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The Temple in the Christian Bible

Stephen L. Cook

The temple of Jerusalem was a monumental structure of the Middle East from the tenth century BCE until the year 70 CE. It passed through phases of renovation, demise, and reconstruction. In scripture, and in the faiths of Judaism and Christianity, the Jerusalem temple is more than merely a significant architectural monument. It expresses and instantiates an intersection of the transcendent and the terrestrial spheres.

In the hermeneutical studies of the premodern church, for example, the temple is (1) the mystical 'body' of all God's faithful people (the temple's 'allegorical' sense), (2) the faithful soul of each genuine believer (the temple's 'tropological' sense), and (3) the centre of God's eschatological reign on Earth (the 'anagogical' sense).

Scriptural warrants underlie all three senses. In Deuteronomy, God's one shrine summons God's one people to assemble in awe and joy before the one God (sense 1). In the Psalms, each individual pilgrim ascends Mount Zion in a liturgical reception of God's imputed righteousness (sense 2). Isaiah and Micah envision the Mount of the Lord's house raised as the highest mountain and all the Earth's nations gazing upon it with joy (sense 3).

The meaning and power of the temple proved highly expansive over time, growing through the pages of scripture to become a central biblical symbol, a 'sacrament', and a prophecy of God's future kingdom, where deliverance flows out to all who are trapped in this disordered and troubled world. Isaiah the prophet, in chapter 6, glimpses the transcendent meaning of the temple, which the hem of God's robe filled. He perceived it as a microcosm of the world, with God reigning from beyond the firmament (symbolized by the olivewood doors to the inner sanctuary), seated above the sky (symbolized by the altar's clouds of incense). The prophet hears the seraphim call to one another, '[t]he whole earth is full of his glory' (*kaḇoḏ*, Isa 6:3), whereas, in fact, it is the temple building alone that fills with the glory (*kaḇoḏ*). In affirming that the whole world is full of YHWH's splendour, Isa 6:3 anticipates the assumption of Isa 66:1 that temple furnishings and iconography represent inklings of God's cosmic habitation. Likewise, it anticipates the prayer of Ps 72:19 that the *kaḇoḏ* may someday fill the Earth and be seen by all flesh everywhere (see Isa 40:5).

Keywords: Temple, Worship, Divine presence, Priests, Liturgy, Eschatology, Iconography, Garden of Eden, Tabernacle, High place, Bible, Architecture

Table of contents

1 Reconstructing pre-temple shrines and the Jerusalem temple's architectural phases

1.1 Archaeological and inscriptional evidence on Near Eastern shrines, temples, and sacred sites

1.1.1 Egyptian temples

Despite the differences between ancient Egyptian temples and those of the Israelite kingdoms, Syria, and Canaan, much Egyptian temple symbology illuminates the meaning of Jerusalem's temple. Just as the temple on Mount Zion was an earthly model of God's cosmic dwelling, Egyptian temples represented the cosmic home of divinity. Thus, Pharaoh Ramses III (1195–1164 BCE) proclaimed to Amon, 'I made for thee an august palace […] like the great house of [the god] Atum, which is in heaven' (Breasted 1906: 115). Here we have the common Near Eastern understanding of a temple as in some sense a god's palace.

In Egypt, as in Jerusalem, there are thus two kinds of palace, the divine palace and the royal palace. As in Egypt, so on Mount Zion; the rule of God is bound up with a serious embrace of superhuman kingship (e.g. Ps 2:7; 89:25–27). The interconnection is evinced in Egyptian reliefs and stele. Thus, a powerful relief on the left façade of the Kom Ombo temple about thirty miles north of Aswan in Egypt shows the gods Thoth and Horus anointing the Pharaoh. Their consecration signifies the king's special infusion with life force, and empowerment with inviolability. The streams of oil that they pour over him are made up of multiple ankh symbols, uniquely imbuing Pharaoh with holy life from the transcendent realm.

Israel also understood the king as a tangibly superhuman, quasi-divine figure. At coronation he is interconnected with the transcendent realm as God's vicar (see Ps 2:7; 45:3; 72:5–17; 89:25). Psalm 45:6 assures the king, 'Your throne, O God, endures forever'. Isaiah 9–10 applies the phrase 'Mighty God' (*ʾēl gibbôr*) to ruler and deity alike (Isa 9:6; 10:21). The phrase is a divine name, not a theophoric name (a name which includes the name of a God but does not identify the bearer of the name as a God). Confirming this, 'Mighty Warrior' is not a theophoric name in Judg 6:12, a closely related text (Isa 9:4 alludes to Judges 6).

The decoration and iconography of Egyptian temples illuminate those of the Jerusalem temple. They illustrate the associations of the temple with the fecundity of God's garden paradise. Thus, the sandstone temple of Hathor at Dendera, the capital of upper Egypt, celebrated the goddess's powers of sensual vitality and invigoration. A major temple feature is its hypostyle hall, filled with columns topped with immense images of Hathor's face. These columns remind us of the prominence in Solomon's temple of two immense

pillars at the front porch topped with waterlily or lotus work. The lotus is Hathor's especially beloved flower, symbolizing primordial vitality and renewal of life. In Egyptian symbology, paralleled in Zion, the lotus restores and invigorates human life. Lotus symbolism in Israel may have migrated and morphed from Egypt, but, even if it did not, the cross-cultural parallel illuminates the biblical symbol (see Keel 1997: 164–165).

Evidence of temple restoration and expansion in Egypt illuminates the history of renovation of the Jerusalem temple. The Karnak temple in Thebes, for example, was continually being expanded. Successive royal expansions of its precincts aimed to support its power to invigorate the populace both physically and spiritually. Reconstructions of the preexilic Jerusalem temple followed in this tradition. King Joash (2 Chr 24:4–14), King Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:3–36), and King Josiah (2 Chr 34:8–13) all undertook temple projects.

1.1.2 Mesopotamian temples

As with Egyptian temples, the iconography and cosmology of Mesopotamian temples shed much light on the artistry and ritual of Jerusalem's temple. Mesopotamian texts place divine Enki's temple at early Eridu, the 'House of the Subterranean Waters'. Appropriately, it sits at the edge of a freshwater marsh, an *abzu*. In the utopian vision of Ezekiel 47 such lifegiving sweet waters flow up, through, and directly out of the temple to renew Judah. The same rivers of life are clearly visible in the iconography on the façade of the Ishtar/Inanna temple at Uruk (fourteenth century BCE); see an illustration of the Façade of the Ishtar/ Inanna temple.

Within the Enki temple in Eridu is found the *kiskanu*-tree, the archetypal tree of divinity, the same transcendental tree represented by the great golden temple Menorah of Zechariah 4. Like the cosmic tree in Eden (Ezek 31:4, 8), Zechariah's 'tree' lies rooted in the Apsu; the waters of life pulse through it. Two olive trees flank the lampstand, rich with 'fresh oil' (Zech 4:14), embodying the tree's cosmic vitality and bounty.

Near the city of Aššur, archaeologists have discovered a garden temple associated with the *akītu* New Year's festival. Since the early scholarly work of Sigmund Mowinckel (d. 1965), scholars have connected the Psalter's psalms of YHWH's enthronement and of quasi-divine kingship with parallel festivities on Mount Zion (Mowinckel's thesis has been heavily modified by subsequent scholars, but there is no denying the persistent biblical motif of the triumph of the divine warrior over cosmic chaos. See e.g. Ps 24:1–2; 29:10–11; 93:1–5; 96:10; 97:1–5). The Aššur shrine included courtyards filled with rows of trees. Just so, the Jerusalem temple and its courts included palm trees, cedars of Lebanon, cypress, olive, and plane trees. As the live trees flourished, they embodied God's victory over death and sterility that the *akītu* rites also celebrated (the divine warrior conquers death and fructifies the Earth. See e.g. 1 Kgs 17:1; 18:24, 41–46; Ps 68:8–9; 77:17; 114:7–8; Levenson 2008: 207). Texts such as Gen 2:9; Ps 52:8; 65:4, 7, 9–11; 84; 92:12–14; and

Ezek 47:12 amply attest to the association of temple trees with God's lifegiving holiness. The same motif is visible in the Mari Investiture Panel (see 'Peinture de "l'Investiture"' from the Louvre) and in the Assyrian Garden Relief (see image from The British Museum).

1.1.3 Shrines and temples in Canaan and Syria

For thousands of years before Jerusalem's temple, the niches, shrines, and royal chapels of Syria and Canaan received worshipers in their urban precincts. Their cults cared for the members of the polytheistic royal pantheon. The thirteenth-century BCE temple with a mudbrick altar at Lachish is one of multiple examples unearthed by archaeologists. Niches in the temple's rear wall displayed divine images and held votive gifts deposited by worshipers. Hazor Shrine 6136, from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, housed standing stones (as in Exod 24:4) and a sculpted deity (see image: 'Orthostat Temple, Hazor, 15th-13th C. BC'). The deity, who is seated, is perhaps Baal Hamon or the Canaanite El. The standing stones, by contrast, represent the worship of departed souls, who can no longer sing and pray in person. One stone carved, with a deceased worshiper's raised hands, is probably the very sort of mortuary stela (*yād*) that Isa 56:4–5 envisions standing in the future temple in Jerusalem. It connects the dead with the living via a *šēm ʿôlām*, an 'invocation name'. Without offspring (v5), the eunuch will lose his 'remembrance', his ongoing membership among the living after his death (cf. *KTU* 1.171 26–28). In 2 Sam 18:18 Absalom solves his identical concern with just such a *yād*.

Outside the fortified cities, some pre-Israelite tribal pastoralists and farmers used similar, but non-sculpted, standing stones (*maṣṣēbôt*) to represent divinity itself. Lineage groups gathered seasonally at shrines with stones for covenant renewal and tribal worship. Archaeological and radiocarbon study of *maṣṣēbôt* indicate that their ritual use began in wilderness areas, and only later spread to agricultural zones, towns, and cities. Among the Israelites, standing stones constituted non-graven representations of YHWH. They were tangible representations of God without being icons (*material aniconism*). They were often used in covenantal rites (see, especially, Gen 28:18; Josh 24:26–27; Isa 19:19).

The north Syrian temple at 'Ain Dara, which functioned from the tenth to ninth centuries BCE, is highly significant in its proximity – both temporally and structurally – to the biblical preexilic temple. The main building is rectangular, with the main entrance on one of the shorter sides (a 'long room' shrine). There is an entrance stairway, a vestibule, and a front porch with a roof supported by monumental columns (parallel to 1 Kgs 7:21 and to the front pillars of the recently unearthed Tel Motza temple). There is a long main hall, behind which is a raised inner shrine (or 'adytum'). Like the raised 'Holy of Holies' in Solomon's temple, the adytum is the deity's throne room.

As in the biblical temple, the complex contains cherubim-like winged beasts guarding the divine presence (see image: ''Ain Dara'). Carved divine footprints on the temple

terrace represent an anthropomorphic conception of deity that has parallels in scriptures such as Ezek 43:7 (Ezekiel's utopian temple reflects a particularly anthropomorphic theology among biblical traditions). The yard-long enormity of the footprints at 'Ain Dara demonstrates the deity's superhuman greatness. Uniquely, a sixteen-foot-wide outer structure encloses the temple building on three sides, directly paralleling the 'side chambers' of 1 Kgs 6:5 that have often puzzled scholars.

The early-Iron-Age Neo-Hittite/Aramean shrine at Tell Tayinat in northern Syria provides another architectural parallel to Israel's first temple, although dating somewhat later (eighth century BCE). Like the 'Ain Dara temple, it is a long room with a porch and columns in front. The columns supported the roof of the shrine's porch, as at 'Ain Dara. They have lion-shaped bases which, like the Zion temple's cherubim, guard the way into the sacred presence of divinity. The shrine had a podium and pedestal elevating its adytum, where a god's image rested.

1.1.4 Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls

During the Hasmonean era, the founding leaders of the apocalyptic Qumran community rejected temple worship in Jerusalem and established a sacral sectarian base on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. There they awaited the end of days as God's faithful remnant. The original split with Jerusalem's temple priests and services involved a religious legal argument with a figure they call the 'Wicked Priest', an unidentified cleric (perhaps Jonathan Apphus). If the Temple Scroll, 11Q19, represents a theological position held at Qumran, at least some covenanters envisioned a more appropriate, ideal temple than had ever been built in Jerusalem by Solomon, Zerubbabel, or Herod the Great (see Broshi 1987; White Crawford 2000).

The Qumran covenanters did not sacrifice, but considered their prayers, songs, and covenant meals as substitutes for rites in Jerusalem. An ideal physical temple was coming in God's time (11Q19), but for now – according to texts such as 1QS 9.4–5 – their 'offering of the lips' expiated sin and procured God's favour as effectively as if their compound was a temple. What is more, according to the Qumran Hymn Scroll (1QH 7.24), their founding leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, could glow like a temple Menorah, shining forth with a 'seven-fold' light of Eden.

Considering themselves participants in heavenly liturgies, the covenanters presupposed a 'porous' view of human experience (in the language of Charles Taylor), meaning they were open toward the world as an experiential matrix filled with humans, spirits, angels, and other objective cosmic entities and forces that produce meaning. According to 11QShirShabb, the Sabbath Songs, their local worship spurred the activities of priestly angels in the heavenly temple. The blood and fat of animal sacrifices were not necessary to bridge the gap between Earth and heaven. God had granted them eschatological

access to the transcendent realm in a manner parallel to the experience of John, the visionary author of Revelation.

Qumran's fascination with heavenly liturgy is echoed in the Testament of Levi, in Hebrews, and in the book of Revelation. Revelation describes John of Patmos invited up to heaven to witness heavenly temple rituals that provoke, as a liturgical process, the unfolding of the eschaton. He sees such rites as the sounding of trumpets, the burning of incense, and the procession of angels. John beholds the heavenly temple filled with smoke from God's glory and power. He hears God's voice thunder from the celestial adytum. As the last trumpet sounds, the adytum opens to view, and the ark of the covenant is revealed.

1.2 Reconstructing early Israelite shrines

Archaeological and textual evidence attest to numerous local worship shrines in and around Israelite towns and cities (see Deut 16:5). The scriptures refer to such a shrine as a 'high place' (*bam̃a*)ʿ, although they did not always sit atop hills. Hills, ridges, and mountains were understood to be where Earth meets heaven, so placing shrines there was symbolically rich. Two seventh-century BCE open-air shrines have been found on a hill near Malhah, southeast of Jerusalem, and one on a hill about a mile from Shiloh, the latter with a rock-hewn altar about five feet high. Some shrines, such as the one at Shechem (Josh 24:1), were gradually taken over from Canaanite worshipers as places of YHWH worship. Texts such as Deut 16:5; 1 Kgs 3:2, 4; 2 Kgs 18:22 confirm YHWH worship at *bam̃oṯ*ʿshrines.

Some high places, such as the Arad and Dan temples as well as the standing-stone (*masṣ̣ēba*)ʿarea at a gate of Khirbet Qeiyafa, were built for YHWH worship. Other high places (*bam̃oṯ*) remained locales of Canaanite worship, which was often oriented around fertility concerns (Hos 4:13; Mic 1:5; Jer 3:23). A northern high place near Dothan, from the Judges era, formed an early Israelite worship site for nearby settlements. A bronze bull cult figurine was a significant worship object there (see image: 'Bull site statuette'), suggestive of the bull idolatry at Bethel's and Dan's shrines later condemned by Hosea. At times, as in the reigns of Ahab and Jezebel in Israel and Jehoram and Athaliah in Judah, temples representing competing deities operated in tension (1 Kgs 16:32; 18:26, 30, 32; 2 Kgs 10:27; 11:18).

Asherah trees were in the courtyards and surroundings of at least some high places. Some of the best-known representations of Asherah as a goddess are found on two of the registers of the Taanakh stand (see 'Pedestal for the figure of a deity' from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem). At the bottom register the nude goddess is found accompanied by outward-facing beasts, reminiscent of the lions on the pillars at Tayinat.

Deuteronomy 16:21 explicitly objects to Asherah poles, and when Ezekiel visits the Jerusalem temple (ch. 8) he is horrified to see an outdoor image that correlates with this goddess. Evidence from Kuntillet Ajrud and elsewhere shows that some Israelites accepted *ʾăšĕrōt* as impersonal symbols of YWHW's own life-giving power (Kuntillet Ajrud is on the periphery of Israelite territory). Biblical Yahwism rejects goddesses per se, but many Israelite households incorporated a use of pillared figurines (probably linked to the tree of life) which attest to women's spirituality. As noted below, to some Israelites the temple lampstands were likely seen as *ʾăšĕrōt*. 'Biblical Yahwism' differs from 'popular' and 'official' Yahwism. Specifically, one can define 'biblical Yahwism' as the perduring stream of Israelite theological tradition that eventually blossomed in an emphasis on one God, one people, one land of God, and one central sanctuary (see Cook 2004).

Alongside the Israelite practice of worship at local shrines one finds the tradition of regular festival gatherings at collective shrines, the most significant of which was the Shiloh pilgrimage centre (Josh 18:1; Judg 21:19; 1 Sam 1:3). The site of Shiloh is the only centre of its era with archaeological evidence identifying it as a place of large-scale interaction among Israelite chiefdoms. Israelites of the Judges era purposely built their new settlement there outside the city walls, signalling their rejection of Canaanite urban culture and its royal, city-state system. Specifically Israelite culture is attested by collared-rim storage jars and a series of four-room houses built outside the old Canaanite tell.

The long-lived Shiloh worship site housed the ark of the covenant and had an altar for sacrificial offerings. The *miśkanī* ('tabernacle') rested there, probably in a large plaza just north of the Shiloh tell that offered a natural rock platform. The area could accommodate large gatherings of pilgrims. 1 Samuel 1:9; 3:3 refer to a Shiloh *hêkāl* ('temple'), perhaps appropriately, given the earlier use of parallel diction at Mari and Ugarit for large sacral tents. Alternatively, *hêkāl* could be an anachronistic term (1 Sam 2:22 retains the term *miśkanī*), or it could suggest that the *miśkanī* had been transformed into a rather permanent structure at Shiloh. A Levitical lineage group officiated at Shiloh, to which Abiathar, one of David's two chief priests, traced his ancestry. Archaeology attests that the Philistines destroyed Shiloh in the late pre-monarchic era (see Ps 78:60–64; Jer 7:12; 26:6). The ark of the covenant survived, and was eventually brought to Jerusalem.

Early historical critics were sceptical of the tabernacle's historicity, but such scepticism has proved unwarranted. Many have seen an analogy in the pre-Islamic *qubbah*, a large red-leather tent-shrine that housed a tribe's sacred objects and accompanied it in seasonal movements and into battle. A bas relief on the temple of Bel at Palmyra, dating to between the third and first centuries BCE, shows a portable tent shrine with traces of red paint very reminiscent of the *qubbah*. As noted above, there is second-millennium BCE evidence in Mari texts for a large public tent parallel to the *miśkanī*. Similar to the situation at Shiloh, at Timnah a stone platform supported a cloth-roofed shrine. Battle tents resembling the

Israelite *miśkañ* sat at the centre of some Egyptian military camps, such as that of Ramses II. Ramses' tent had a three-part structure like the *miśkañ* and an inner chamber with winged creatures flanking the pharaoh's cartouche.

King David built an altar on an open-air, natural rock threshing floor above Jerusalem (2 Sam 24:18–25; 1 Chr 21:18–30), pitching a sacred tent there (2 Sam 6:17; 15:25; 2:28; 1 Chr 16:1). He likely understood the tent as the *miśkañ* of Shiloh (see Josh 18:1; 2 Sam 7:6), which by then lay in ruins (Jer 7:12; Ps 78:60). It was long David's plan to recreate 'Shiloh' at Jerusalem, hence he appointed Abiathar of Shiloh as a chief priest and brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:12–18; 15:25, 28), although for the book of Chronicles, the tabernacle remains at Gibeon (see 2 Chr 1:3–6). The concern in 2 Sam 24:18–25 with the details surrounding David's purchase of the tent's site betrays its essential nature as Solomon's temple's founding legend. Chronicles makes this explicit by using the 2 Samuel text to establish the sanctity of the temple's locale (1 Chr 22:1; 2 Chr 3:1).

David's heir Solomon replaced the tent-shrine north of Jerusalem with Zion's monumental temple, and extended the city walls to enclose the northerly complex and his new palace. 2 Chronicles 3:1 connects the locale of Solomon's temple not only with David's choice of the Jebusite threshing floor for its site but also with 'Mount Moriah', the site of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:2). By housing the *miśkañ* and the ark within the temple, Solomon buttressed its new identity as the primary shrine of his newly-centralized agrarian monarchy. He thus strengthened the liturgical and political authority of Jerusalem, as the city holding the most important sacred artefacts of God and the central focal point of worship for the Israelite people. Until King Hezekiah's time at the earliest, however, Jerusalem/Zion did not claim to be God's sole legitimate sanctuary.

Both Arad and Dan had their own regional YHWH temples from at least the ninth century BCE. Arad letter 18 speaks specifically of a 'house of YHWH' (*bêt YHWH*). Unlike Solomon's temple, the main temple hall at Arad was a 'broad room', whose width exceeded its length. An earthen sacrificial altar stood in the shrine's sizeable outer courtyard. Renovations later added a long storeroom in the court, north of the altar. The inner sanctum contained two horned incense altars (see image: 'Holy of Holies in the Israelite Sanctuary at Tel Arad') near its entrance. Scholars recently discovered the use of cannabis on one of them, which might be one of the mind-altering substances prohibited in Lev 10:9, a prohibition that the priestly biblical text perhaps roots in the incident of unacceptable incense [*ʾēš zārâ*] in Lev 10:1–2.

A standing stone (*masṣēba*)ˆ at the adytum's rear (*material aniconism*) represented YHWH's presence at Arad. It was the functional equivalent of the ark of the covenant in the Jerusalem adytum. The framed space above the ark and between its cherubim represents what scholars call an *empty-space aniconism*. In some biblical traditions the palpable

emptiness between the two cherubim points behind sublunary experience toward the Beyond. Obviously, such traditions contrast with the above-referenced anthropomorphic theology of Ezekiel seen in texts such as Ezek 43:7.

The Iron-Age temple at Tel Motza, unearthed in 2012, more strongly resembles Jerusalem's temple than do the Arad and Dan shrines. Like the non-Israelite temples at 'Ain Dara and Tel Tayinat described above, the Judean Tel Motza temple was a *long room* with an adytum, a main hall, and two outside columns. As at 'Ain Dara, side chambers surrounded much of it. Large agricultural silos near the Motza temple received the offerings and taxes of hundreds of farmers. They attest to the long-suspected role of temples in monarchic economic systems, including state-level banking.

1.3 The Jerusalem temple's main historical phases

1.3.1 The first (pre-exilic) temple

According to the account in 2 Samuel 7, it was David who first conceived the idea to move the ark of the covenant from the *miškañ*/tabernacle, which had housed it for generations, into a temple complex to be constructed in Jerusalem. Solomon is credited with erecting the temple (2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 5:5), but Chronicles understands that David accomplished much preparatory and planning work (1 Chr 22:2–5, 14–16; 28:1–29:9). According to 1 Chr 28:11, David gave Solomon a detailed building plan (*tabnît*) of the temple.

The temple's overall design, its courts, and its associated structures and equipment are summarized in 1 Kings 6–7. Parallel descriptions occur in 2 Chronicles 2–4 and in the extrabiblical account of Josephus. Solomon secured crucial supplies and assistance from King Hiram of Tyre and began temple building in earnest in the fourth year of his reign. He completed the project in seven years, that is in about 1005 BCE.

A shrine model from Khirbet Qeiyafa, from the very era of the temple's original construction, illustrates several features of Jerusalem's sanctuary (see image of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Exhibition in Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem). It shows its 'triglyph' joists, its three-plank beams, and the technique of 'stepped ledge-offsets' used for supporting the three-storied side chambers (1 Kgs 6:6). The model also illuminates the first temple's sequence of narrowing entrances to increasingly holy inner spaces. The temple's design is highly similar to those of the shrines at 'Ain Dara and Tell Tayinat discussed above. At the same time, the biblical account understands the temple in many ways to be a larger, more permanent version of the tabernacle/*miškañ*. Its primary dimensions are double those of the *miškañ*. A court with an entrance facing east surrounded both (Exod 27:13; 2 Chr 29:4). The temple altar was enormous, over against its predecessor in the courtyard of the tabernacle/*miškañ*, though both processed the same animal offerings (2 Chr 4:1; cf. 1 Kgs 8:64; 9:25; a mention of the altar in 1 Kgs 7:22–23 has perhaps been lost due to scribal error). The temple's large bronze water basin, the 'Sea' (1 Kgs 7:23–26; 2 Chr

4:2–5), replaced the tabernacle's smaller laver (Exod 30:17–21). Ten golden lampstands (1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Chr 4:7) replaced the single prominent lampstand of the tabernacle (Exod 25:31–36).

Passing through the courtyard with its huge altar and Sea into the temple building proper, one entered a long room known as 'the holy place' (Exod 26:33 NRSV; Hebrew: *haqqoḏes*), otherwise called the 'Great Hall' (1 Kgs 6:17 NJPS; Hebrew: *hahe*ḵ*al*) or the 'nave' (NRSV). Here were located the lampstands, incense altar, and table for the bread of the Presence. Beyond (that is, west of) the nave, separated by a partition and raised by a platform, was an inner shrine or adytum, the 'Holy of Holies' (Exod 26:34 NJPS, Hebrew: *qoḏes haqqodašîm*) or the 'Debir' (1 Kgs 6:16 NJB; Hebrew: *dĕbîr*). Here was placed the ark of the covenant (see this plan of Solomon's temple).

A significant change was the proximity to the temple of the royal palace immediately south of the sanctuary, along with its associated halls and monumental structures. The temple compound itself had modifications and additions over against the *miš*ḵ*an*, the earlier tent shrine. At the courtyard's periphery were gatehouses with internal rooms for meetings and judicial procedures. Lining the courtyard were chambers for dining and other spaces. Ten movable bronze washing stations were in the court, each six feet square and four and a half feet high. There were new stairs and a porch structure (*'ul*ā*m*, 1 Kgs 6:3) in front of the temple building, along with monumental pillars. Folding doors leading into the main hall were new. The hall/nave also had new windows set above the level of the new outer annexes, a clerestory light-source for those serving inside the *he*ḵ*al*, the main hall/nave. The annexes may have had spiral staircases, like those at Temple A, Selinunte, connecting upper and lower levels.

The inner shrine (adytum) had no windows (1 Kgs 8:12; for the theological significance of this and other features, see Section 2.1 below). It was a cube occupying an elevated position on a rock mass (known now in Arabic as the 'Sakhra') at the summit of the temple mount, Mount Moriah. The ark of the covenant likely sat in a rectangular depression cut into the rock, its short sides facing east and west. It was flanked on its long sides by two gold-plated olive-wood cherubim facing out to the east. The two iconic statues with extended wings were so large as to barely fit in the space.

1.3.2 Major Monarchic-Era reformations and renovations

By the time of King Jehoshaphat, a new temple court was added east of the shrine's altar court (2 Chr 20:5). The Hebrew Bible notes other restorations and improvements under King Joash (2 Chr 24:4–14) and King Josiah (2 Chr 34:8–13). King Hezekiah's reforms, however, are best attested archaeologically. Around 715 BCE he worked to eliminate local shrines, decommission their altars, and centralize worship in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:22;

Isa 36:7; 2 Chr 31:1; 32:12). This is attested, for example, by the decommissioning of the temple altar at Arad (stratum VIII).

According to 2 Chr 29:3–36, the king renovated and reconstructed the Jerusalem temple. As the Egyptian evidence cited above shows, temple renovation and expansion were not unusual, often entailing enlargement and aggrandizement of extant compounds. Significant temple work fits with other major Hezekian building projects in Jerusalem, such as his Broad Wall (Isa 22:10) and underground water tunnel (Isa 22:11).

A major Hezekian temple renovation project is attested by eighth-century BCE masonry in the eastern wall of the temple mount. Hezekian rebuilding may also account for differences between the temple described in the books of Chronicles and the Solomonic temple described in 1 Kings. The huge bronze basin (the 'Sea') in 2 Chr 4:2–5, for example, held about 18,000 gallons of water, and so is one-third larger than the basin in 1 Kgs 7:26. A cloth veil is added at the adytum's entrance (2 Chr 3:14). There are chambers above the adytum (2 Chr 3:9) and chambers for dining, storage, and lodging on the outer perimeter of the temple complex (1 Chr 9:33; 28:12; also see 2 Kgs 23:11).

The initial impetus behind King Hezekiah's efforts may have been the need to repair earthquake damage (see Amos 1:1; 8:8; 9:5; Zech 14:5) and to redress the pillaging and neglect of the temple that apparently occurred under Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:8, 17–18). According to 2 Chr 28:24, whose historicity is debated, Ahaz cleaned out the temple, boarded up its doors, and set up altar-shrines all over Jerusalem and throughout Judah.

1.3.3 The Persian-Era (Zerubbabel's) temple

Scriptural texts concerning the restoration era relate a prolonged struggle at rebuilding the Jerusalem temple (ca. 537–515 BCE), which Babylonia destroyed in 586 BCE. Temple rebuilding was authorized by the Persian King Cyrus (Ezra 1:1–2; 6:3). However, as the exiles returned in waves to what was now the Persian province of Yehud, they wrestled with rebuilding for two decades before dedicating a new complex in 515.

Among the obstacles were challenges reconciling with those who had remained in the land (Zech 7:5; 8:10), the opposition of non-Yahwists and syncretists (Ezra 3:3; 4:4), tensions between Israelite clerical groups (Isa 65:5; 66:8), poor agricultural yields (Hag 1:6, 10; 2:16), and a lack of imagination about the temple's cosmic role in God's coming reign (on the latter, see Isa 66:6, 20; Ezek 43:5; Hag 2:7; Zech 1:16; 2:10; 8:3).

At the first return of exiles under Sheshbazzar in 538 BCE, the temple altar was set up and sacrifices were resumed (Ezra 1:11; 3:3). According to Ezra 5:16 Sheshbazzar began clearing and resetting the temple foundations at this time. In 537 BCE Zerubbabel and Jeshua initiated the temple's actual reconstruction (Ezra 3:10). The project then stalled until 520 BCE, Darius of Persia's second regnal year (Hag 1:4). At that time, the

exhortations of Haggai and Zechariah pushed the work forward in earnest (Ezra 6:14–15; Zech 4:9–10). Haggai 2:18 designates December 18, 520 as the date that temple work resumed with zeal, perhaps with a new foundation-laying ceremony (also see Zech 8:9).

What little we know about Zerubbabel's temple includes the dimensions supplied by Ezra 6:3, which specifies a temple with height and width of ninety feet each. If the Hebrew text is correct, the figures likely refer specifically to a huge temple porch fronting a lower and thinner main hall and adytum of standard, Solomonic proportions. The interior of Solomon's temple was thirty feet in width, forty-five feet in height, and ninety feet in length (including neither the porch nor the width of the outer walls). The utopian temple of Ezek 40–48 was somewhat larger, thirty-five feet wide and one hundred nine feet long.

The postexilic temple appeared disappointing to those who remembered the earlier sanctuary structures of Solomon and Hezekiah (Ezra 3:12; Hag 2:3; Zech 4:10). Since the temple dimensions described in Ezra 6:3 are impressive, the disillusion presumably traces to the quality of workmanship and of the construction materials. Besides the unfavourable comparisons to the first temple, there was great disparity between the extant structure and current visions of a messianic temple (see Hag 2:6 and Zech 6:13).

A valuable collection of Aramaic papyri reveals the existence of a Jewish temple in Elephantine, Egypt, separate from Zerubbabel's temple. The papyri constitute correspondence from members of a Jewish military garrison serving the Persians on Elephantine Island (495 to 398 BCE). The correspondence includes appeals for help rebuilding the temple – appeals directed even to Jerusalem's high priest Johanan (ca. 410–371 BCE). The assumption that Johanan would be receptive to such an appeal signals problems with the Torah's authority at Jerusalem's temple. This correlates with prophetic critiques of priests in the later part of the Persian II period, such as in Zech 12:10–13:9 and Mal 3:3.

1.3.4 The second (Herodian) temple

Herod the Great undertook a massive temple rebuilding project, which significantly enhanced and enlarged Zerubbabel's Persian-era structure. Adding a large forecourt and plaza, Herod created the largest temple compound in the ancient world (1,506,400 square feet; 34 acres). Construction began in Herod's eighteenth regnal year (20–19 BCE) and concluded about 63 CE, after Jesus' death. The temple was a chief achievement of Herod's reign, but only lasted until 70 CE when the Romans destroyed it. The arch of Titus in Rome pictures the Roman army looting the temple's furnishings.

Jews throughout the ancient world sent half-shekel donations in support of the temple annually. From the third century BCE, diaspora Jews built local synagogues, but only one competing temple outside Jerusalem is known (built in Egypt by Onias, a high priest

fleeing Antiochus IV). Thousands of pilgrims attended the three temple festivals annually. Many temple visitors approached Jerusalem from the south and ascended through city streets to ritual baths. Entering through temple gates, they went down a 200-foot tunnel and up a flight of steps rising to the surface courts of the huge complex. Pilgrims emerged up and out at the boundary of the inner court containing the altar area.

On its west, north, and east sides, the temple complex had covered walkways with double rows of Corinthian columns, thirty-seven feet six inches in height, with flat roofs. The King's Porch (Royal Stoa) atop the southern wall of the temple platform had nearly two hundred marble columns and a high arching ceiling. The Gentiles' Courtyard occupied most of the temple platform, surrounding the raised platform containing the Women's Courtyard, the courts around the altar, and the temple building proper. A warning sign informed Gentiles not to proceed into these areas. In Acts 21:28, certain Asian pilgrims accuse Paul of leading some to violate the ban. The provision for non-Israelites to visit the outer temple courtyard witnesses to positive relations with Gentiles.

The inner courtyards were accessed from the east through the Beautiful Gate. Four chambers framed the corners of the Women's Courtyard, which was open to all Jews. Passing through the Gate of Nicanor, male Jews could enter the Israelites' Courtyard and witness sacrifices on the altar before the temple building. The temple, which only priests could enter, had a façade of imported white marble and gold plates ornamenting the front entrance doors. The building towered many feet above the courts and porches below.

2 The temple's symbolic, sacramental, and theological meanings

2.1 The temple's polyvalent symbols

In scripture, temple and tabernacle alike are spaces for God and God's people to gather and commune together. They are places for renewing the covenant, for paying tribute and making offerings to God, for experiencing God's mighty victories and enthronement, and for finding atonement, reconciliation, and sanctification. Various streams of biblical thinking, and various Israelite groups and individuals, approached temple rites, pilgrim festivals, liturgical songs, and prayers with varying understandings. Differing biblical covenant theologies saw the role of the temple differently. They varied in their understandings of God's presence and absence there. Various biblical texts suggest differing imaginations and experiences about the workings of temple objects and rites (see the many examples in Cook 2018). Thus, this article's treatment will emphasize the diversity of meanings and understandings in various texts, without necessarily insisting that differing emphases are incompatible.

A temple structure such as the sanctuary's courtyard altar for burned sacrifices possessed many values, meanings, and appeals. The altar variously represented a zone of asylum (1 Kgs 1:50; Ps 36:7), a sacred grill for fellowship feasts (Deut 12:7; Ps 22:26; 36:8; 1 Cor 10:18), a disposal site for sin and impurity (Lev 6:25–27; Hos 4:8), a source of holiness and life (Exod 29:37; Hag 2:12; Ezek 47:1), a cosmic foundation (*ḥêq hāʾāreṣ*, Ezek 43:14), and more. Often the multiple meanings of a temple icon or object are homogenous and mutually reinforcing. At other times, as noted, different meanings reflect different biblical theologies, though again the differences may not mean incompatibility.

Varying biblical interpretations of temple decoration and furnishing reflect varying theologies of divine embodiment, presence, and absence. An example is the different descriptions of temple construction in Chronicles and Kings. The former emphasizes gold (2 Chr 3:4–10) and cherubim (2 Chr 3:7, 10–14), highlighting the temple's identity as the visually stunning earthly palace of a majestic God. Chronicles even speaks of the adytum (inner sanctum) having nails of gold. In its parallel account, Kings makes no reference to such enormous amounts of gold, and never mentions any golden nails. The adytum is a place of 'thick darkness' (1 Kgs 8:12), befitting a deity outside of terrestrial space and time and therefore without need of visual orientation and cues.

The books of Kings often reflect Deuteronomy's perspective, which emphasizes language of God's voice and divine name far more than visual appearance. Deuteronomy understands that a temple can never successfully localize and apprehend God – visually or otherwise – due to God's singular mystery. It allows no stable divine indwelling of Jerusalem, although Israel gathers regularly to invoke God using the divine name (Deut 12:7; Jer 7:10). Israel encounters God verbally, through the intimate means of voice (Deut 4:12; 17:10–11; 33:10; 1 Kgs 19:12). Chronicles, in contrast, makes no real distinction between building a house for God and building a house for God's 'name'. In 1 Kgs 9:3 God speaks only of the divine eyes and heart being at the temple, of God putting God's name there as a powerful means of invoking encounter. In contrast, a text such as 1 Chr 28:2 visualizes God somehow resident in the temple, with feet resting on the ark as a footstool.

The ark of the covenant is a highly significant multifaceted symbol in the temple. For its part, Deuteronomy says nothing of the ark other than identifying it as a wooden chest, or a reliquary for the covenant tablets (Deut 10:5, 8; 31:9; also see 1 Kgs 8:9). In contrast, a traditional view sees the ark as the symbolic throne of YWHW, the divine warrior and covenant Lord (Ps 47:5–8). Early on, it functioned as a palladium, an iconographic standard effecting safety and victory in warfare (Num 10:35; Ps 24:7–8; 78:61). After victories of God, the ark returned to rest in the shrine (Ps 99:8), where God sits 'enthroned' on its cherubim (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1; 99:1), as does the king in the famous thirteenth-century ivory inlay from Megiddo (see 'inlay featuring a narrative scene' from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem). As just noted, 1 Chr 28:2 sees the ark as forming only

a footstool for God. There is even greater pushback against anthropomorphism in those priestly texts oriented towards reverence (Exod 25:20–22; Isa 57:15; 66:1). Some biblical texts exalt God's majesty by reducing the entire temple building to merely God's ark-footstool (Ps 99:5; 132:7; Isa 6:1).

In certain holiness-oriented priestly texts of the Pentateuch and Ezekiel, the embodied Presence of God (the *kābôd*) continually rests on the ark's cherub icons (see Ezek 9:3). God's enthroned Presence sits directly above the cherubim's heads (Ezek 1:22, 26; 11:22; cf. 4Q405 f20ii 22:7). They are dynamic, active beings (Ezek 1:14; 28:14b; cf. Ps 18:10). The use of palanquin thrones in Egypt provides an analogy, since they presented a god's image, or the pharaoh, the earthly king, seated amid a pair of winged goddesses.

Ezekiel's utopian temple in chapters 40–48 deliberately lacks an ark, since a representation of God is superfluous after God's permanent bodily occupation of the temple (Ezek 43:5). Images of cherubim do appear in the utopian temple, but they mark zones of stratified sanctity. Thus, images of cherubim now guard the holiest temple areas, whereas in the preexilic temple cherubim were visible in the courtyard (1 Kgs 7:29, 36).

In contrasting reverence-oriented priestly texts of the Pentateuch, the ark's cherubim form a framed emptiness or void, as represented in the second to bottom tier of the Taanakh stand (see the image linked earlier). To frame an empty space in this manner points to a numinous, eruptive divine otherness. The technical term for such a negative representation of God's presence is *empty-space aniconism* (de Hulster 2015: 191). The cherubim bow their heads (Exod 25:20; 37:9 NLT; cf. Rev 7:11) to avoid the blinding glory that sometimes appeared (Exod 25:22; Num 7:89; cf. Isa 6:2). When the cherub iconography comes alive in Isaiah 6, the temple becomes dynamic and unstable (6:4). In this theology, any proposal that a physical shrine might 'house' God's volatile presence is highly problematic and dangerous.

Scholars continue to argue about the nature and relationship of the two major priestly sources of the Pentateuch, their theological traditions, and their counterparts in the Prophets (see Cook 2018: 16–18). No particular scholar's views can be accepted uncritically, although very recent scholarship – especially on Ezekiel – is providing increasingly assured results. What is beyond dispute, however, is that Ezekiel's view of God dwelling bodily in the temple stands in marked tension with the view in Isa 56–66 that not even the highest heavens can contain God. The positions are discontinuous, deriving from differing clerical lines.

Biblical descriptions of the table for the 'bread of the Presence' in the main hall (*hahekāl*; the 'nave') differ, just like the varying representations of the ark. The table in reverence-oriented priestly texts of the Pentateuch was overlaid with gold (Exod 25:24). In contrast, holiness-oriented priestly texts in Lev 24:6 and Ezek 41:22 leave the wood of the table

exposed without gold. Against the translation of *hasšŭlḥān haṭṭāhōr* in the NRSV, NIV, and NABR, the table in Lev 24:6 is simply, ‘the pure table’ (NET: ‘ceremonially pure’; REB: ‘ritually clean’; NJPS, CEB, NJB: ‘pure table’). When the table reappears in Ezek 41:22 there is no hint of gold. The table ‘was wood’, the text reports, and its components ‘were wood’. Thus, one tradition emphasizes the golden beauty befitting divine sublimity. The other emphasizes tiered zones of pure sanctity (a ‘pure table’). Two contrasting understandings of the meaning of table are clearly at issue here. The language of Lev 24:6 fits how ritual objects are sometimes referred to expressly as ‘pure’, e.g. ‘a pure vessel’ (Isa 66:20); ‘pure incense’ (Exod 37:29); ‘the pure lampstand’ (Exod 31:8).

As with other temple features, the two large bronze pillars on the temple’s porch (1 Kgs 7:15–22) evoked varying meanings for different groups and in different eras (this article does not aim to isolate hypothetical ‘original’ meanings of temple symbols). In some ceremonies of the temple, the pillars took over the function of earlier standing stones at shrines, the *maṣṣēbôt*. Thus, royal installations and covenant rituals took place ‘standing by the pillar’ (2 Kgs 11:14; 2 Kgs 23:3; see also 2 Chr 34:31; Mic 5:4; Cook 2004: 212). Near Eastern treaty texts link covenants and standing stones (e.g. Sefire Inscription II), and treaties may even be inscribed directly on *maṣṣēbôt*.

For others, the pillars bore associations with the life-giving sacral power of the temple. As noted earlier, their lotus decoration is Hathor’s especially beloved flower, symbolizing primordial vitality and renewal of life. For still others, the pillars symbolized the mountains at earth’s horizon, understood as gateways into the Beyond, that is, into transcendence (as in Zech 6:1). In this regard, the greenstone seal of Adda showing the god Shamash rising between two peaks is illuminating (see ‘Greenstone seal of Adda’ from The British Museum). Also directly comparable are the two trapezoidal pylon towers guarding the zone of Egyptian temples corresponding to the Great Hall, the holy place, of Jerusalem’s temple. They symbolized the eastern horizon’s mountain peaks where sunrises were visible (see Beale 2014: 55).

Moving out into the courtyard, the temple’s large water tank, known as the Sea, had multiple significations. The Sea’s original meaning is not stated in scripture, although Chronicles considers it to be a ceremonial washing station for temple priests (2 Chr 4:6). The Sea was largely inaccessible to priests and worshippers, however, because of its great height. As in Mesopotamian temples, it likely originally signified watery cosmic chaos. It bore the name Yam, the Canaanite god of chaos, and conveyed primordial vastness through its enormity. Enclosed within temple precincts, the primordial Sea lay subdued by God. As Ps 29:10 puts it, ‘The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever’. Psalm 104:3 reads, ‘You built your home over the mighty ocean’ (CEV). The Sea symbolizes the titanic, oceanic power of God’s justice in Ps 36:6.

Despite its terrors, the Sea in its contained state publicly displayed God's power over the forces of chaos. Beyond this, it also sourced fresh water for the temple's wheeled washstands (1 Kgs 7:27), water the laity needed to wash their sacrifices (Lev 1:9 NET, NJB). Ezekiel's utopian temple has no Sea, and waters of life flow past the very place where it previously stood (Ezek 47:1). The explanation, as in Ps 74:15a and Ezek 31:4, is that amid subterranean chaos lies God's reservoir of life-giving water, the fountain of sweet streams (Gen 2:6; 49:25; Deut 33:13; Ps 74:15a; Ps 78:15; Prov 3:20; 8:24, 28; Ezek 31:4; and perhaps Job 36:27). These sweet waters push up from below the temple as 'the waters of Shiloah that flow gently', evoking faithfulness (Isa 8:6). They form the river 'whose streams make glad the city of God' (Ps 46:4). Everything lives where this sweet river flows (Ezek 47:9).

2.2 The Lord of Hosts enthroned atop Mount Zion

Solomon's temple and its structures of meaning take centre stage in Jerusalemite royal theology, that is, Zion-covenant theology. Along with the ideals of Davidic kingship, temple symbols and rites form pillars of this stream of tradition. Intensive faith in the inviolability of Mount Zion, combined with hopes vested in the supernatural kingship of David's line, represent the essence of Zion thinking (see Levenson 1985: 177–180). The biblical writers drew on common ancient archetypes to convey the transcendental dimensions of the Zion covenant. As seen above, language, ideas, and images of divine sonship were readily available to the writers. The Investiture Panel at ancient Mari shows the deity selecting and empowering the Mari king, who then rules by divine authority (see the image linked earlier). At Mari it is the goddess Ishtar who presents the king with symbols of authority at the centre of the mural. The Investiture Panel likewise displays the archetypes of the cosmic mountain and the paradisiacal garden.

The Zion covenant theology appears in multiple texts, both biblical and extrabiblical. The Deuteronomistic History (the books of Joshua–2 Kings) traces the covenant back to Nathan's oracle to David in 2 Samuel 7. The prophet Isaiah exhorted King Ahaz and King Hezekiah to stand firm in the Zion promises (e.g. Isa 7:9b; 38:6). An early sixth-century inscription in a burial cave at Horvat Beth Loyal in the Judean foothills speaks of the Lord as the 'God of Jerusalem', possessing cosmic prerogative as 'YHWH the God of the whole earth'.

2 Samuel 7 emphasizes God's unilateral promissory grant to David. In v.11 he receives the promise of a dynasty and v.14 specifically designates David, Israel's anointed, as 'son' of God. Verse 16 establishes David's throne 'forever'. At the same time, a link between supernatural kingship and holy temple is part of the conversation from the beginning (v.2, 5). Verse 13 declares that David's scion will build God's temple and v.10 contains idiomatic language rich with connotations of Zion's cosmic identity.

According to 2 Sam 7:10, God will plant God's people beneath a sacred place (*māqôm*), a Jerusalem shrine. They will dwell under (*taḥat*) the protective 'shade' of that shrine and of the holy God resident there (see Vanderhooft 1999). The diction of v.10 is common in the ancient Near East, where divine habitations often cast protective shade over those dwelling beneath them (see Ps 36:7–8; Ezek 31:6). The idea appears in a variety of Mesopotamian traditions, including in personal names such as *Ina-silli-Esagil*, 'In-the-Shadow-of-Esagil', where the Esagil temple functions like a divine name in a theophoric appellation.

The temple sits atop God's 'holy hill', the *Weltberg*, the cosmic mountain (Ps 2:6; 15:1; 24:3; 68:15–16). This archetype expresses Zion's transcendence as a poetic centre of creation, ordering all terrestrial life around it. This backdrop reveals Zion as Earth's centre of gravity, the axis around which all revolves, the axis mundi connecting Earth with heaven. 'Zion resembles the peaks of Zaphon' (Ps 48:2 NET), the beautiful mountain of divinity in the Ugaritic texts. As God's holy citadel, the strength of the Almighty protects it (Ps 48:3). With God within, 'it will never crumble' (Ps 46:5 CEB).

The impregnability of Zion as the cosmic mountain is illustrated by the Mari Investiture Panel. In the mural, fantastic creatures – winged sphinxes, griffins, and bulls – defend the temple garden and its inhabitants. Various prophetic texts pick up the kind of imagery found at Mari and in the Psalter. They speak of God's ideal temple resting unassailable atop God's holy, high mountain (Isa 2:2; 30:29; 56:7; Mic 4:1; Ezek 20:40–41; 40:2; Zech 8:3). Later, Daniel envisions this temple mountain crushing all opposition and growing to fill 'the whole earth' (Dan 2:35).

Other texts push back against those using Jerusalemite royal theology as a 'cover' for sin and oppression. Texts such as Mic 4:9–12, Jer 7:4–15, and Ezek 11:2–7 warn that blithe disrespect of Zion and disregard for its demandingly high standards effectively vulgarize and denature it (see Levenson 1985: 189–193). Put another way, it is possible to take the 'cosmos' out of the cosmic mountain by wilfully ignoring its transformative purpose and potential.

2.3 The Jerusalem temple as the garden of Eden

In the ancient Near East, God's abode often appears as a paradisiacal garden or orchard atop the cosmic mountain, the towering peak at Earth's centre interconnecting with heaven. As a sacred representation of the divine abode, the biblical temple symbolizes and points back to Eden, its primal innocence, its natural delights, its pure joy. In Eden, God was at home and strolled secure and casual, enjoying the late afternoon breeze (Gen 3:8). The ideal vision of the temple as a safe and bountiful garden of paradise appears in the eschatological prophecy of Isaiah: 'They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy

mountain' (Isa 11:9; see also 65:25). The serpent of Eden who caused so much mischief (Gen 3) will, in the end, literally bite the dust on Mount Eden (Isa 65:25).

The temple and its appurtenances abound with beautiful artistry depicting lush flora, arboreal wonders, and impressive fauna. The fauna include cherubim (winged sphinxes), oxen, and lions (1 Kgs 6:23, 39; 7:25, 29). The flora include palm and palmette trees, colocynths (a kind of gourd), open flowers (rosettes), water lilies (lotuses), and pomegranates (see 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35; 7:18–20, 24, 26). The ten lampstands in the nave were symbolic blossoming trees (1 Kgs 7:49). Eden's many trees made it as much an orchard or arboretum as a flower garden – a haven scaled for God's enjoyment (see Ezek 31:8, which speaks of God's Garden filled with cedars, fir trees, and plane trees).

Like other temple symbols, the Menorah was polyvalent. To some it was the tree of knowledge, the 'cosmic tree' (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:11). As noted, the *kiskanu*-tree in the Eridu temple and the lampstand of Zechariah represent the cosmic tree, the *Weltbaum*. The connection of the stands' lamps to heavenly lights also fits in here (see the discussion below). To others, the Menorah was the tree of life (Gen 2:9; 3:22). Relatedly, as noted above, Asherah and *ʾăšĕrōt* often had a place in shrines as symbols of the tree of life. Hathor is a parallel fertility goddess. She often appeared as a (sycamore) tree, and she had her own temples in Egypt. This is not to directly equate a Menorah in the Jerusalem temple with Asherah or her pole(s). Josiah removed Asherah but not lampstands from the temple (2 Kgs 23:6).

Because God's temple home sits atop the cosmic mountain, its garden setting, Eden, is certainly on the 'holy mountain of God' (see Ezek 28:13–14, 16; 43:12; Levenson 1985: 149–151). God indwells Zion, Psalm 46 affirms, a lofty refuge and fortified height (*miśgāb*, v.11) from which Eden's River of Life emanates (v4). From Egypt to Mesopotamia, the three concepts of sacred temple, cosmic mountain, and garden of paradise interlock. Thus, Zimri Lim's palace (with Ishtar shrine) at Mari, Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh, and Pharaoh Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Deir el-Bahri all represent sacral re-creations of the gods' original garden paradise.

The streams of the river that 'make glad' God's holy habitation (Ps 46:4) flow down the axial mountain, watering the Earth (Gen 2:10–15; see the 'Garden Relief' and the façade of Ishtar's temple at Uruk, both linked earlier). These are the 'blessings of the deep' that lie beneath Eden (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; Ezek 31:4). Psalm 36 places God's house/temple (*bayit*) by the 'fountain of life' in God's garden (v9). The Hebrew term for 'delights' (v8) alludes to Eden's streams. Precisely as these streams, waters of life flow down from Zion's temple (Ps 36:8, 9; 46:4; 68:26; Ezek 47:1–12; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8).

One of Eden's streams is accessible in real time near the Jerusalem temple: the Gihon (Gen 2:13, 1 Kgs 1:33, 38, 45). It is no accident that Solomon's royal anointing in 1 Kings

1 takes place at the Spring of Gihon. An accession like Solomon's fittingly occurs by such a 'fountain of life' (Ps 36:9) on God's 'holy hill' (Ps 2:6). The anointed of the Lord rightly drinks from Zion's vitalizing Edenic stream (*naḥal ʿădāneykā*; Ps 36:8).

Zion's temple, like the tabernacle/*miśkañ* before it, faces east (Exod 27:13; 2 Chr 29:4), mirroring the orientation of Eden (see Gen 3:24). Atop Zion, God rules enthroned upon Eden's powerful cherubim guardians (Gen 3:24). One of Eden's cherubim shockingly goes rogue in the prophetic poetry of Ezekiel 28. Appalled at his behaviour, God exclaims 'You were in Eden […] You were a cherub; I placed you on the holy mountain of God […] I drove you out, O guardian cherub' (Ezek 28:13, 14, 16 NRSVue).

The diction describing the Levites' work in God's sanctuary matches what God invites humanity to do in the garden of Eden. According to Num 3:7 (also see Num 18:7; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14), the shrine's clerical staff maintain (*sāmar*) the shrine and perform its duties (*ʿabad*). Just so, God places humans in the garden of Eden to perform its duties (*ʿabad*) and maintain it (*sāmar*; Gen 2:15). Clearly, the priests and Levites serving in God's holy sanctuary are like Adam and Eve tending God's primal garden.

As they work and keep the shrine, the Levites and priests represent Israel and all of creation before God. Like Eden, the shrine is a sacred space saturated with the life and presence of God. Cherubim now keep the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve out of Eden (Gen 3:24; also cf. Ezek 28:16, 'O guardian cherub'), just as they guard God's invisible throne in the temple's inner recesses (Ezek 10:4). While the temple stood, however, God's people could still enter the sanctuary's outer courts and worship and sacrifice as the temple clerics represented them in the shrine's more interior, sacred zones.

2.4 The tabernacle and temple as a model of the entire creation

The layout and iconography of the temple complex render it a microcosm of creation, a model of the world. Psalm 78:69 is suggestive in this regard: '[God] built his sanctuary […] like the earth'. The temple is a model cosmos, but so also is the cosmos understood as a huge version of God's temple. As Isa 66:1 puts it, for God '[h]eaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'. In Isa 40:22, God spreads out the skies like a tent canvas to live under. Indeed, just as Isaiah experienced the temple filled with God's glory (Isa 6:1 LXX), so the entire Earth will eventually fill up with awareness of divine glory 'as the waters cover the sea' (Hab 2:14). Someday the cosmos will feel like God's palace.

In Genesis 1, God speaks the created world into existence in a series of seven days. Just so, in seven speeches in Exodus 25–31 God organizes the tabernacle's construction. Both the account of creation and the account of tabernacle construction are structured around

a series of seven divine speech-acts. The seven tabernacle speeches are as follows: (1) Exod 25:1–30:10; (2) 30:11–16; (3) 30:17–21; (4) 30:22–33; (5) 30:34–38; (6) 31:1–11; (7) 31:12–17. Further, just as Gen 2:2 states that God finished his creation work, Exod 40:33 indicates how Moses finished his shrine work. For more resonances of language, compare Gen 1:31; 2:1; 2:2 with Exod 39:32; 39:43; 40:33.

Both the creation of the cosmos and the creation of the tabernacle conclude with the topic of the Sabbath. In both Gen 2:2–3 and Exod 31:12–17 rest follows shrine construction. Just so, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, deities constructed abodes and rested in them after defeating enemies. The god Ea, for example, 'peacefully rested in his abode', the Apsu, after subduing his enemies (*Enuma Elish*, 1:73–76). Notably, 1 Kings makes rest from enemy threats the precondition for temple construction in Jerusalem. Still engaged in warfare, David could not begin construction (1 Kgs 5:3). Instead, according to 1 Kgs 5:4–5, it was God's gift of 'rest' to Solomon that allowed him to begin the temple.

The temple's structural arrangement aligns roughly with basic components of creation. The inner sanctum (adytum) symbolizes the transcendent realm, where God and the host of heaven dwell. Just as God is surrounded by the cherubim in heaven (2 Sam 22:11; Ezek 28:14), so huge cherubim statues in the temple protect the ark (1 Kgs 23–28). A wall divides the temple's main hall from the adytum, thus representing the heavenly dome or firmament (*rāqîaʿ*, Gen 1:7, 20; Ezek 1:22; Exod 30:7–8; 25:20). Below the divider terrestrial existence has common, quotidian space in which to live and thrive.

In the main hall, an incense altar sends up clouds of smoke, another barrier or canopy separating God and the earthly plane (2 Sam 22:10, 12). The altar's coals are theophanic manifestations of God's fiery otherness (2 Sam 22:9, 13; Isa 6:6–7; Ezek 1:13; 10:2). The main hall of the temple contains fixtures symbolizing (in part) the visible heaven and its celestial lights (Gen 1:8, 14). The Hebrew word *māʾôr*, used for heavenly 'light' in Gen 1:14–16, appears elsewhere in the Pentateuch only for the Menorah's lamps.

A Menorah's seven lamps stand for the seven celestial lights visible to the naked eye (i.e. the sun, moon, and five visible planets). This parallels the sun, moon, and stars inscribed on the ceilings of inner spheres of Egyptian temples. The lights are not merely part of the created order, however, but represent the watchful eyes of God and the heavenly host, as attested by the appearance of *māʾôr* in Ps 90:8 and by Zech 4:10. The association of the Menorah with an almond tree (Exod 25:33–34) brings connotations of wakefulness (see Jer 11:11–12), buttressing the identity of the flames as God's wakeful eyes (again, the article at hand presents sample meanings across differing texts and eras, not making claims about which senses are most 'original'). The table of the bread of the Presence similarly marks the nave as a sphere fostering the interconnection of God and terrestrial life. On the table, the agricultural bounty of the Earth is offered back to God.

Both tabernacle and temple had outdoor precincts divided in half, with an eastern section forming an altar court at the shrine's front. Stepping outside the shrine enclosure, one left behind the realm of sky and Presence to rejoin life on the habitable, terrestrial Earth. Here, in the eastern courtyard, was the tabernacle's laver and the temple's bronze Sea. The temple Sea rested atop twelve bull statues, representing the forces of fertility animating the Earth. In sets of three, they pointed in the four cardinal directions, mapping the temple's quadrants symbolically onto the Earth and its four corners. Human beings and representative land creatures moved about the large altar in the courtyard.

Through tabernacle and temple service, Israel was blessed and made holy, partaking of the good divine life that God ordained from the beginning. The shrine was a space where God and humanity communed, encountering each other through sacred service. The divine service was a realization of God's creative and redemptive work with and through humanity. It gave Israel its mission to bring life and light to the world.

2.5 A place blessed with God's name: Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and related texts

Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and related texts insist that Israel must have only one temple, a demand figuring centrally in a tripartite theology of one God, one people, and one sanctuary. The sanctuary's lone singularity (Deut 12:13–14) is no mere expression of allegiance to only one God, but an engine recreating the fiery encounter with God at Horeb in Israel's collective life. In this theology, the temple hosts Israel in gathered oneness. As a united worship assembly, Israel catalyses the beckoning, summoning verbal revelation of Horeb anew. The people's gathering in unity becomes an act of *re-membering*, of re-creating Horeb's encounter with God's otherness and its community-forming power.

The people of Israel reunite at the central shrine to recapitulate God's binding of them together in solidarity as an integral, integrated 'Thou'. Forming this 'Thou' afresh, they invoke the 'I-Thou' encounter between themselves and God that stands at the heart of Deuteronomy's covenant. The single shrine of Deuteronomy furnishes Israel with a staging ground for an event, for the performance of a word-act of divine encounter.

In this space, Israel acts in freedom and power, re-creating itself as a 'Thou' who invokes the Lord. It acts to re-member itself, inclusive of all members of its entire populace, so as to summon forth God. As the covenant community re-members itself at the central shrine, the availability of the divine 'invocation name' there suddenly becomes crucial (Exod 20:24; Deut 12:5). This is the time for remembering the divine name, thus 're-membering' God amid the community. This is the time for communing with God.

Repeatedly in 1 Kings 8, Solomon avails himself of the divine name at the chosen shrine in summoning God. Solomon acknowledges the name, confesses it, and uses it to invoke

the Lord (see v.23, 25, 28, 33, 35). The name has become Israel's means for perpetuating covenantal relationship. By remembering the name – taking the name of God on their lips – the community welcomes its most important member, its suzerain.

2.6 Projecting a holiness array: holiness-oriented pentateuchal passages, Ezekiel, and related texts

Certain holiness-oriented texts of the Pentateuch, the book of Ezekiel, and related scriptures have an anthropomorphic understanding of YHWH's Presence, the *kābôd*, which (ideally) indwells the temple. This is a God whose feet are planted on the same Earth as the feet of prophet and people, at least in Ezekiel's utopian temple vision (Ezek 43:7). God's embodiment on Earth in this theology renders the Presence vulnerable to the forces of desecration associated with impurity and sin. The earlier parts of Ezekiel's book describe how such forces drove the divine Presence out of the temple and out from the land.

Texts such as Ezek 43:9 directly attest to the tension between God's residence on Earth and Israel's infection with pollution. The tension helps explain the detailed concern about the architectural elements of the utopian temple in Ezek 40–48. The design of the ideal temple in these chapters aims to protect the divine Presence from ever having to depart again. Barriers and gate towers create tiered zones of holiness surrounding and protecting the inner sanctum. The temple's graded holiness also includes a vertical element, in the form of steps. A windowless, sealed inner sanctum in the temple additionally safeguards the Presence from the threat of death (Ezek 41:5–15a). As Jer 9:21 exhibits, death personified may break into houses through the windows. Here, compare Baal's insistence on a windowless palace in Ugaritic myth.

In this theology, the temple shields God's Presence but also projects holiness and life into the world. Claims that Ezekiel excludes common Israelites from the benefits of holiness do not fit the book's assumptions. For his line of priests, the temple mount is a holy cosmic centre (Ezek 5:5, 40:2) but so is the entire land. Ezekiel emphasizes the plural phrase 'mountains of Israel' (6:2, 3; 19:9; 33:28), making all God's territory into 'the holy [*qōdeš*] mountain of God' (28:14). The entire land is an Eden realm in Ezek 36:35. Later priests of his theological persuasion reiterate the theme. Thus Zech 2:12 calls Israel the 'holy land', and Zech 14:20–21 describes holiness infusing bells and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah.

Rather than simply protect sanctity, Ezekiel's temple organizes the surrounding territory as sacred, hallowed space. The rhetoric of Ezek 42:15–20 describes a temple with perpendicular 'compass axes' that situate it within a cosmic grid. The passage also speaks of the temple's four sides as *rûḥôt*, recalling the world's four cosmic 'winds' (see Ezek 1:20–21, 37:9–10) and suggesting that the temple possesses a sacral 'valence', a capacity

to interconnect with the outside. Ezekiel 43:12 describes the entire sanctuary complex as ‘most holy’, implying that all surrounding zones have a derivative holiness (also see Ezek 45:3). Territories arrayed about the temple complex must therefore be relatively holy zones.

A tiered system of graded holiness expands out beyond the stepped holy zones of the temple complex itself. Square geometry in the utopia represents holiness, so that a holy matrix of concentric squares centred in a square altar (Ezek 43:16) extends to encompass a square altar yard (Ezek 40:47) and then the temple’s square outer perimeter (Ezek 42:20). Rather than stop there, in Ezek 45:1–9 and 48:20 the utopian temple’s system of holy squares bursts beyond temple walls, reaching beyond the shrine’s borders to include a great outer holy square. This outer square includes the land’s new central city, with its twelve gates welcoming all tribes of Israel to gather regularly near the Presence.

2.7 Heavenly temples and eschatological temples

Various texts in the Bible understand God to have a celestial or transcendent temple, in relation to which Jerusalem’s temple is a mere shadow or reflection. A supernatural reality lies behind icons such as the ark. At the eschaton, God’s tangible inbreaking will greatly surpass the shrine’s iconography (e.g. Isa 60:1–3; Jer 3:16–17).

Micah 1:2–7 describes the Lord coming down from the heavenly temple to tread upon the Earth, which bursts open under him. The temple at issue is unlikely to be the structure at Jerusalem. The prophet pejoratively calls the capital city ‘the high place of Judah’ (Mic 1:5), one of the ‘high places’ God is coming down to Earth to trample (1:3).

The present shape of 2 Samuel speaks of God’s heavenly temple as extant long before Solomon’s temple building in Jerusalem (2 Sam 22:7). This matches the theology behind the superscription to Psalm 18. God hears David’s cry ‘from his temple’ (Ps 18:6) and proceeds to bow the heavens and come down to Earth (2 Sam 22:10; Ps 18:9).

Paul in Gal 4:25–26 speaks of a heavenly Jerusalem corresponding to the earthly one, the former built by God, the latter built by humans. The book of Hebrews understands the earthly temple as the physical reflex of a transcendent, celestial temple (Heb 8:1–5; 9:23–24). Paul’s discussion sets the two temples in tension and opposition, whereas the book of Hebrews tends to emphasize their parallelism and complementarity (Heb 12:22). The writings of early Judaism commonly assume that the Jerusalem shrine has a heavenly counterpart (1 Enoch 14:9–23; 2 Bar 4, 5; Philo, *Heir* 75; 112–13; Ber 4.5, 8c). Revelation’s end-time apocalyptic drama gives the temple an active role (Rev 4:6; 8:4; 11:1–2, 19), its inner workings alternately veiled (Rev 15:8) and visible (Rev 11:19).

A variety of late prophetic and early apocalyptic texts in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament understand the Jerusalem temple’s destruction to figure centrally in the events

transitioning into the climactic coming of God's reign. In Ezek 38–39, Joel 3, and Zechariah 14, Earth's many nations battle at Jerusalem and are defeated by the divine warrior. In Daniel, the advent of a desolating sacrilege in the temple is the touchstone of the tribulations of the end times (Dan 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). This expectation proved polyvalent, with multiple fulfilments. Antiochus IV placed an altar to Zeus in the temple (167 BCE), Caligula planned a statue of himself for the temple (c. 39 CE, Mark 13:14), and Matt 24:15, 2 Thess 2:3–5, and Revelation 13 expect a still later monstrosity.

From Micah 4 and Third Isaiah (chapters 56–66) to Enoch and the Dead Sea Scrolls, many Israelites and early Jews envisioned a marvellous temple as the centrepiece of God's coming reign (Mic 4:1–5; Isa 66:20; 90:28–29; Jub 1:27–28; 11QTemple). This shared hope, however, included varying conceptions and emphases. Some groups focused strongly on ritual details (11QTemple; cf. 2 Bar 6, 7–9), while others concentrated on conceptualizing an eternal divine dwelling (4 Ezra 10, 27, 44–54; T. Benj. 9.2; T. Levi 18).

2.8 Views of the temple in Jesus' circle and in the New Testament

Jesus was solidly Jewish, born amid a community engaged in early Jewish practices that reverenced the temple. The book of Luke begins with the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, receiving a revelation in the temple. When Jesus is a baby, Joseph and Mary visit the temple to dedicate their son at Passover time (Luke 2:22–38). His parents return to Jerusalem for Passover every year. Jesus is left behind at the temple during one such annual pilgrimage when he is twelve years old (Luke 2:41–51). Upon being discovered teaching in the temple (probably in the 'Portico of Solomon' east of the women's courtyard), Jesus explains to his mother that he 'must be' in 'my Father's house' (v49).

In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9–14), the temple appears in a positive light as the appropriate sacral locale for talking directly to God. Repentance and reconciliation occur in that space. Thus, the tax collector who humbles himself in the temple returns home 'justified' through grace (Luke 18:14). Jesus returns to teach in the temple near the close of his life, again provoking amazement (Luke 19:47–48). In driving out merchants from the complex, Jesus recognizes the temple's central symbolic value and re-enacts Jeremiah's theology (Luke 19:45–46, quoting Jer 7:11).

After Jesus' departure, his earliest followers continued as faithful Jews and were often seen in the temple compound (Luke 24:52–53; Acts 2:46). According to Acts, the apostles often came to the temple to pray and teach (Acts 3:1–10; 5:21, 42; 21:26–30; 22:17). Their Jewish neighbours generally showed them goodwill (Acts 2:47). By the same token, Acts presents Paul as a traditional early Jew who participates in temple rituals (e.g. Acts 16:1–

3; 21:26). At the same time, Paul can speak of the early Christian communal ‘body’ as a temple (1 Cor 6:19; 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16), the ‘body of Christ’ (1 Cor 12:27). Similarly, Eph 2:21 speaks of God’s people developing into a ‘holy temple in the Lord’. The Qumran community similarly considered itself God’s sanctuary (1QS 8.5–9).

John’s Gospel understands Jesus to fulfil scripture’s expectations of God’s eschatological inbreaking, relativizing the traditional functions of temple structures (Isa 60:1–3; Jer 3:16–17). Jesus realized in his person the supernatural reality behind temple symbols (John 2:21; 4:21). In John 6:4, Jesus does not go to Jerusalem for Passover but stays in Galilee, where the kind of crowds expected only at temple festivals gathered around him. Flocking to Jesus, the crowds feast abundantly and find physical healing, just as temple pilgrims traditionally did within temple precincts (Ps 30:2; 36:8; 63:5).

As noted earlier, the book of Hebrews understands the earthbound temple as ‘a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one’ (Heb 8:5; also see Heb 8:2; 9:1, 24). Even when fully in synch with transcendent archetypes, earthly temple rites have a preliminary, restricted purpose and role. Temple rites on Earth require cyclical repetition. They must constantly redress impurity and transgression and were never intended to achieve a perfect, definitive atonement (see Heb 9:9; 10:14). Here, one is reminded of the Jewish Tannaitic view that only thank offerings, not the temple’s atonement offerings, will be appropriate in the messianic age. Sin will end someday, rendering atonement obsolete, but thanksgiving to God is forever appropriate and can never run its course.

The ‘realized eschatology’ of John and Hebrews transitioned the faithful to a new era with no temple. With the Jesus event now realized, Christ was now the one ‘to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people’ (Heb 2:17). Jesus was now the uniquely ‘merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God’ (2:17). The idea of an ideal futuristic chief priest traces back to Zechariah’s early diarchic vision of end-time leadership. Zechariah’s visions centred in an ideal eschatological priest and Davidic ruler mediating God’s presence (Zech 4:3, 14). Texts such as Zech 6:13 understand this ideal as fulfilled messianically, at the coming of David’s ‘branch’, not something achieved within history by leaders like Zerubbabel and Joshua. The hope for a messianic high priest is later taken up in early Jewish texts such as 1QS 9.11; T. Levi 18.1–14. The priest would stand at the head of Qumran’s Children of Light in their final battle (1QM 15.4). Other texts from Qumran speak messianically of ‘Melchizedek’, the priest of Jerusalem in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. In 11QMelch he executes divine judgment and performs priestly functions (2.6). Melchizedek also appears prominently in Hebrews 5–7.

2.9 New Testament visions of an eschatological Zion on Earth

Apocalyptic eschatology pushes beyond visions of a heavenly temple. It expects temple archetypes and perfections to interrupt history, breaking into Earth as a new creation

appears (see Dan 2:45; Cook 2018: 4–5, 19, 80–85). Early apocalyptic prophecy in Ezek 38–39, Joel 3, and Zechariah 14 describes a defeat of evil and chaos at the temple mount, and the spread of holiness and life out to encompass the land. Isaiah 65:25 envisioned God's temple mount as a new Eden. There, God's final eradication of chaos and evil issues in a radically peaceable kingdom. In the New Testament, this apocalyptic temple is best apprehended in Revelation's New Jerusalem which has become the new Eden (Rev 22:1–5).

Because of the absence of a specific temple structure in Revelation's new Jerusalem (Rev 21:22), some readers have seen this as a deprecation of traditional temple understandings. It is far preferable to interpret this new feature of Zion as deriving from Zech 14:20–21; Ezek 40–48; and the Qumran Temple Scroll. These texts describe temple holiness extending out from the inner sanctum to encompass the surroundings. As this holiness spreads, God's presence is freed to move out beyond the adytum. In this way, Revelation's new city in its entirety is safely pure and holy to the same degree as the adytum that it replaces (Rev 21:27; 22:3, 15). Its sturdy boundaries (Rev 21:12–21) sufficiently safeguard holiness to allow the secure indwelling of God and the Lamb.

3 The believer and the community

3.1 Sacral service before God

The various biblical streams of theology agree that it is right and obligatory for God's people to respond in praise to God's specific acts of deliverance ('declarative' or 'narrative' praise), and also to laud him simply for his divine character ('descriptive praise') in hymnic celebration (see Westermann 1981). Many psalms presuppose that God created Israel expressly to offer God praise. Texts such as Psalm 6 assume that God is always yearning for public, communal worship (Ps 6:5–6; 30:9; 88:11). Psalm 22:3 offers a metaphor stressing the centrality of temple prayer, where it speaks of Israel's prayers as the throne upon which God sits. If one fails to join the praising throng, one diminishes communal consciousness of God's cosmic prerogative (see Davis 2019: 320).

The biblical God longs for the sort of free and intimate relationship with humanity that is expressed and fostered in temple service and praise. Temple sacrifices are appropriate, but properly performed ritual practice alone is not enough. God desires intimate knowing (*daʿat ʾĕlōhîm*) and loyalty (*ḥesed*; Hos 6:6). As God puts it, 'I delight in faithfulness, not simply in sacrifice' (idem, NET). In Hebrew thinking, one's external and internal orientation towards God should form one unified commitment.

Texts in both Testaments draw parallels between temple incense and verbal prayer as instruments connecting humans and God (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3–5). Whether it is temple incense or liturgical praise, the aim is deeper human communion with the divine presence.

Far from hollow words, communion through prayer is substantive, as vibrant and vivid as incense, visibly real and sweetly fragrant.

The poetry, rhythm, and music of temple worship attests to God's passionate enjoyment of the beautiful. So also does the 'powerful beauty' (see Ps 96:6) that sets the temple apart visually from common life. Texts such as Isa 60:13 drive home that the beauty of the temple includes the visible as well as the aural. For this reason, much of the Pentateuch's detailed portrayal of the Tabernacle/temple entails visual description.

God called creation into being not merely for the sake of fostering human welfare and promoting human ethical fairness in his world but also out of love of fairness, understood as beauty. The sublime is a primary good, of inherent value. Its epiphany engenders fairness by mitigating anthropocentrism, ennobling experience, and tightening humanity's humble appreciation of nature and neighbour.

3.2 Liminality, asylum, sacrifice, righteousness, and instruction

3.2.1 Liminality

In Zion theology, as discussed, the temple represents sacred, liminal space. That is, the temple mount overlaps (iconographically, archetypally, and typologically) with transcendent, celestial reality. Temple imagery, architecture, and atmosphere are 'sacramental', they are windows or portals to the Beyond. The term sacramental is here meant not in a technical Christian sense but is shorthand for the use of the earthly and the material to access or to manifest the spiritual and the heavenly. Temple iconography symbolized the presence of God but also enabled and effected an approach to God. It mediated the transforming presence of the transcendent God for the life of the worshiper.

3.2.2 Asylum

As a liminal and holy space, the temple offers a sacred zone semi-independent of, and alternative to, the power structures, assumptions, and techniques of common daily life. Asylum is one manifestation of the shrine's relative autonomy and apartness. Exodus 21:14 attests to Israel's recognition that God's altar offers asylum to perpetrators of inadvertent murder. Even before Solomon built the temple, Adonijah, his rival claimant to the throne, sought refuge up at Jerusalem's altar by grasping its horns (1 Kgs 1:50).

Joab later followed suit, since he, like the chief priest Abiathar, had supported Adonijah's rival claim to the throne. Although Joab sought refuge by grasping the altar's horns (1 Kgs 2:28), Solomon ordered him killed within the sacred precincts on the grounds of his deliberate murders (1 Kgs 2:32). Also relevant here is chief priest Jehoiada's hiding of the young prince Joash in temple chambers for six years (2 Kgs 11:1–3).

In Amos 3:14 God threatens the horns of Bethel's altar: 'The horns of the altar shall be cut off and fall to the ground'. The symbolism behind the divine threat alludes to the horns' offer of asylum. God will now override all asylum protections at Bethel.

At least some of the many psalms of individual lament in the Psalter were likely used by people seeking asylum at the temple. Such use fits these texts' protestations of innocence, pleas for justice, and denunciations of slanderous opponents (e.g. Ps 3; 4; 5; 7; 17; 26). Especially relevant may be prayers for refuge and shelter in God (e.g. Ps 27:5; 31:2). Others sought healing of physical injuries and disease in the shrine (see Ps 38; 39; 41; 88). Outside of the Hebrew Bible, the sixth century BCE 'House of God' ostracon from Arad attests to the temple's offer of asylum. Writing from Jerusalem, the author assures the commander at Arad, Elyashib, of the wellbeing of a certain person about whom Elyashib had inquired. The notice that the person at issue is safe in the temple fits a scenario in which he had been seeking asylum at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.

3.2.3 Sacrifice

The bringing of offerings and sacrifices to the temple had several meanings. The following list of five sample meanings is representative, not exhaustive. (1) As mentioned earlier, evidence from Tel Motza points to the temple's role in taxation. The lines were often blurred between temple and palace authority in collecting offerings and taxes, which could be stored in the temple as state economic reserves (see 1 Chr 28:12). Priests received income for ritual services in the form of offerings (see, e.g. Lev 12:6–8) and mandatory offerings funded state-organized temple renovations (see, e.g. 2 Kgs 12:4–7). (2) Sacrifices consumed in the sacral compound were often fellowship sacrifices (*zebaḥ šĕlāmîm*) for feasts of joy (Lev 3; Deut 12:7; Ps 36:8). (3) Yearly samplings from harvests aimed to recognize God as the covenantal liege lord of the entire land, deserving of all vassals' rent and tribute. (4) Thanksgiving offerings fulfilled vows that supplicants made when uttering laments requesting God's rescue (e.g. Ps 56:12; 116:14, 17–19; Jonah 1:16). The meat was enjoyed with family and friends in temple precincts accompanied by psalms of personal thanksgiving and narrative praise (e.g. Ps 22:25; 107:22; 118). (5) The most theologically profound sacrifices were those aimed specifically at atonement, especially the purification and reparation offerings.

In several biblical streams of tradition, the temple altar had a crucial role in atonement, the reunifying of God and God's people. The topic of atonement has generated voluminous research and debate, which cannot be covered here. It is still a commonplace scholarly notion that ceremonial cleansing (purification) is the primary biblical metaphor for understanding sacrificial atonement. Against this view it should be mentioned that, in some priestly understandings, the altar absorbed Israel's impurity and transgression. Invested with iconic and sacramental power, the altar sucked away sin and, in turn,

released life and holiness. This language is equally as authentic to scripture as metaphors of purification. The altar's constant need of cleansing with the blood of atoning sacrifices attests to its power to 'suck in' sin, conceived of as forming a tangible crud (Lev 4:20, 34; cf. Ezek 24:6, 12 NRSVue). Zechariah, an early apocalyptic visionary, likewise assumes significant accumulations of palpable sin at the temple altar. He envisions the horns of the altar, a locus of absorbed iniquity, transfiguring into archetypal evil forces in Zech 4:18–21.

Early historical critics sometimes interpreted the prophets as generally opposed to sacrifices and other ritual practices of the temple. What they actually opposed, though, were rites without righteousness, piety without amendment of life, and temple theology as a 'cover' for sin and oppression. Even today, the NRSVue and other versions translate Hos 6:6 as 'I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice'. Hebrew syntax, however, knows of a dialectical negative, i.e. 'not so much this as that' or 'not this without that'. The NET rendition reflects this syntax, 'I delight in faithfulness, not simply in sacrifice'. The NLT also gives the proper sense, 'I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings'. Verse 17 of Psalm 51 is thus not opposed to the spirit of v19. Rather, it reveals the inner human transformation that acceptable temple sacrifices catalyse if they are functioning correctly.

Early critics also supposed that expiatory atoning sacrifices were a late development within Israelite religion, but this view has also been shown to be misguided. Already in the eighth century Hosea identifies sacrifices as atoning for sin (Hos 4:8). Hosea sarcastically quips that the priests of his time long for Israel's iniquity. They have exclusive rights to eat the people's sin offerings and they want the people of Israel to actively increase their sin. If they do, they will receive more of the meat of their sacrifices!

Archaeological exploration of sacred feasting at the Iron-Age-II-era site Tel Dan confirms that Dan's priests received special parts of slaughtered animals. They also ate a greater percentage than the laity of sheep and goats, the animals specified for atonement sacrifices (see Lev 5:6, 15–19; 14:12–21; see Greer 2013).

Excavations at Tel Dan also show that the altar priests there had a separate area within the sacred precincts to eat their share of sacrifices. This traditional practice is featured prominently in Ezekiel's utopian temple.

3.2.4 Righteousness

Diverse scriptures understand the restorative, sanctifying power of the temple variously, but everywhere the temple facilitates access to God and God's righteousness. Indeed, God's righteousness is embedded in the temple's very layout and architectonics, which embody creation's deep structure and cosmic order. Thus, Ps 92:12–15 imagines temple land as the cosmos's underlying seedbed of fruitful life. The fullness of human existence springs up if one roots one's life in this elemental fundament of righteousness.

Temple language of total contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous reflects not workaday ethics but the polar tensions and binary oppositions through which God ordered creation. The light of God's presence on the temple mount reveals creation's underlying structure and the coherence of a righteous life (Ps 80:16; 90:8). A righteous life is one whose total pattern is aligned with God and can be judged as having integrity and substance.

Genesis 1 reveals the parallels between the temple and the cosmic order. Genesis 2–3 witnesses to the crucial role of temple rituals and sacraments in leading humanity back to Eden and its central Tree of Life, by the fruit of which one may live forever (Gen 3:22; Ps 36:8–9). A pilgrimage to the temple is supposed to be a ritual and liturgical preparation and training for returning to God's presence in Eden. This is not an escape from history into mythical realms. It is a periodic reorientation that accelerates a journey toward righteousness, a journey mostly walked *within* daily life. At the temple, celebrants briefly pass into sacral precincts where they experience anew how to live as God intended.

Temple theology aims to confront a fallen world's brutal existence and tragic history. Its realism, judgment, and challenge are perhaps clearest in the imprecations (cursing prayers) of the lament psalms. As early in the Psalter as Psalm 3 we read: 'Rise up, LORD! Deliver me, my God! Yes, you will strike all my enemies on the jaw' (3:7 NET). The verse is misinterpreted if read as vengeful malice. The psalmist is simply claiming for himself Zion's sacred character (Ps 93:5), owning its moral demands (Ps 15:2–3; 24:4; see Levenson 1985: 198), embracing its fundament of righteousness (Ps 1:6; 92:12–13), receiving its objective, foreign godliness (Ps 24:5; 26:6; 143:2; Jer 33:16), an endowment of a higher self (Ps 7:8; 73:13; see Levenson 1985: 199).

The defeat of wickedness is God's work, never a matter of a human vendetta (Ps 3:8). God has Eden's cherubim with a flaming sword (Gen 3:24) to keep evil in retreat as temple righteousness expands to envelop the world. God will someday defang evil and reopen Eden on Mount Zion (Isa 65:25). As Ps 3:7 puts it, 'You break the teeth of the wicked!'

The cosmic power of Zion is relevant for the entire people, not just the individual in dire straits. Psalm 36:8 confesses that all God's people drink from the temple's river of Eden. They all find refuge under Zion's shadow (Ps 36:7), like Eden's creatures sheltering under a great cedar of Paradise (Ezek 31:6–9). Employing similar metaphors of Eden, Psalm 46 declares that God has made Zion his unshakeable refuge and mountain stronghold (*miśgāb*, v.11), the fountainhead of Eden's river (v4; see Levenson 1985: 156–157, 176–177). As noted above, Isaiah exhorted both King Ahaz and King Hezekiah to pin Judah's hopes for geopolitical security on Zion promises (Isa 7:9b; 38:6). The prophet believes Zion's links to Eden to be relevant in history and reality, not just in metaphor and mythology. God's people must trust the blessings flowing in Eden's stream (Isa 8:6).

Zion texts are aware that realists and pragmatists will struggle to take them seriously. They contend, nonetheless, that Zion's offer of cosmic refuge is no myth. It is a subsistent truth behind a sacramental face. It is a substratal structure, of a piece with the primordial energies God used to call the cosmos into being. Psalm 36 speaks of a cosmic refuge but affirms that God must open human eyes and awaken our souls to see it (Ps 36:9).

3.2.5 Instruction

In New Testament times, the Portico of Solomon on the eastern perimeter of the temple complex served as a teaching venue, with benches to sit on, paths between columns to stroll, and space for a sizeable audience. According to the Gospels, Jesus probably engaged temple teachers at that locale (Luke 2:46). He later taught in the temple authoritatively (Luke 19:47–48; John 7:14), as did the disciples (Acts 3:11; 5:12, 21, 25). Rabbinic traditions also attest to teaching within the second temple's precincts (m. Orlah 2.12; t. Sanh. 2.6). By Jesus' era, standard forms of rabbinic discussion and pedagogy developed, and the temple became a prominent venue for teaching in this mode.

Various types of teaching of different kinds by non-priests had also occurred earlier in the preexilic sanctuary. When someone shared a thank offering meal, for example, she or he would 'teach' (Ps 51:13). That is, they would fulfil at the sanctuary the 'vow of praise' that is standard in lament psalms such as Psalm 51. In the temple's dining areas, they would recount God's manner of intervention, thus illuminating the character of God (Ps 9:1; 22:22, 25; 30:12; 40:3, 9–10; 59:16–17; 63:5; 71:15; 107:32; 118:17). Such teaching generated reverence and trust (Ps 40:3), set sinners on God's paths (Ps 51:13), and turned foreigners to God (Ps 22:27).

Prophets of varying social roles spoke and taught polemically at Zion and other shrines. Amos famously confronted the priest Amaziah at Bethel's shrine (Amos 7:10–17). Priests in charge at the Jerusalem temple, such as Pashhur, were furious at Jeremiah's standing in temple courts and reminding the people of God's words. Pashhur had temple guards beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks by the Benjamin Gate (Jer 19:14–20:2), a northern gate into the temple complex (also see Ezek 8:5).

Jeremiah 26 recounts Jeremiah's standing in temple courts arguing that the sanctuary is as vulnerable to destruction as was the shrine at Shiloh. Temple clerics and guards seized him and convened a trial in a chamber of the New Gate within the temple complex (Jer 26:8–10). This was likely the gate between the New Court (2 Chr 20:5) and the altar court.

Specialist teaching in the sanctuary was a responsibility of socially central priests and prophets (Jer 18:18; Mal 2:4–7; 2 Chr 15:3). Temple specialists recounted God's saving deeds (Ps 96:2–3; 111:4, 6) and read and extoled covenant statutes (Ps 19:7; 50:16; 81:9, 13; 95:7b; 111:7–8; Neh 8:18). They taught formulaic prayers; shared traditional

wisdom in response to tragedy (e.g. the ‘woes’ of Hab 2:6–19); responded to envoys with questions (Zech 7:2–7); engaged in disputations (Hab 1:5–11; Mal 1:2–5); and directed the assembly in prayer (Hab 3:1) and mourning (Joel 1:13–15). Texts such as Mic 4:2 or Isa 2:3 understand that at the coming of God’s reign all nations will desire temple teachings. The many peoples travel to Zion and instruction flows out from Jerusalem.

The postexilic figure of Ezra exemplifies the model priest who studies torah and sets his heart to teach it (Ezra 7:10, 25). He embodied the preexilic statute in Lev 10:11, ‘You are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them through Moses’. The responsibility of priests for teaching is attested in the era after the fall of the northern kingdom in 2 Kgs 17:27–28, and earlier in Samuel ‘B’ texts (1 Sam 12:23) and in the prophecies of Hosea and Micah (Hos 4:6; 8:12; Mic 3:11; 4:2).

Deuteronomy and related scriptures prioritize teaching at the temple (1 Kgs 8:36; Mal 2:6–7). Every seven years at the festival of booths, the torah must be read at the shrine (Deut 31:10–13). Levites, present in Jerusalem on a rotating basis, must provide legal instruction as part of a temple-based national court of appeals (Deut 17:8–12). They interpret torah for the populace and announce rulings (Deut 17:11; 19:8–11).

In this stream of tradition, teaching was a particular obligation of the Levites (Deut 17:11; 31:9; 33:10). The seriousness with which some Levites took this duty is reflected in Neh 8:7, 9, where Levites rather than other priestly lineages assist Ezra in instructing the people. Jeremiah, a Levite from Anathoth, presupposes the responsibility of priests for instructing the populace (Jer 2:8; 5:31; 8:8). Micah, Hosea, and Malachi chastise priests for poor or corrupt instruction (Hos 4:6; Mic 3:11; Mal 2:8–9).

4 Summary

The Israelite temple figured centrally in the sacral service of God’s people. Praise, offerings, and worship at the sanctuary all fostered deeper communion with the divine presence. The glory of temple worship, including its iconography, liturgy, poetry, and music provided experiences of sharing in God’s enjoyment of beauty. Encountering the sublime fostered reverence and ethical fairness. Crucially, the Jerusalem temple represented sacred, liminal space where physical, material icons and elements function ‘sacramentally’ to provide access to or to manifest the spiritual and heavenly. The temple also provides asylum, with its central altar acting as a refuge for targeted fugitives.

Sacrifices at the temple have various meanings, ranging from taxation offerings to fellowship and thanksgiving sacrifices to animal sacrifices aimed at purification and atonement. The temple altar plays a crucial role in atonement. In some biblical theologies, it functions ‘sacramentally’ to absorb Israel’s impurity and transgression, releasing life and holiness in return. In multiple poetic texts of scripture, the motif of a healing, lifegiving

stream or river flowing down from near the altar represents the flow of God's blessing and sanctification out from transcendence to the physical world of history.

The transformative power of the temple and its ceremonies derives from the archetypal perfections and transcendental dynamics that underpin and animate its symbols and rites. The temple's role and power are misunderstood or even abused when these perfections and dynamics are downplayed, domesticated, or 'explained' away. When appreciated, however, they facilitate human ethical transformation and access to God's 'objective' righteousness. The temple serves Israel as a periodic reorientation, providing brief encounters with sacred experiences of living life with God's health, joy, and beauty.

Attributions

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