διακονίας), unto the building up (εἰς οἰκοδομήν) of the Body of Christ. These gifted members perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry, which is to build up the Body of Christ. The word καταρτισμόν (perfecting) comes from the verb καταρτίζω, which has three meanings: to mend or restore what is broken (cf. Matt. 4:21); to fit out, equip, put in order, or adjust; and to strengthen, to make something what it ought to be. The gifted ones perfect, mend, equip, and strengthen the members of the Body to minister Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ. The building up of the Body is not accomplished directly by the gifted ones but by the saints who have been perfected by the gifted ones. The gifted ones perfect the saints to do what they do—to be sent to minister Christ and raise up churches (as apostles); to speak for Christ, speak forth Christ, and speak Christ into people (as prophets); to announce the gospel (as evangelists); and to cherish and nourish others while teaching them the truths of God’s economy (as shepherd-teachers).

According to the grammatical construction of Ephesians 4:16, all the Body causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. This growth goes on simultaneously with the joining and the knitting, which takes place through (διὰ) every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part (καὶ ἐνέργειας ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους). According to the context the joints of the rich supply are the gifted

ones spoken of in verse 11, and *each one part* refers to the perfected saints in verse 12.

In verse 16 we follow the early manuscript $\mathfrak{P}46$, reading καὶ ἐνέργειας for κατ' ἐνέργειαν. The gifted joints coordinate together with each one part of the Body, which functions or operates according to the measure given to it. The functioning and the measure of each part are enhanced by the amount of perfecting received.

The building is something done by each member and in mutuality (building up one another). According to Romans 14:19, we should pursue the things for building up one another (τὰ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους), and each (ἐκαστος) of us should please his neighbor with a view to what is good for building up (πρὸς οἰκοδομήν)” (15:2). In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 Paul says that we should build up each one the other (οἰκοδομεῖτε εἷς τὸν ἕνα). The essence of the relationship between the members is mutual love toward one another. Knowledge puffs up, but love (ἀγάπη) builds up (1 Cor. 8:1). Ἀγάπη refers to the divine love, God’s essence of love imparted into the believers to be their love one to another.

The growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love goes on simultaneously with the joining and the knitting, which takes place through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part.

Building up is particularly related to our speaking. In Ephesians 4:29 Paul says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear,” and in Acts 20:32 he committed the believers to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build up (οἰκοδομῆσαι) and to give the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.

Paul devotes the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 to the matter of prophesying, which is a crucial function in the building up of the church. Prophesying here is not used in the sense of foretelling primarily, but in the sense of speaking for Christ, speaking forth Christ, and speaking Christ into others. He who prophesies speaks building up (οἰκοδομήν) and encouragement and consolation to men (v. 3). Paul contrasts prophesying with speaking in tongues. The former builds up the church, the latter builds up the individual (vv. 4-5, 17). He charges the believers to seek to excel for the building up of the church (v. 12). Whenever the church comes together, each one should have something to say: “Each one has a psalm, has

a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation,” but the governing principle should be, “Let all things be done for building up” (v. 26). Another principle related to the building is that “all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful, but not all things build up” (10:23).

The building up of the church takes place in the local church and in the realm of the human spirit, according to Ephesians 2:22: “In whom you also are being built together (συνοικοδομεῖσθε) into a dwelling place (κατοικητήριον) of God in spirit.” Whereas verse 21 refers to the universal church (“all the building”), verse 22 refers to the local church (“you also,” i.e., the church in Ephesus).

It seems that the practice of the early church was for all the members of the Body to function in mutuality, and their meetings were filled with prophesying. As a result, in Acts 9:31 “the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up (οικοδομουμένη); and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied.”

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The Tabernacle and the Temple

The issue of the building up of the church as the Body of Christ is an eternal dwelling place for God and man. This building consummates in the New Jerusalem as the tabernacle of God and the temple, the fulfillment of the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament. From God’s perspective this dwelling is a tabernacle, a movable dwelling place. From the human perspective, this dwelling is a temple, a more solid, fixed, and permanent dwelling place.

The tabernacle is a type of humanity, God’s movable dwelling place. Indeed, the human body as our temporal earthly dwelling place is referred to as a tabernacle (2 Cor. 5:1, 4; 2 Pet. 1:13-14). The Lord Jesus, as the Word who became flesh, was a tabernacle (John 1:14). When God became a man, He picked up humanity to be His movable, visible, physical dwelling place on earth among men. The church, as the enlargement of Christ, is the continuation of this movable dwelling place on earth. The New Jerusalem, the mingling of divinity with humanity, is also

considered a tabernacle (Rev. 21:3). This is the means for God to dwell among men and relate to them on earth for eternity. The inhabitants of the new heavens and new earth will be God’s peoples, and He will be their God.⁵ The believers are actually part of the tabernacle and the means for God to relate to the nations on the new earth for eternity. Christ will reign over the peoples of the new earth with the believers as His co-kings in the millennial kingdom and for eternity (5:10; 20:6; 22:5)

In addition to the church as a tabernacle on earth, there is a greater and more perfect tabernacle in the heavens, into which Christ entered as a High Priest, after accomplishing redemption (Heb. 9:11-12; cf. Rev. 13:6; 15:5). He is now “a Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Heb. 8:2), ministering the heavenly life into the believers. Indeed, Christ is a tabernacle over the believers (2 Cor. 12:9; Rev. 7:15). This heavenly tabernacle was actually the pattern for the earthly tabernacle. God charged Moses that he make everything according to the pattern (*tabnit*) which He showed him in the wilderness (Exo. 25:9; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5).⁶

The temple also has its fulfillment in Christ and the church. The Lord Jesus indicated that He was greater than the temple (Matt. 12:6), and He even forsook the earthly temple in Jerusalem (23:38; 24:1-2). After He cleansed the temple of the sellers and moneychangers, He indicated that His body was also a temple and that if it were destroyed, it would be raised up in three days, which was actually fulfilled in His death and resurrection (John 2:19-21). The church is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Rev. 3:12), and even the individual bodies of the members of the Body are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).

There is also a temple of God in heaven with God’s throne in its midst (Rev. 7:15; 11:1-2, 19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17; cf. Ps. 11:4; Hab. 2:20; Jonah 2:7; Micah 1:2). In the New Jerusalem there is no temple, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (Rev. 21:22). In the new heaven and new earth, the temple of God will be enlarged into a city. The three dimensions of the city are equal (v. 16); this indicates that the city as a whole will be the Holy of Holies, the inner temple (ναός). This inner temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb, signifying that God and the Lamb will be the place in which we serve God.⁷ Divinity (God) and deified humanity (the Lamb) are the fixed, permanent dwelling place of the believers for eternity.

The holy city as the tabernacle of God is for God to dwell in, and God and the Lamb as the temple are for the redeemed saints to dwell in. In the new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem will be a mutual dwelling place for God and man for eternity.

Conclusion

God's building is solid, fixed, and permanent. In the Old Testament God had a solid, fixed, strengthened dwelling place in the temple in Jerusalem. However, His desire was to dwell among and within His people in a more intrinsic way, within their very being. In this way they as a people, family, or dynasty would be built up and established permanently on the earth. In the New Testament God became a man to become a tabernacle, a movable dwelling on earth among men. He was also a permanent dwelling, a temple, for human beings to dwell in God eternally. Although His physical body, temple, was destroyed on the cross, He raised it up in three days. In resurrection His humanity was uplifted into divinity to become a permanent dwelling for mankind. As the life-giving Spirit He is now available for human beings to enter, and He also can enter into them. From the day of Pentecost the church came into existence as the enlargement of Christ as a tabernacle and temple. However, these human beings indwelt by the Spirit in their spirit need to be built, to become more solid, through seeing a revelation of Christ as the foundation, as the living stone for their transformation, and as the cornerstone for their joining together. The more He is constituted into the believers, growing in them and transforming them, by making His home in their hearts, the more they are built up. The gifted members perfect the saints to carry out the work of the ministry—to minister, or dispense, more of Christ into others to build up the Body of Christ. They function and operate mainly by prophesying, the most excellent way to build up the church. They carry out their function in mutuality, with each member having a part in the building up of the church. The built-up church consummates in the New Jerusalem, a movable tabernacle for God to dwell in and a solid temple for humanity to dwell in. This is the goal and consummation of God's building.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹Dunn points out that by using the phrase *made with hands* Stephen [and Paul] are using language that equates the temple with an idol, denouncing “the Temple as itself an idol” (97). He points out that in the Septuagint the term χειροποίητα “made with hands” is used to refer to idols (Lev. 26:1, 30; Isa. 2:18; 10:11; Dan. 5:4, 23). Also in Acts 7:41 Stephen refers to the golden calf as “the works of their hands” (τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν). This indicates that in Stephen's eyes the temple had become an idol to the Jews of that time.

²The verb ἐποικοδομέω (lit., build upon—ἐπί) occurs frequently with the notion of foundation expressed or implied.

³The companion verse to Ephesians 4:16, Colossians 2:19, also speaks of growth. Out from the Head all the Body grows with the growth of God, the increase of God's element in the Body. In Ephesians 3 Paul links the concept of being rooted and

grounded in love with Christ making His home in our hearts through faith (v. 17).

⁴Paul emphasizes the joining together of the members of the Body with the frequent use of the preposition σύν (with, together) by itself and in compound. For example, the Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the Body, and fellow partakers (συγκληρονόμα, σύσσωμα, and συμμετόχα, Eph. 3:6).

⁵The peoples here are not the believers or the nation of Israel but the nations inhabiting the new earth. While similar language is used in other verses to refer to Israel and the church, *people* is always singular (Exo. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:30; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10). On the other hand, *peoples* (plural) refers to the nations in contrast to God's people (Exo. 19:5; 1 Kings 9:7). Also, God is referred to in Revelation 21:3 as their God (i.e., Creator) but not as their Father, as in Matthew 13:43, which would indicate that they have received the life of God and have become His sons.

⁶The design of the temple, which was also according to a specific pattern indicated by the Spirit, was doubtless modeled on the design of the tabernacle (1 Chron. 28:11-12, 19). In

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addition, we could say that, at least in New Testament times, the heavenly tabernacle and temple are connected to the earthly one by Christ, the Son of Man, as the heavenly ladder, the fulfillment of Jacob's dream at Bethel, meaning the house of God (Gen. 28:10-22; John 1:51).

⁷There are two Greek words translated “temple,” ἱερόν and ναός. The former refers to the entire precincts of the temple, including its courts; the latter, just to the enclosed sanctuary consisting of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The earthly temple is mostly called ἱερόν (apart from Mark 15:38, which refers to the splitting of the veil of the temple—ναός). In John 2:19-21, however, in reference to the church as the temple of God, and throughout the book of Revelation, ναός is used to refer to the heavenly and spiritual temple.

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