

Matthew 23:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

Analysis

And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein—the verb *katoikounti* (κατοικοῦντι, dwelling) is a present participle describing God's continuous habitation in the Temple. Jesus's argument climaxes: swearing by the Temple invokes God Himself, who dwells there. The phrase *en autō kai en tō katoikounti auton* (ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν τῷ κατοικοῦντι αὐτόν) links the physical structure inseparably to the divine presence inhabiting it.

The Temple's holiness derived entirely from God's *shekinah* glory dwelling there (1 Kings 8:10-11). To swear by the Temple while claiming not to invoke God was theological nonsense—the building's significance was God's presence, nothing else. Jesus exposes the Pharisees' pretense: they wanted to appear religious (swearing by holy things) while avoiding accountability to God. Tragically, within 40 years, God would abandon this Temple (Matthew 23:38), and Rome would destroy it (Matthew 24:2).

Historical Context

Solomon's Temple and its Second Temple successor (expanded by Herod) represented God's earthly dwelling place among His people. The Holy of Holies contained the Ark (in Solomon's Temple) or was empty (in the Second Temple), yet God's presence still sanctified the structure. Psalms 27:4, 132:13-14 celebrate God dwelling in His sanctuary.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do people today invoke God's name religiously while avoiding submission to His authority?
2. What does God's dwelling in the Temple teach about the incarnation—God dwelling in Christ's body (John 2:21)?
3. Why is it impossible to separate sacred symbols from the God they represent?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ὁ	ὀμνύει	ἐν	τῷ	ναῷ	ὀμνύει	ἐν	αὐτόν	καὶ
And	G3588	sweareth	by	G3588	the temple	sweareth	by	it	And
G2532		G3660	G1722		G3485	G3660	G1722	G846	G2532
ἐν	τῷ	κατοικοῦντι	αὐτόν						
by	G3588	him that dwelleth	it						
G1722		G2730	G846						

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 26:8 (Parallel theme): LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

1 Kings 8:13 (Parallel theme): I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever.

2 Chronicles 6:2 (Parallel theme): But I have built an house of habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever.