

## **Bible and the Headlines: Massive Buildings**

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It is not often that the Oscars, the White House and the Tar Heel State have the same thing on their collective minds. Stranger still is the object of their fascination: Post-WWII public buildings. It is the style of the architecture that is in the headlines.

In the prelude to the red carpet, the curated news service MyNews.com on February 24th offered an Agence France-Presse story titled, “How Oscar Nominee The Brutalist Was Inspired by a ‘Forgotten’ Minnesota Monastery.” The movie tracks the process that led to a Hungarian Jew designing a Benedictine monastery on the snowy prairie after the fall of the Nazis. The architect’s monicker comes from ‘brutalism,’ a label describing the modernist style used for huge public buildings. A 21st century designer described the edifice, “St John’s Abbey Church would be considered one of the greatest examples of 20th century architecture if it were located in New York, not Minnesota.”

On February 24th, the Carolina Public Press featured, “Razing Concern: NC’s Brutalist Era Is Slowly Ending — For Better or Worse.” The article is about the impending destruction of Raleigh’s massive Bath Building. The doomed structure is described as, “An instantly recognizable work of brutalist architecture, with its blocky geometry and plain concrete exterior. Notably, there are no windows above the ground floor.” In preparation for destruction, even these few windows have been removed. With all artifices removed, the west side of the Bath Building is still capable of unintended beauty as the sunset is reflected of its huge cement canvas.

The New York Times added its voice on February 24th with, “The Politics of Brutalism.” The article was triggered by a recent Executive Order signed by President Trump directing federal buildings to be built using classical designs. The target of said order was brutalism, “A Modernist subgenre popular in . . . the 1960s and ’70s, Brutalism is typically defined by poured concrete, blockiness and a minimalist ethos, emphasizing functionality.” In his first term, President Trump issued an executive order in 2020 that condemned the HUD headquarters and HHS building as examples of brutalist ugliness.

A massive public building plays a central part in both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the construction of the first temple is described, “By King Solomon’s orders great stones, stones of high price, were cut out, so that the base of the house might be made of squared stone” (1 Ki 5:17). The Babylonians destroyed this temple (2 Ki 25:9). A new temple was rebuilt by the prophet Ezra (Ezr 6:14). Like the Tar Heels listed above, there were critics of the new edifice, “Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Doesn’t it seem to you like nothing by comparison?” (Hag 2:3). God promised that the glory of the second temple would outshine the first (Hag 2:9).

The promised glory of the second Temple came when Jesus was presented there as a baby (Luk 2:22-32). During his childhood, Jesus returned to the Temple annually (Luk 2:41). As an adult, Jesus taught at the Temple (Matt 21:23). Jesus’ disciples were amazed at the Temple’s construction, “They began talking about the beautiful stonework of the Temple and the memorial decorations on the walls” (Luk 21:5). One of his disciples said to Jesus, “Teacher, look! What massive stones! What impressive buildings!” (Mar 13:1). Jesus responded as a different kind of ‘brutalist,’ “The time is coming when all these things you are admiring will be knocked down, and not one stone

will be left on top of another; all will become one vast heap of rubble”(Luk 21:6). This prophecy of the Temple’s razing was part of the accusations that led to his crucifixion, “He said in our hearing, I will put an end to this Temple which is made with hands, and in three days I will make another without hands” (Mar 14:58).

All that remains of the Temple built by human hands are the massive stone blocks of the Western (or Wailing) Wall. However, Jesus was true to his word, and he raised up a new ‘Temple’ on the third day after his execution (Joh 2:21; Luk 24:5-7). Believers can still access this ‘Temple.’ It is offered every time they celebrate communion, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24). This public ‘building’ is not only for the Oscars, the White House, and the Tar Heels. It is open to all mankind.