Temple
Study Notes

Introduction
If you read through the Old Testament, you’ll find significant space given to the tabernacle and the temple. These structures were symbols that pointed to the fact that all creation is God’s temple. Jesus picks up on this truth, presenting himself as the true temple. He also made a bold claim that God’s presence would come to dwell in his followers and not just in these sacred structures. The early church formed communities where God rested and ruled—his intention since the beginning! This is what our theme video on the temple is all about.

These notes go a level deeper than we can cover in a five-minute video. In the following pages, you’ll be introduced to key concepts, passages, and images that will enable you to gain a better understanding of the temple theme throughout the Bible.

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**Creation is a Temple: Genesis 1-2:3**

The temple theme begins on the first pages of the Bible with a bold claim: all creation is God's temple.

The first creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:3 depicts God as a cosmic temple builder. He arranges a three-tiered creation (sky, land, and sea) that is inaugurated on the seventh day. This previews the three-part design of the Israelite tabernacle and temple (holy of holies, holy place, and courtyard). This parallel states a significant truth about creation itself. The cosmos is a macro temple, and the temple is a miniature cosmos. Heaven and Earth are not separate realms; they are meant to completely overlap within the divine purpose. And instead of a statue for the divine image, humanity is placed as the image of God in the temple—a living image of the divine creator and king. Later biblical authors pick up on this theme as they reflect on the functions of the tabernacle and temple.

“The Hebrew Bible is replete with descriptions of creation as a tabernacle which God has pitched (Psalm 104; Job 9:8; Isaiah 40:22), or a house that God has established (with pillars, windows, and doors: Job 26:11; Gen 7:11; Ps 78:24). Consequently, the temple of Zion, as a sanctuary that God has established, becomes a microcosmic metaphor for creation itself.”


*But chose the tribe of Judah // Mount Zion which he loved. And he built his sanctuary like the heights // Like the land which he has founded forever.*

Psalm 78:68-69
## Literary Design of Genesis 1:1-2:4

Although not explicit, the literary design of the first creation account in Scripture provides insight into the concept of creation as God's temple. God creates an ordered world out of a dark wasteland in seven days. Then on the seventh day, God's presence fills creation as he takes up his rest and rule. Days one through three focus on creating ordered environments, and days four through six focus on the inhabitants of each of those environments.

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<td>1:2 Exposition of Prologue in 3 lines [ 7x 2 words ]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Now, the land was wild and waste (tohu va-vohu) and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (tehom) but the breath of Elohim was hovering over the face of the waters (hamayim)</td>
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<tr>
<td>tohu</td>
<td>wilderness, unordered, chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vohu</td>
<td>uninhabited, empty, no residents</td>
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<td>Days 1-3</td>
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<td>Day 1 [1:3-5] “light” called “day”</td>
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<td>“let there be light”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“divide between ...”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“good”</td>
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<td><strong>Day 4</strong></td>
<td>Day 4 [1:14-19] “lights”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“let there be lights”</td>
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<td>“divide between ... and between”</td>
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<td>“good” rule the day/night</td>
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<td><strong>Day 2</strong></td>
<td>Day 2 [1:6-8] Sky dome in the waters</td>
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<td>Dome called “heavens” divides the waters “divide between ... and between”</td>
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<td>A: waters below</td>
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<td><strong>Day 5</strong></td>
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<td>Creatures in the waters and the dome of the heavens “good” / created</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A: water-swarmers below + sea monsters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B: sky flyers above</td>
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<td>Blessing: “fruitful, multiply, fill the land”</td>
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<td><strong>Day 3</strong></td>
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<td>A: land emerges from the waters [1:9-10] “good”</td>
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<td>B: Plants and fruit trees emerge from the land</td>
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<td>Day 6 [1:24-31] Land creatures</td>
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<td>A: Beasts emerge from the land</td>
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<td>C: “let the land bring forth beasts” [1:24] “good” / created</td>
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<td>B: Creation of adam to rule the land “very good”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blessing fruitful, multiply, fill the land, rule the land</td>
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### 2:1 Summary Epilogue: Thus were the skies and the land and all their host

### 2:2-3 Exposition of Summary

1. And God completed on the **seventh** day his work which he had done [7 words]
2. And he rested on the **seventh** day from his work which he had done [7 words]
3. And God blessed the **seventh** day and sanctified it because on it he rested from all his work which God **created to do** [7 words] [key word of 1:1]
From Creation to Tabernacle to Temple

Echoing the seven days of creation in Genesis 1, the tabernacle and temple were built and dedicated in a series of seven speeches and seven days, after which the priest or king could rest and rule in God’s presence. This chart depicts the specific correspondences between the creation account and the tabernacle and temple. Through these intentional parallels, the authors confirm the “creation as temple” idea.

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<tr>
<th>Creation and Sabbath Genesis 1:31-2:3</th>
<th>Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath Exodus 25-31</th>
<th>Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath Exodus 39-40</th>
<th>Jerusalem Temple Completion 1 Kings 6-8</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seven days open with divine command: “And God said…”</td>
<td>Seven speeches open with divine command: “And Yahweh spoke to Moses …”</td>
<td>Seven acts of obedience to the divine command complete the tabernacle: “And Moses did … just as Yahweh commanded Moses.”</td>
<td>Seven petitions of Solomon upon the completion of the temple: “Blessed be Yahweh who spoke to my father David.”</td>
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<td>Day 1 - Genesis 1:5</td>
<td>Speech 1 - Exodus 25:1</td>
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<td>Day 2 - Genesis 1:8</td>
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<td>Day 3 - Genesis 1:13</td>
<td>Speech 3 - Exodus 30:17</td>
<td>Act 3 - Exodus 40:23</td>
<td>Petition 3 - 1 Kings 8:35-37a</td>
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<td>Day 4 - Genesis 1:19</td>
<td>Speech 4 - Exodus 30:22</td>
<td>Act 4 - Exodus 40:25</td>
<td>Petition 4 - 1 Kings 8:37b-40</td>
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<td>Day 6 - Genesis 1:31</td>
<td>Speech 6 - Exodus 31:1</td>
<td>Act 6 - Exodus 40:29</td>
<td>Petition 6 - 1 Kings 8:44-45</td>
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<td>Day 7 - Genesis 2:1-3 Sabbath</td>
<td>Speech 7 - Exodus 31:12 Sabbath</td>
<td>Act 7 - Exodus 40:32-35</td>
<td>Petition 7 - 1 Kings 8:46-53</td>
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Seven day feasts

Culmination of 7’s

| Seventh day culminates in Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3) | Seventh speech emphasizes the “sign of Sabbath” (Exodus 31:12-17) | Seventh act of obedience “completes” the tabernacle | Solomon has two seven-day feasts to dedicate the temple (1 Kings 8:65) |

Repeated 7’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Repetition of 7’s</th>
<th>Culmination of 7’s</th>
<th>Repeated Words</th>
<th>Tragic Disruptions</th>
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<tr>
<td>“and God saw all that he had done, and behold, very good. And there was evening and morning, the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:31) + “And God blessed the seventh day.”</td>
<td>“Then the king faced about and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing.”</td>
<td>&quot;Then the king faced about and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;In the eleventh year, in the eighth month, the temple was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it.” (1 Kings 6:38)</td>
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<td>“and the skies and the land were completed (“כליא”),”</td>
<td>“and Solomon built the temple and he finished it.”</td>
<td>“and Solomon built the temple and he finished it.”</td>
<td>“And the work (תְּמַלְכָּתָו) of the pillars was finished.” (1 Kings 7:22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“and God rested (שָׁבָתָו) on the seventh day …”</td>
<td>“and the cloud filled the house of Yahweh.”</td>
<td>“and the cloud filled the house of Yahweh.”</td>
<td>“Thus all the work (תְּמַלְכָּתָו) that King Solomon performed in the house of the Lord was finished.” (1 Kings 7:51)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“… from all his work (תְּמַלְכָּתָו) … and God blessed (ברך) the seventh day and made it holy (שָׁבָתָו).”</td>
<td>“you shall keep the Sabbath for it is holy (שָׁבָתָו) for you … Six days let the work (תְּמַלְכָּתָו) be done, and on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of Sabbath.”</td>
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<td>&quot;Temptation and fall narrative: Genesis 3&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Temptation and fall narrative: Exodus 32&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Temptation and fall narrative: Leviticus 10&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Temptation and fall narrative: 1 Kings 9:1-9 and 11:1-13&quot;</td>
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</table>
Think of the planet Earth. What comes to mind? Many would picture a satellite image of our planet amidst a vast solar system. In the ancient world, they had a very different conception of the cosmos. Throughout the biblical creation accounts, we can construct an accurate view of their three-tiered cosmos. Let’s walk through some Scripture together to put ourselves in the shoes of the ancient readers.

**Tier 1: The Skies**

The first tier of the Biblical cosmos is the sky. When an ancient looked up at a blue sky, they believed there was water behind a carefully placed dome. They concluded that God placed the sun, moon, and stars within the dome—each with a role to bring order to the universe. Lastly, they envisioned God enthroned in his heavenly temple above the earth. Let’s look at the Scriptures that confirm these elements:

**The sky-dome separates the waters above and below:**

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Then God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” God made the dome and separated the waters which were below the dome from the waters which were above the dome; and it was so. God called the dome “skies” (or “heavens”).
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**Genesis 1:6-8**

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I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
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**Proverbs 8:27**

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He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters for a boundary between light and darkness.
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**Job 26:10**

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The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their dome is declaring the work of His hands ... Their line has gone out through all the land, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
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**Psalms 19:1, 4**

**The waters above and below:**

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He established the land upon its foundations, So that it will not totter forever and ever. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; The waters were standing above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled, At the sound of Your thunder they hurried away. The mountains rose; the valleys sank down To the place which You established for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass over, So that they will not return to cover the earth. He sends forth springs in the valleys; They flow between the mountains; They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst ... He waters the mountains from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works.
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**Psalms 104:5-13**

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In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the windows of the skies were opened. And the rain fell upon the land for forty days and nights.
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**Genesis 7:11-12**

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Praise him from the skies, praise him in the heights ... Praise him skies of the skies, and the waters above the skies
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**Psalms 148:1, 4**

“...The function of these correspondences is to underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive ... The Temple was conceived as a microcosm, a miniature world. But it is equally the case that in Israel, the world, or I should say, the ideal world, was conceived as a macro-temple, the palace of God which is permeated with his presence and in which all is aligned with his will.”

Jon Levenson, *Cosmos and Microcosm*, 86.
The stars in the dome:

God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also. God placed them in the dome of the skies to give light on the earth.

Praise him from the skies, praise him in the heights
Praise him all his angels, praise him all his host
Praise him sun, moon, and stars of light

Genesis 1:16-17
Psalm 148:1-3

The heavenly temple:

The Lord is in his holy temple;
the Lord is on his heavenly throne.
He observes everyone on earth;
his eyes examine them.

In my distress I called to the Lord;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears ...
He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.
He mounted the cherubim and flew;

Psalms 11:4
Psalm 18:6-10

Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is My footstool."

Isaiah 66:1

The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
Yes, the Lord sits as King forever.

Psalm 29:10

Tier 2: The Land

The second tier in the ancient concept of the cosmos was the land. Because of their understanding of waters above and below the earth, all land was floating on and bordered by the sea. Remember the sky-dome holding back the waters? They believed the mountains functioned as a support to the sky-dome, creating a sort of portal to Heaven and Earth. Take a look at the Scriptures that verify these visualizations:

A disk whose center is Jerusalem:

... who live at the center of the world. (Hebrew: tabur, the “navel” of the land)

Hear my cry, O God;
Give heed to my prayer.
From the end of the earth
I call to You when my heart is faint;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I

Ezekiel 38:12
Psalm 61:1-2

Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.
Beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth,
Like your name, O God,
your praise reaches to the ends of the earth;
your right hand is filled with righteousness.

Psalm 48:1-2, 10
Land disk is bordered by sea:

Who shut up the sea behind doors
when it burst forth from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment
and wrapped it in thick darkness,
when I fixed limits for it
and set its doors and bars in place,
when I said, "This far you may come and no farther;
here is where your proud waves halt"?

I was there when he set the heavens in place,
when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,
when he established the clouds above
and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,
when he gave the sea its boundary
so the waters would not overstep his command,
and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

Job 38:8-11

I made the sand a boundary for the sea,
an everlasting barrier it cannot cross.
The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail;
they may roar, but they cannot cross it.

May he also rule from sea to sea
And from the river to the ends of the earth.

Jeremiah 5:22

Land is floating upon the sea:

The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty;
The Lord has clothed and girded Himself with strength;
Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.
Your throne is established from old;
You are from everlasting.
The Rivers have lifted up, O Lord,
The Rivers have lifted up their voice,
The Rivers lift up their pounding waves.
More than the sounds of many waters,
Than the mighty breakers of the sea,
The Lord on high is mighty.

The earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.
For He has founded it upon the seas
And established it upon the rivers.

Psalms 93:1-4

Mountains reach/support the sky dome and are a portal of Heaven and Earth:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
In the city of our God, His holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
Is Mount Zion the far north (Hebrew: tsaphon "north" = “extreme height”) The city of the great King.

Then the earth shook and quaked,
The foundations of heaven were trembling
And were shaken, because He was angry.

2 Samuel 22:8

Land is supported by the pillars underneath:

The land ... It is I who have set it upon its pillars.

If the heavens above can be measured
And the foundations of the land searched out below ...

Psalms 75:3

Jeremiah 31:37

The Lord also thundered in the heavens,
And the Most High uttered His voice ...
Then the channels of water appeared,
And the foundations of the world were laid bare
At Your rebuke, O Lord,
At the blast of the breath of Your nostrils.

When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became fixed,
When He set for the sea its boundary
So that the water would not transgress His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the land;

Psalms 18:13-15

Proverbs 8:28-29
Tier 3: The Waters/Underworld

The third and last tier in the Biblical conception of the cosmos is the waters—or underworld. Underneath the land were the ominous waters below. This tier is associated with frequent Biblical imagery of the grave/pit and Sheol. Take a look at the Bible verses that explore these concepts:

The waters below the land:

**The land** is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.

Psalms 24:1-2

... heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

Exodus 20:4

The deep abyss is the grave/pit:

Save me, O God, For the waters have threatened my life. I have sunk in deep mire, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. May the flood of water not overflow me Nor the deep swallow me up, Nor the pit shut its mouth on me.

Psalms 69:1-2,15

The pit and Sheol ("the grave") is also the deep waters:

For my soul has had enough troubles, And my life has drawn near to Sheol. I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I have become like a man without strength, Forsaken among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave, Whom You remember no more, And they are cut off from Your hand. You have put me in the lowest pit, In dark places, in the depths ... And You have afflicted me with all Your waves.

Psalms 88:3-7

The cords of death encompassed me, And the torrents of ungodliness terrified me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me.

Psalms 18:4-5

The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, But the earth He has given to the sons of men. The dead do not praise the Lord, Nor do any who go down into silence;

Psalms 115:16-17

Vertical and horizontal horizons are often combined:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take to the edges/wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the end of the sea,

Psalm 139:7-9
Tying It All Together

Other Ancient Visualizations of the Cosmos

Israel did not exist in a cultural vacuum. Their view of the cosmos is confirmed by other creation accounts from surrounding nations in the ancient Near East. The Egyptian and Babylonian accounts are of note here.

Egyptian Conceptions

First, you can observe the various Egyptian representations of the primeval hill. They believed this was the first entity to rise from the water of chaos, which the world eventually evolved from. The image on the right depicts their more detailed understanding of the cosmos. Here, the sun-god Re traverses the heavens daily in an invisible boat. Notice how the sky—with obvious human likeness—forms a barrier between the waters above the heavens and the waters below the earth.
This sixth century B.C. map, called the Babylonian Sippar Map, presents a flat circular earth bordered by a circumferential sea. The solid dome of the heavens ends at the horizon and is supported by seven pillars.

Below you will see a Late Kassite kudurru (boundary stone) from Susa (ca. 1180 B.C.). The multipart picture of the world distinguishes an upper heavenly sphere, an earthly realm, and the underworld.


What can we learn from these other ancient conceptions?

“It should be evident that within the worldview of the ancient Near East, including the Hebrew Bible, their physical-technical and poetic-mythical statements and conceptions are not susceptible to consistent separation. To the ancient Near East, the empirical world, as manifestation and symbol, points beyond its superficial reality. A blurring occurs between the actual and the symbolic, and conversely between the symbolic and the actual. This openness of the everyday, earthly world to the spheres of divine life and bottomless, devastating lostness is probably the chief difference between ancient Near Eastern conception of the world and our own, which views the world as a virtually closed mechanical system. The principal error of conventional representations of

the ANE view of the world lies in their profanity and lifelessness. In the biblical and ANE conception, the world is open and transparent to things above and beneath the earth. It is not a lifeless stage. The universe is thoroughly alive, and, therefore, the more capable of sympathy with humans and of response to the rule of its creator, on whom both humanity and the universe directly depend. Certainly we have here more than a poetical personification of the cosmos, when it is invited to shout for joy!”

The Eden Temple: Genesis 2:4-3:24

Building on the temple concepts in Genesis 1-2:4a and Genesis 2:4b-3:24 offers a complimentary creation account focusing on the garden of Eden. It depicts God ordering the world out of a chaotic wilderness and placing humans atop a cosmic mountain-garden as his royal priestly representatives. The design plan of Eden is a prototype of the tabernacle and temple. This narrative is meant to preview the priesthood and the holy of holies in the Israelite tabernacle and temple, and it makes a significant claim about the nature of creation itself. God has appointed creation as the place where humans are united with the beauty and presence of God for all eternity.

What does Eden mean?

Is there any significance to the word eden? How does it help us better understand the concepts the author was trying to communicate to his readers? Let’s take a look at where the word was first mentioned. In Genesis 2:8, the text states, “And Yahweh Elohim planted a garden in Eden from the east.” The word eden (Hebrew: עדן) has two facets of meaning.

1) A proper geographical term, Eden (as in all modern English translations)

2) An adjective meaning “liquid luxuriance, watery abundance”

The latter definition is most consistent with the meaning of this word in biblical Hebrew.

*They will feast on the richness of your temple, and a stream of your bounty/your edens will water them, for with you is the fountain of life.*

Psalm 36:9-10

He has filled his stomach with my delights/my edens.

Jeremiah 51:34

To reflect this concept in our modern Bibles, “delight” was the word adopted by the earliest biblical translators. The first Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, is aware of both meanings. In Genesis 2:8, we find “a paradise in Eden” (παράδεισον ἐν Εδεμ), but in Genesis 3:23, we find “a paradise of bounty” (τοῦ παραδείσου τῆς τρυφῆς). In a much later translation, the Latin Vulgate, we find “garden of voluptuousness” (paradisum voluptatis).

In summary, this word is part of the larger Eden as cosmic mountain motif that grounds this text in a larger design pattern that extends forward to the mountains of Ararat, Bethel, Sinai, and Jerusalem.

The Symbolic Topography of Eden

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<th>Cosmic Geography in Genesis 2-3</th>
<th>Tabernacle/Temple</th>
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<td>Skies</td>
<td>Cosmic mountain the middle of the garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>The garden in Eden</td>
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<td>Trees</td>
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<td>Animals</td>
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<td>Humans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>Sea</td>
<td>The land outside the garden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remember the three-tiered cosmos (skies-land-sea) depicted in Genesis 1? The garden of Eden also connects with the three-tiered design found in Genesis 1 and the tabernacle and temple.

Primeval Hills of the Ancient World

The concept of Eden described as a cosmic mountain temple would not be unfamiliar to ancient readers. The great pyramids of Egypt, ziggurats of Babylon, and ancient palace gardens all pay homage to these concepts.
The pyramids have the form and also (in the understanding of the ancient Near East) the character of the primeval hill. In the pyramid of Djoser, these aspects coincide with that of a double staircase, which is probably intended to enable the ascent of the deceased into the heavenly world. The Egyptian words for “climb” and “ascend” are determined by a double stair.

The title of the step-temple of Babylon is “house of the foundation of heaven and earth” (cf. Psalm 78:69). The temple is the center and mainstay of creation.


Adam and Eve: Priests of the Garden

If the biblical authors wanted us to see the garden as a temple, then an obvious implication is that Adam and Eve were to be seen as priests. The temple is where heaven and earth unite and humanity serves as God’s royal representatives or priests. The following passages confirm this idea.

- Humanity’s work is described in priestly vocabulary: Genesis 2:15, Numbers 18:1-8 (cf. also Numbers 3:7-8 and 8:26): tending to the holy space and not “drawing near” outside of appointed times.
- The map of Genesis 2:4-18 imitates that of the holy space: Eden > garden > middle of garden with tree of life. Courtyard > tabernacle > holy of holies (see also Numbers 18:1-8).
- The trees of knowledge and of life (Genesis 2:9) are symbolized by the menorah in the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 25:31-40).
- The danger of the “middle” of the garden is like the danger of “holy ground” for Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 35:2), Moses on Sinai (Exodus 3:5), and the Israelites in Sinai (Exodus 19:1-12).
- The tree of “knowing” good and evil in the middle of the garden (Genesis 2:8) that is not to be approached (Genesis 2:17) is like the tablets of the Torah placed in the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies (Deuteronomy 31:26), which is Israel’s “wisdom” (Deuteronomy 4:4-6) and “life” (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).
**Rebellion: The New Normal**

Knowing their original priestly function makes Adam and Eve’s rebellion in Genesis 3 all the more tragic. They take and eat from the tree and spread, not Eden, but mistrust, violence, and death to the whole world. God has to exile humanity from the ordered Eden temple into the chaos of the wilderness. The rest of the biblical story is about the hope for a new humanity to be reunited with God’s realm of order and life to “work and to serve” and rule as God’s image in the temple.

“The entire book of Genesis is designed according to an archetypal pattern, related to what we may call ‘cultic cosmology.’ In short, sacred space is poetically conceived in the Bible as a world-mountain surrounded by the primeval waters. At the cloud-covered summit of the mountain is the temple, the dwelling of God, and at the base are the chaos waters, underneath which lies Sheol, the realm of the dead. The waters of life flow from the summit of the mountain, representing the outgoing nature of God’s life-giving presence. But humanity’s movement away from the sacred mountain, and therefore away from God, is depicted as a descent away from the source of life (Eden) toward death (wilderness, chaos). And conversely, movement toward God is expressed as an ascent from death and into life.”


**Eden Outpost: The Old Testament Story Continues**

We’ve only covered a few pages of the Bible so far with the two complementary creation accounts. The temple theme continues to develop as we continue on in the biblical story. First, we see God plant an Eden-outpost in the wilderness after the Exodus event (the tabernacle). Several hundred years later, the nation of Israel is established in the land and another outpost arises on another mountain (the Jerusalem temple). Both Eden-outposts include parallels to the creation accounts.

- Patterns of seven in the tabernacle/temple design (See table in Section 1)
- Blessing, rest, gold, jewels, and cherubim (e.g., Exodus 25:1-8, 31-40; 1 Kings 8:29-32)
- Priestly figure reentering Eden once a year on the day of atonement (e.g., Leviticus 16)

In summary, the tabernacle and the temple are to be seen as diminished Edens in a world of chaos.

**Outpost Destroyed**

Unfortunately, Israel’s leaders play out Adam and Eve’s rebellion, wanting to rule on their own terms. The temple system becomes corrupt, the nation ends up in exile, and the temple structure is destroyed (e.g., 2 Chronicles 36:15-21, Jeremiah 52). What happened to God’s plan to reestablish his dwelling in creation?

This is the question many of the biblical prophets wrestled with. When the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by Babylon, the prophets envisioned a new temple, where God would begin again to recreate his world.

“Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” declares the Lord. “Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. The Lord will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

“Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He is aroused from His holy habitation.”

Zechariah 2:10-13

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of the gate that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.

Ezekiel 47:1-2
The Israelites returned to the land, and they rebuilt the temple (Ezra 1:2-3; 3:10-11). However, it didn’t turn out the way the prophets had hoped (Ezra 3:10-11). Due to opposition and lack of motivation, the temple took over 20 years to build, and it was way less impressive than Solomon’s temple. Later Israelite prophets said that this temple was hopelessly corrupt (Malachi). As we close the Old Testament, we are still waiting for the promise of God’s ultimate temple.

Jesus: The Temple Reality

The New Testament Story

We’ve arrived at the story of Jesus! He claimed that through him, God’s presence and rule would come to our world in a new way. He presented himself as a new kind of priest, but Jesus wasn’t a priest, and he didn’t work in the temple. In fact, there was a temple in Jerusalem at the time, but it had been rebuilt by Herod the Great—an evil ruler.

Jesus declared that the Jerusalem temple was corrupt and that his body was the real place where Heaven and Earth united (e.g., John 1:1-2; 14; 2:13-22). He was the reality the temple was supposed to point to all along.

The People of Jesus Become the Temple

After his resurrection, Jesus said that God’s presence would come to dwell in and among his followers, so that they could become minitemples. The promise comes true, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell amongst the first believers during Pentecost.
After this event, the good news spread throughout the ancient world. Communities of people sprung up where God could rest and rule. Some of the New Testament authors picked up on the deeper meaning behind this, describing the vision of the church as a temple. It was no longer a building, but people!

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Looking Forward to Renewed Creation

At the end of the biblical story, do we get a new physical temple? In Revelation, we read about the new creation; however, a temple structure is lacking. Why? There is no need for a temple building “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22). This was God’s plan all along. We have a glorious future to look forward to, where all creation will be the place where God rests and rules the world with his people.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He “said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Revelation 21:1-7

Sources


