The Temple for New Testament Jews was a symbol of national and religious identity. This was the second Temple built on the same site. It had been completed around 515 BCE after the people’s return from exile in Babylon. In the time of Jesus, Herod the Great enlarged and refurbished it further. It was beautiful. Here’s a description the historian Josephus wrote of the Temple.

The sacred edifice itself, the holy temple, in the central position, was approached by a flight of twelve steps. The façade was of equal height and breadth, each being a hundred cubits (150 feet); but the building behind was narrower by forty cubits (about 65 feet), for in front it had as it were shoulders extending twenty cubits (32 feet) on either side. The first gate was seventy cubits high (about 100 feet) and twenty-five (35 feet) broad and had no doors, displaying unexcluded the void expanse of heaven; the entire face was covered with gold, and through it the first edifice was visible to a spectator without in all its grandeur and the surroundings of the inner gate all gleaming with gold fell beneath his eye.…

The exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The Temple then was not only a symbol of identity and history, but beautiful to look at. It seemed invincible. Yet Jesus’s prophecy of the Temple crumbling came true within a generation of Jesus’s death and only about 10 to 15 years after the writing of Luke’s Gospel.

Because the Israelites associated the Temple with God and God with the Temple, it was hard for them to realize that when the Temple fell, God was still there. But God was still there amid the rubble of the Temple. God was still there within the rubble of the Temple. In fact, the Temple crumbling initiated an age in which we worship God through the body of Christ. It brings us closer to the time of new creation, that new Jerusalem of which Isaiah speaks, when we will no longer have sorrow, but rather peace. The grandness of the Temple was no more, but God and God’s love exists forever.

The Temple can be a metaphor for whatever treasure in life. It can be a metaphor for beautiful objects, such as houses, or boats, or RVs. It can also be a metaphor for jobs or health or a way of life or tradition. It can even be a metaphor for people we love. These temples crumble. Floods and hurricanes could damage our homes or boats. We can lose our jobs. We fall sick or our loved ones fall sick. Catastrophes require that we adjust our way of life or how we’ve always done things before. We die. Yet, God is in all these things. God helps us to rebuild our homes or adjust to another one. God sustains us in time of loss. Sometimes God even teaches us something new in the process. Sometimes we draw closer to God in our desolation.

This week we had another school shooting in the United States – this time in California. Two students and the shooter died. Other students were injured. For parents of these young people and for their friends, a Temple crumbled. All these school shootings represent a crumbling of a way of life for all of us. A place where we have always thought our children were safe – a school – is not necessarily safe any longer.

For those connected with this school, there’s desolation and loss. Yet even amid this desolation, God is there. God is there in the after life for those who died. God is there to comfort their families and friends. God will be with all those students as they return to school. Some people will even draw closer to God through this tragedy. But no matter what, God is there.

We all experience pain and desolation at some time in our lives. In fact, pain is an inevitable part of life.

Poet and hymn writer Margaret Clarkson writes this:

Pain is pain and sorrow is sorrow. It hurts. It limits. It impoverishes. It isolates. It restrains. It works devastation deep within the personality. It circumscribes in a thousand different ways. There is nothing good about it. But the gifts God can give with it are the richest the human spirit can know.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Historians most often list Abraham Lincoln as the greatest U.S. president. Lincoln, however, faced enormous challenges during his presidency and his life. He faced many examples of his Temple crumbling. His mother died when he was 9. His first love died when he was a young man. Later, three of his four children died in childhood. His wife may have been affected by mental illness, and he himself is believed to have suffered from what we would now call clinical depression. The media often described him as a hick from the backwoods. He was rejected by the society folks of the day because he was from Illinois, an uncultured frontier. When he was elected, the country divided and the civil war began. During the war, his popularity increased, but just a few days after the war ended, he was killed. The nation united around their grief for him.

Lincoln was such an effective leader during this great crisis because his acquaintance with sorrow and hardship had prepared him for the kind of self-sacrifice his presidency would require. No matter what happened to Lincoln in his life and death, God was with him and God bought something good from that.[[3]](#endnote-3)

We all have those times when our Temple crumbles. When our Temple crumbles, God endures.

1. Culpepper, R. A. (1994–2004). [The Gospel of Luke](https://ref.ly/logosres/nibab?ref=Bible.Lk21.5&off=468&ctx=nes+and+adornments.+~Josephus+is+even+mor). In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 9, pp. 398–399). Nashville: Abingdon Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *Margaret Clarkson in "The Banner" (Nov. 19, 1984), Christianity Today, Vol. 32, no. 18.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Found on PreachingToday.com [↑](#endnote-ref-3)