

GOD'S TEMPLE: A CENTRAL MOTIF OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Zachary S. Maxcey¹

Introduction

The Lord has masterfully woven many themes or motifs throughout the tapestry of His Holy Word, and He has 'threaded' each to communicate profound spiritual truth to His people. The *temple of God* is one such motif laced all the way through the pages of Scripture.² What profound spiritual truths does the temple motif convey? First, it communicates, as Allen Ross has written, that mankind, not the Lord Almighty, needs "a sanctuary where they could come together and focus on him in their worship" and experience "the majesty, glory, holiness, and beauty of the real presence of God."³ Further, "God did not need a house. After all, as Solomon later said, the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him, so how much less a temple (1 Kings 8:27)!"⁴ Second, the temple motif demonstrates that God has established *a specific location* to receive *covenantally-prescribed worship* from His people. Finally, it conveys that it is within the precincts of His holy temple that God offers the ultimate gift to His covenant people: a manifestation of Himself. As a result, the temple motif performs a central function in public worship as each temple is a God-ordained, covenantally-established sanctuary wherein the Lord God chooses to sovereignly manifest Himself to His covenant people and receive their service and worship.

The purpose of this writing is to demonstrate from the Scriptures that the temple motif does perform a central function in the public worship of God in both the Old and New Canons of Scripture. By establishing that the heavens and the earth together constitute the Lord's cosmic temple, I will introduce several Old Testament sanctuaries which are microcosms of that Celestial Temple. **First**, however, is the cosmos itself as the Celestial Temple of God; then, **second**, the Garden of Eden; **third**, the Tabernacle; **fourth**, the Temple of Solomon; **fifth**, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ultimate Temple of God and **the** fulfillment of all preceding Old Testament sanctuaries; including, **finally**, the Church as God's Temple by virtue of her union with Christ.

The Celestial Temple of the Cosmos

The entire universe, the biblical cosmos, includes the heavens and the earth, and functions as God's macrocosmic Celestial Temple. Genesis 1:1 declares: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Concerning the cosmos, Meredith Kline states that "the cosmic structure was built as a habitation for the Creator himself."⁵ Elsewhere, he writes that the Lord created the heavens and

¹Zachary S. Maxcey is a Masters of Divinity student at Providence Theological Seminary in Colorado Springs, CO (www.ptsco.org). This paper was written for PT608: Pastoral Theology – The Theology & Practice of Public Worship.

²In writing about the temple motif in Scripture, I have drawn extensively from the writings of Gregory Beale, Meredith Kline, and Allen Ross, being in biblical agreement with these authors.

³Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 171.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations For A Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 27.

the earth as “a holy temple of his Glory.”⁶ Indeed, Scripture confirms Kline’s insightful statements. For instance, the Almighty proclaims in Isaiah 66:1 that “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool.” The prophet Amos also asserts that God “builds His upper chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vaulted dome over the earth” (Amos 9:6). Righteous Job describes Yahweh as anthropomorphically walking “on the vault of heaven” (Job 22:14).

There are numerous Scripture references which state that the Lord stretches out the curtains of the heavens. For example, Job 9:8 declares that God “alone stretches out the heavens.” The Psalmist pictures the Lord as “stretching out heaven like a tent curtain” (Ps 104:1). Moreover, Isaiah writes that Yahweh “stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in” (Isa 40:12). Perhaps it is odd-sounding to modern ears, yet these verses emanate with temple language from the biblical era. Michael Heiser affirms this when he writes, “elsewhere in the biblical world, the divine beings of the divine council were considered to live in tents.”⁷ When the Lord God created the heavens, He divided them into three distinct compartments. The Hebrew word *šāmāyim*, translated ‘heavens’ or ‘sky,’ is used in three specific ways throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 1:20, *šāmāyim* describes the earth’s atmosphere, where “the birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens (*hāšāmāyim*).”⁸ In Genesis 1:17, this word speaks of outer space where the Lord placed the stars and the planets “in the expanse of the heavens (*hāšāmāyim*) to give light on the earth.” In Isaiah 66:1, *šāmāyim* indicates the heaven of heavens or third heaven where God Himself dwells. The New Testament confirms the Old Testament concept of three heavens, when the Apostle Paul describes himself as being “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor 12:2). Concerning the “three heavens,” the late Ernest Martin writes:

Numerous texts show that the “first heaven” is the atmosphere where the birds fly and where all weather phenomena take place. The “second heaven,” however, was beyond the earth’s atmosphere and embraced all the visible planets and stars, including the sun and the moon. The “third heaven,” that the apostle Paul referred to in II Corinthians 12:1-4 that he called Paradise, was that of God’s official residence in his heavenly region which was separate from the other two heavens.⁹

Turning our attention to the heaven of heavens, the cosmic inner sanctuary and throne room of God Almighty, observe that the Book of Revelation describes the incomprehensible “spiritual realities” of the third heaven in terms of “physical objects.”¹⁰ These objects are replicated in the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle, and the Temple in Jerusalem. For example, the Apostle John saw the very throne of God encircled by four “living creatures” or cherubim (Rev 4:6) which were “before the throne” of God. “The seven lamps,” a heavenly menorah, “correspond to the lampstand in the tabernacle with its seven bowls, and the sea represents the laver, now calm as crystal, controlled and peaceful in God’s perfect domain.”¹¹ The temple motif can be repeatedly seen within the later chapters of Revelation as well:

It says the Lord spreads his tent over his people (7:15), that there is a golden altar of incense before the throne that represents the prayers of the saints (8:3)....Later, when the

⁶Ibid., 63.

⁷Michael Heiser, *Chapter 12: God’s Address (Chapter of Unpublished Book)*; accessed 24 March 2010; available from <http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/GodsAddress.pdf>; Internet, 6.

⁸Although *hāšāmāyim* may look like a different word, it is only *šāmāyim* with the Hebrew definite article *hā* (the) attached to the beginning of the word.

⁹Ernest L. Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot* (Portland, OR: Associates for Scriptural Knowledge, 2000), 252.

¹⁰Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 188.

¹¹Ibid., 188.

temple is opened in heaven, there is revealed the ark of his testament (11:19), which in Revelation 15:5 is called the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony. So in the heavenly vision of Revelation, there are spiritual correspondences to the earthly objects.¹²

The book of Hebrews also describes the third heaven as the heavenly “Mount Zion” where “myriads of angels” and “the spirits of righteous men made perfect” bask in the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 12:22-24). Note that mountains themselves are characteristic of the temples of Scriptures as they repeatedly appear in connection with the same.

With the establishment of the cosmos serving as Yahweh’s macrocosmic Celestial Temple, it is necessary now to define the purpose of this grand sanctuary. **First**, *the Scriptures clearly indicate that the Celestial Temple serves as the cosmic command center of the Living God*. For example, the Psalmist declares that the Lord is “enthroned in the heavens” (Ps 123:1). Kline similarly asserts that “heaven and earth were erected as a house of God, a palace of the Great King, the seat of sovereignty of the Lord.”¹³ The cosmos is a “royal construction” and “the throne room of the King of Kings,” and it is “from the heights of this holy cosmic house that God rules, robed in heaven’s majesty.”¹⁴ **Second**, *it is within the precincts of His cosmic temple where the Lord manifests Himself and receives the worship of His creation*. In Revelation 5:11-12, the Apostle John testifies that he “heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’” John further states that he heard “every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them” saying, “‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever’” (Rev 5:13).

The Garden of Eden

The Garden of Eden, like the cosmos, was established as a temple under the covenantal stipulations which the Lord forged with Adam. Though not immediately apparent at first, there is evidence within the biblical account to justify calling the garden a temple. The Scriptures repeatedly describe this primeval paradise with language characteristically used of biblical temples. Gregory Beale fittingly describes the garden as “a non-architectural temple,”¹⁵ that is the garden functioned as a temple without having the physical structure of one. Kline likewise insists that “Paradise was a sanctuary, a temple-garden.”¹⁶ He further states that “the garden of Eden was a microcosmic, earthly version of the cosmic temple and the site of a visible, local projection of the heavenly temple.”¹⁷ For instance, like the Celestial Temple of the cosmos, Eden was divided into three distinct compartments:

The first and principal portion was its inner area where God periodically met with Adam and Eve. This interior region...[was] where God was supposed to have his residence. The second section of the Garden was the remainder of the outer Garden area and it had boundaries that separated the Garden from the rest of the Land of Eden....Outside the

¹²Ibid.

¹³Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 27.

¹⁴Ibid., 27.

¹⁵Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 383.

¹⁶Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 48.

¹⁷Ibid., 49.

Garden one would come to the territory that was called the Land of Eden itself. This Land of Eden surrounded the Garden, and in the Book of Genesis, this was called “the Land of Eden” proper.¹⁸

In addition, the ‘temple-garden’ reflected the heavenly Mount Zion of God’s cosmic temple due to the fact that it was situated upon a mountain.¹⁹ Ezekiel 28:13-14 declares that “Eden, the garden of God” (v. 13) was situated “on the holy mountain of God” (v. 14). Ezekiel 28:18 also implies the existence of “sanctuaries,” that is, holy places within Eden as well.

The second and third chapters of Genesis richly resonate with numerous temple motifs which confirm that the Garden of Eden was in fact God’s earthly sanctuary; six Edenic motifs of which follow. **The first motif** is found in the Hebrew word for garden (*gan*), which is defined as “a plot of ground protected by a wall or a hedge.”²⁰ Thus, the Garden of Eden was a small enclosed area, may be viewed as foreshadowing the small enclosure known as the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple. **The second motif** is found in Genesis 3:24 which demonstrates that the entrance to Paradise was “at the east of the garden of Eden,” as the Lord “stationed the cherubim” there “to guard the way to the tree of life.” The ‘eastern entrance’ would also be replicated in both the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple. Observe that “the entrance to Eden was from the east (Gen. 3:24), which was also the direction from which one entered the tabernacle and later temples of Israel.”²¹

A third Edenic motif which would reappear in subsequent temples was the presence of precious stones and metals in or near the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 2:12, the Spirit states that Havilah, a land adjacent to or within Eden, contained “good” gold, and “the bdellium and the onyx stone are there.” “In the literature of the ancient world, precious gems were included in the gardens of the gods,” demonstrating the “richness of the dwelling place of the gods.”²² And so, the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple were both richly endowed with gold, silver, bronze, and precious stones. **The fourth temple motif** which characterized this primeval paradise was the abundance of living water. Note that “one feature of the garden was life-giving water.”²³ The Lord established “a subterranean source of water (*’ēd*, “mist,” NIV “streams”)” which would “go up from the earth and water all the fertile soil (Gen 2:6).”²⁴ In Genesis 2:10, the Spirit also informs us that “a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers.” The names of these four rivers are the “Pishon” (Gen 2:11), the “Gihon” (Gen 2:13), the “Tigris” (Gen 2:14), and the “Euphrates” (Gen 2:14). It is not without significance that the spring which flowed out from the Temple precincts in Jerusalem was also named the Gihon (1 Kgs 1:33; 1 Kgs 1:38; 2 Chr 32:30; 2 Chr 33:14).

The plentiful presence of trees within the Garden of Eden constitutes **a fifth motif** that paradise was in fact God’s earthly temple. Genesis 2:9 states that “out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food.” Kline writes that Eden was “well-watered and fertile,” and in this garden “grew all manner of trees, the glory of the vegetation kingdom.”²⁵ Likewise, another states that “the garden of Eden was therefore a place of

¹⁸Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*, 249.

¹⁹Previously, it was noted that that mountains are characteristic of the temples of Scriptures.

²⁰R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 168.

²¹Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 74.

²²Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 97.

²³*Ibid.*, 93.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 52.

beauty as well as a place of provision,” which was “displayed by the fact that the garden was filled with every kind of tree that was beautiful in appearance and good for food.”²⁶ Two trees in particular, those in the very middle of the garden, garner special attention; these are, of course, “the tree of life” and “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:9). The Tree of Life was “designed to be a source of perpetual life.”²⁷ It is interesting to note that “the Tree of Life was reckoned by the early Jews to have been the almond tree,” since the almond tree “showed the greatest longevity of life each year...being the first to bloom in springtime and the last to lose its leaves.”²⁸ As for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam was forbidden to eat of it “as the knowledge of good and evil belonged to God.”²⁹ The Scriptures may indicate that the forbidden tree was a fig tree, as Adam and Eve “sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings” after partaking of its fruit (Gen 3:7).

Perhaps the greatest indicator that the Garden of Eden was God’s earthly temple lies in **the sixth Edenic motif**—the fact that the LORD God walked “in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8). In other words, God “constituted the Edenic temple” by being “present in his theophanic Glory.”³⁰ Yahweh not only “stationed in Eden” His “localized, visible Presence,”³¹ but He also chose Paradise “to be the focal site of his throne-presence among men.”³² Within the precincts of His ‘temple-garden,’ God sovereignly manifested Himself and walked with Adam and Eve. Our first parents’ experienced a blessed communion with the Lord.

God was with man, man’s dwelling-place was God’s dwelling-place. That was the greatest glory of paradise and the supreme and ultimate blessedness of human life. The covenant servant had been created for friendship and fellowship with his Lord. He was qualified for his holy communion by the nature with which God’s creating hand endowed him. And he found to his delight that his transcendent Maker was not a god far off, but the immanent Immanuel.³³

Clearly, the Scriptures present strong evidence that the Garden of Eden performed a central role in the public worship of God with Adam prior to the Fall.

It is noteworthy that within the precincts of His ‘temple-garden,’ Yahweh established a *covenantal relationship* with Adam specifying stipulations which God would require of him. Concerning this “covenantal revelation,” Kline states the following:

Consonant with the fact that the garden was the place of divine Theophany, it was the site of special oracular revelation. It was the holy place where man heard the voice of God speaking to him, telling him what he must know of God’s covenant beyond the covenantal revelation available through creation, the revelation which he found within him and in the world outside, instructing him so that he would know how to glorify and enjoy his Creator forever.³⁴

²⁶Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 99.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 100.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 102.

³⁰Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1980; reprint 1999), 35.

³¹Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 47.

³²Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 35-36.

³³Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 60.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 48.

The Spirit reveals three principle verses which together constitute the primary stipulations of this covenantal relationship which may be termed a pre-fall covenant. **The first stipulation** of this pre-fall covenant was that the Lord placed Adam in Paradise “to serve” Him and “keep” the ‘temple-garden’ (Gen 2:15). The Hebrew word translated ‘to serve’ (or frequently ‘to cultivate’) in Genesis 2:15 is *āvad*, which “is used frequently for spiritual service, specifically serving the LORD (Deut 4:19) and for the duties of the Levites (see Num 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26).”³⁵ This particular verb is “the highest designation of the Hebrew in his engagement with the worship of God.”³⁶ Moreover, *āvad* conveys “the relationship of servant and kindly master,” and “this bond was thought of and described in terms of privilege and honor more than of inhuman bondage.”³⁷ The Hebrew word translated ‘to keep’ in Genesis 2:15 is *šāmar*. Ross states that this verb “can be translated “keep, observe, watch, guard,” but its religious use is that of observing spiritual duties or keeping the commands (Lev 18:5).”³⁸ *šāmar* is also used to describe “the duty of the Levites to guard the tabernacle.”³⁹ Like the Levitical priests, Adam was to ‘serve’ (*āvad*) the Lord and ‘guard’ (*šāmar*) the holy sanctuary, which was in his case the Garden of Eden. Thus, Adam, the primogenitor of the human race, was a king-priest who was created to direct the worship of Yahweh in the ‘temple-garden.’

The second principal stipulation of the pre-fall covenant was God’s commission that Adam and his offspring multiply, fill, and rule over the earth (Gen 1:28). Adam “as created was already crowned with glory and honor” and “was invested with official authority to exercise dominion as priest-king in God’s earthly courts.”⁴⁰ Observe that “God reigns over the cosmos, creating it a holy temple of his Glory; therefore, his human image-bearer must exercise dominion (under God) over the world, sanctifying it for the presence of the Creator-Lord.”⁴¹ God had commissioned Adam as a king-priest with a very specific purpose: “to deliver over the world subdued in fulfillment of the cultural mandate to the glory of his holy Creator Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15:28).”⁴² Beale even proposes that “it is plausible to suggest that they were to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered the whole earth.”⁴³ He continues:

The intention seems to be that Adam was to widen the boundaries of the Garden in ever increasing circles by extending the order of the garden sanctuary into the inhospitable outer spaces. The outward expansion would include the goal of spreading the glorious presence of God. This would occur especially by Adam’s progeny born in his image and thus reflecting God’s image and the light of his presence, as they continued to obey the mandate given to their parents and went out to subdue the outer country.⁴⁴

It is clear that Adam was to expand the precincts of this ‘garden-temple’ to cover the whole earth, fill the earth with king-priests, and direct the worship of Yahweh from Paradise itself.

The third stipulation of the pre-fall covenant was God’s command, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for

³⁵Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 105.

³⁶Ralph P. Martin, *Worship In The Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964; reprint 1974, 2001), 11.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 105.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 31.

⁴¹Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 63.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 85.

⁴³Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 81-82.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 85.

in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:16-17). Adam, the God-established king-priest in Eden, was not only the primogenitor of the whole human race, but he also served as the mediator between God and mankind in the pre-fall covenant. As a result, when Adam, our covenantal representative ate of the forbidden fruit, the Lord immediately and justly imputed both the guilt and the penalty of his sin to the entire human race (Rom 5:12-21). Since Adam and Eve were now spiritually dead and corrupted by sin, the Lord promptly drove them out of the precincts of the Garden of Eden, His earthly temple. After the Great Fall, “the former priests of Eden were now regarded as themselves potential intruders, against whom the sanctuary must be guarded, and “the priestly guardianship, originally assigned to man, was now committed to the cherubim.”⁴⁵ Likewise, Ross states that “the pair was expelled from the garden, now to “*work* (i.e., *serve*) *the ground*” (*la ’āvōd* in 3:23), and in their place the cherubs were stationed to “*guard the way*” (*lishmōr* in 3:24) to the Tree of Life, for sinful humans could no longer have access to it.”⁴⁶ These guardian cherubim constitute yet another ‘temple motif’ which would later reappear in both the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple.

The Tabernacle

“And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (Exod 25:8). With these marvelous words, Yahweh commissioned the construction of the Tabernacle as His mobile ‘tent-temple’ under the Old or Mosaic Covenant. *God’s Word testifies the Tabernacle to be a symbolic recreation of both the Celestial Temple of the Cosmos and the Garden of Eden.* Like the cosmos which Scripture describes as a heavenly tent, the tabernacle was “a portable **tent structure** that served as the location for Israelite worship during the wilderness wanderings under Moses, and then Joshua”⁴⁷ [emphasis mine]. Like Eden which contained gold, bdellium, and the onyx stone, many implements within the Tabernacle “were made of gold,” and “onyx stones decorated both the tabernacle and temple, as well as the high priestly garments.”⁴⁸ Additionally, the three compartments of the Tabernacle (i.e. the Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies) corresponded to the three heavens of the Celestial Temple and the three divisions of the Edenic sanctuary.

The overall floor plan of the tabernacle with its divisions into outer court, holy place, and holy of holies reproduced on the horizontal plane the sectioning of the cosmic temple into earth, heaven, and heaven of heavens. And each of the tabernacle’s three divisions, not just the holy of holies, represented heaven and earth in its vertical dimension, the court standing under the open sky and the holy place, along with the holy of holies, under the symbolic heavens of the tabernacle coverings.⁴⁹

The Tabernacle served as the God-ordained sanctuary of the Old Covenant where Yahweh chose to sovereignly manifest Himself to Israel, His Old Covenant people. The Tabernacle or “tent of meeting” (Exod 27:21; Exod 40:2; Lev 1:1) was the location where the Lord would “dwell” (Num 5:3) and meet “with the sons of Israel” (Exod 29:43). This ‘tent-temple’ was “that place where heaven and earth intersected, for there God chose to be present with his people and revealed his divine glory.”⁵⁰ The Tabernacle has also been described as “the home of Yahweh” and “the focal

⁴⁵Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 137.

⁴⁶Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 42. It is important to note that *lishmōr* is an infinitive construct form of the Hebrew verb *šāmar* (to guard).

⁴⁷Heiser, *Chapter 12: God’s Address*, 7.

⁴⁸Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 73.

⁴⁹Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 41.

⁵⁰Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

point for the presence of Yahweh.”⁵¹ Regarding God’s decision to manifest Himself within this ‘tent-temple,’ Beale writes, “The same Hebrew verbal form (stem) *mithallēk* (hithpael) used for God’s ‘walking back and forth’ in the Garden (Gen 3:8), also describes God’s presence in the tabernacle (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14[15]; 2 Sam 7:6-7).”⁵² He continues: “Since the Old Testament temple was the localized dwelling of God’s special revelatory presence on earth, the temple’s symbolic correspondence with the cosmos pointed to an eschatological goal of God’s presence tabernacling throughout the earth.”⁵³ At this particular juncture, a brief description of the Tabernacle’s structure and various implements is in order.

The author of Hebrews informs us that the Tabernacle was “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things;” he further states that “Moses was warned *by God*” to “make all things according to the pattern which was shown” to him “on the mountain” (Heb 8:5). Note that the structure and implements of the ‘tent-temple’ replicate numerous temple motifs embodied in not only the Celestial Temple but also the ‘temple-garden’ of Eden. For instance, the entrance to the inner court was on the eastern side of the Tabernacle complex (Exod 27:13-16), thus replicating the eastern entrance of the Garden of the Eden (Gen 3:24). The first implement which an Israelite encountered upon entering the Tabernacle was the brazen altar of sacrifice. Upon this altar, the priests of Israel offered the prescribed Old Covenant sacrifices (Lev 1-3), which “prefigured the death of Jesus the Messiah.”⁵⁴ “Between the tent of meeting and the altar” stood the bronze laver which was used for the ceremonial “washing” of the priests (Exod 30:18). “Washing with water” symbolically portrayed “the cleansing from frequent defilements in the world,” which is “necessary for fellowship and service” with God.⁵⁵ This brazen wash basin was “an image of the heavenly sea,” which the Apostle John describes as “a sea of glass, like crystal” (Rev 4:6) before God’s throne.⁵⁶

Stationed within the Holy Place, the second compartment of the Tabernacle, were three pieces of sacred furniture: the table of showbread, the menorah or lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. The golden table of showbread was positioned “on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil” (Exod 40:22). Concerning the table, Ross states that “the bread and the table signified communion with God.”⁵⁷ He continues: “On the one hand, the bread was a thank offering from the tribes, a grateful recognition of God’s provision of food; and on the other hand, the bread was a reminder of their dependence on God.”⁵⁸

The term *showbread* comes from a Hebrew word that means *bread of the face* or *bread of presence*, because the loaves were set before the face or presence of Jehovah (who dwelt in the holy of holies) as a meal offering from the children of Israel (Lev. 24:8). God gazed with delight on the pure bread offering that sat continually before His face....The showbread was a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, who is the true bread of life, giving unending sustenance to all who partake of Him.⁵⁹

2007), 121.

⁵¹Heiser, *Chapter 12: God’s Address*, 7.

⁵²Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 66.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 170.

⁵⁴Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 193.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 192.

⁵⁶Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 41.

⁵⁷Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 194.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹David M. Levy, *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah- Its Sacrifices, Services, and Priesthood* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1993), 53.

Standing opposite the golden table on the south side of the Holy place was the golden menorah or lampstand. This beautiful artifice was hammered from a single piece of pure gold, and it had two sets of three branches flanking its central shaft. Fashioned into each branch were multiple “almond blossoms,” almond bulbs, and almond flowers (Exod 25: 31-49). The lampstand “figuratively depicted an *almond* tree, and not just any *almond tree*, but the one that represented the Tree of Life.”⁶⁰ Not only was the menorah a symbolic ‘recreation’ of the Tree of Life from Paradise, but it also served as an earthly representation of the ‘heavenly’ menorah, that is the “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Rev 4:5). Furthermore, the lampstand ultimately typified Christ, as He is “the true light that reveals the way to the Father” and “the true light that shines in darkness, giving light to everyone who comes into the world.”⁶¹ The final piece of sacred furniture in the Holy Place was the golden altar of incense positioned directly in front of the veil ‘guarding’ the way into the Holy of Holies. Like the lampstand, the golden altar was an earthly facsimile of a ‘heavenly’ artifice, which in this case was the altar of the third heaven (Rev 6:9; 8:3), symbolizing the priestly ministry of prayer.

Intercessory prayer was a regular ministry of the priesthood, and it is still a spiritual duty of the servants of God in Christian worship. Jesus is our Great High Priest who is in heaven today in the presence of the Father to make intercession for us based on his atoning sacrifice (Heb. 7:24-27). But the people of God are also to make intercession, especially as part of their priestly worship, ***for the imagery of the altar of incense is used in Revelation 5:8 for the prayers of the saints [emphasis mine].***⁶²

The innermost sanctum of the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies, where Yahweh visibly manifested His presence in the form of the Shekinah Glory. ‘Guarding’ the way into the Most Holy Place was the inner veil, which was made from “blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen” and covered “with cherubim” (Exod 26:31). This splendid curtain with its embroidered angels represented not only the four “living creatures” or cherubim who guard the very throne of God in heaven (Rev 4:6), but also the cherubim whom the Lord stationed in the ‘temple-garden’ to “guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:24). Regarding the veil, Beale writes:

The figures of the cherubim woven into the curtain that guards the holy of holies reflects the real cherubim in heaven who presently and in the future will stand guard around God’s throne in the heavenly temple....Furthermore, no human could enter the inner sanctum and look upon the luminous divine glory. Even the high priest, who could enter only once a year, offered incense which formed a ‘cloud’ so thick that he could not see God’s glorious appearance.⁶³

Beyond the cherubim-embroidered curtain was stationed the Ark of the Covenant. The Scriptures declare that the Lord communed with Israel “from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Exod 25:22; Num. 7:89). The Scriptures also state that Yahweh sat “above the cherubim” (1 Sam 4:4) and was “enthroned above the cherubim” (2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15). The Ark of the Covenant was “God’s ‘footstool’ and thus corresponded to the earth-footstool in the cosmic temple, while the higher region of the holy of holies where the Glory was enthroned in the midst of the cherubim corresponded to the heaven and heaven of heavens.”⁶⁴ Likewise, Beale has written that “the ark itself was understood to be the footstool of God’s heavenly throne.”⁶⁵ In addition to

⁶⁰Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, 394.

⁶²Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 195.

⁶³Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 35.

⁶⁴Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 40-41.

⁶⁵Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 35.

serving as Yahweh's earthly throne, the ark was where atonement was made for the nation of Israel on Yom Kippur.

The use of this ark clarifies the symbolism: during worship on the Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled on the lid, the place of propitiation — at the feet of the Majesty as it were....In the New Testament fulfillment of these things, Paul declares that God set his Son to be a propitiation for our sins, so that through faith in his blood we might have the remission of sins (Rom. 3:25) and new life in him (5:17-19).⁶⁶

The Scriptures strongly affirm that the Tabernacle served not only as the center of public worship for the nation of Israel but also the center of everyday life. Numbers 2:2 states that “the sons of Israel...shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance.” This tent structure functioned as “the focal point of Israel’s community and life, with the tribes dwelling around its four sides.”⁶⁷ The central location of the Tabernacle served as “a visual reminder” to the people of Israel that their lives were to be centered around Yahweh, the one true God.⁶⁸ It was the place where the Israelites presented themselves to the Lord, where they worshipped Him, and where they received atonement for individual and national sins. Regarding the Tabernacle’s centrality, Levy writes.

Although the Tabernacle made God accessible to the Israelites, He was only approachable in holiness. The structure and service of the Tabernacle showed a sinful people how they could come before a holy God in worship and service (Ex. 29:42-43, 45), offer sacrifice for sin (Lev. 1-7; 16:17), and receive instruction and counsel from the Word of God. Thus, it was a graphic portrayal of God’s redemptive program for Israel.⁶⁹

In addition, the sheer splendor of the Tabernacle complex pointed to its unique and central role in Israel’s public worship and daily life. All other structures within the Camp of Israel were eclipsed by its pure and utter magnificence:

The valuable metals reminded worshippers of God’s exalted majesty and the beauty of his holiness. The most valuable metals of this world and the beautiful fabrics and embroidery work could only begin to reflect his glory. Because his presence was displayed in this way, it told the people that he was to be the central focus of their devotion, the object of their spiritual desire, and the transforming power in their lives. So the shrine dominated the camp not only by its central location but also by its great beauty and significance.⁷⁰

The divine cloud of glory which rested above the Tabernacle structure strongly points to the centrality of the ‘tent-temple’ in Israel’s public worship of God. Numbers 9:15 declares “the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning.” The visible manifestation of God’s presence in the cloud above the ‘tent-sanctuary’ indicates that the Tabernacle was **the** location where God would meet with Israel, His Old Covenant people.

The Temple of Solomon

⁶⁶Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 195.

⁶⁷Levy, *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah*, 17.

⁶⁸Ibid., 16.

⁶⁹Ibid., 17.

⁷⁰Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 192.

The Temple of Solomon was established under the Davidic Covenant as the God-established sanctuary in Jerusalem which would supersede the Tabernacle. Generally speaking, the Temple was a more lavishly furnished and expanded facsimile of the 'tent-temple' of the Old Covenant. Like the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple was partitioned into three distinct compartments (i.e. the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies), housed the same sacred furniture, and served as God's dwelling place among the people of Israel. Furthermore, the Temple, like the Tabernacle, was "built to be a pattern of God's heavenly abode," and it "also represented the Garden of Eden in which our first parents were placed."⁷¹

Note the 'expanded' temple motifs which distinguish the Temple of Solomon from the Tabernacle. First, it mirrored the cosmic temple and the Garden of Eden as it was also situated upon a mountain, the earthly Mount Zion (Ps 76:1-2). The Temple "was naturally associated with a cosmic mountain dwelling" as "it was situated in Jerusalem on Mount Zion."⁷² Another 'temple motif' which reemerged in Solomon's Temple was the presence of living water in the temple area. The source of this 'living water' was the Spring of Gihon which was located *within* the Temple complex. Concerning the spring, Martin notes that "it was well known in Jewish traditional teachings that the Gihon Spring at Jerusalem was named after the Gihon River, the essential stream that finally left the Garden of Eden and debouched into the Persian Gulf."⁷³ Elsewhere, he writes:

It was essential in Temple symbolism...that a natural spring had to be located within the Temple grounds. Solomon, and all subsequent rulers in Israel, realized that *spring waters* had to be within the Temple precincts. That is why the Temples (all of them) had to be located over the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem. The reason the name "Gihon" was given to this natural spring is because one of the rivers that fed water to the original Garden of Eden was also called the Gihon. It has been recognized that the use of Gihon in Jerusalem was to make a symbolic connection to the Gihon River in Eden.⁷⁴

The Scriptures also corroborate that the court of Solomon's temple symbolized the earth and the sea. Proof that the Temple symbolically represented the earth can be found in both its 'expanded' altar of burnt offering and its two bronze pillars. Concerning the altar, Ezekiel 43:14 describes the altar as the "bosom of the earth."⁷⁵ Concerning the pillars, Solomon placed the two "huge columns in front of the temple to represent the pillars of the earth (1 Kings 7:21)."⁷⁶ Evidence that the Temple symbolically represented the sea can be found in its 'expanded' bronze laver, since 1 Kings 7:23-26 describes "the large molten wash-basin" as "the sea."⁷⁷ Another has stated that "the huge laver of water in the courtyard" was "to represent the sea."⁷⁸ As a result, Solomon's Temple abounded with "cosmic symbols that may have been associated in the mind of the Israelite...with the seas and the earth."⁷⁹

⁷¹Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha*, 384.

⁷²Heiser, *Chapter 12: God's Address*, 10.

⁷³Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*, 313.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 254. Interestingly, Martin states on page 149 that "Aristeas in about 285 B.C.E. personally saw the Temple and he stated that a *natural spring* was emanating from its interior." This being so would mean that the true site of the Temple is actually south of the Haram Sharif, the traditional "Temple Mount" where the Dome of the Rock is located.

⁷⁵Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 33.

⁷⁶Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 85.

⁷⁷Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 33.

⁷⁸Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 85.

⁷⁹Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 33.

King Solomon continued to richly develop earlier temple motifs within the confines of the Temple itself. Echoing the splendor of Paradise, he lavishly furnished God's Temple with precious stones and metals. Beale elaborates on its lavish furnishings:

The 'foundation' of the temple building (containing the holy place and the holy of holies) was laid with 'gold', 'silver', and 'precious stones': 'they quarried great stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house' (1 Kgs. 5:17); 'and the inner sanctuary...he overlaid...with pure gold....So Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold' (1 Kgs. 6:20-21). He also covered with gold the altar (1 Kgs. 6:20), the cherubim around the ark (1 Kgs. 6:28), the floor of the temple (1 Kgs. 6:30), and the engraved work on the temple doors (1 Kgs. 6:35).⁸⁰

Additionally, Solomon commanded an embroidered veil to be made for the entrance to the Holy Place. Josephus, who was himself a priest, describes this veil as "a kind of image of the universe," upon which was depicted "all that was mystical in the heavens."⁸¹ This tapestry "represented the entrance into the starry heavens beyond our atmosphere."⁸² This 'second heaven motif' was further expanded with the lampstand and the golden table in the Holy Place taking on additional 'cosmic' significance. Josephus states that "the seven lamps" of the menorah "signified the seven planets" and "the twelve loaves that were upon the table signified the circle of the zodiac and the year."⁸³

Moreover, Solomon further developed the 'garden motif' within the Holy Place which he had "overlaid" with "pure gold" (1 Kgs 6:21). He did this by having his artisans engrave "all the walls of the house round about with carved engravings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, inner and outer sanctuaries" (1 Kgs 6:29). "Cherubim together with ornamental palm trees and calyxes" were skillfully carved "on the inner walls of the holy place of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6:29) and on its doors (1 Kgs 6:32-35) in order to "reflect the primeval cherubim whose duty it was to patrol the entrance leading to 'the tree of life.'"⁸⁴ Solomon engraved "flowers and palm trees in the outer and inner walls of the Holy Place in order that the Holy Place resemble a garden," and he "also carved cherubim onto the walls because cherubim were at first associated with the Garden in Eden where our first parents were placed after their creation."⁸⁵ The 'garden motif' was further expanded with the presence of ten lampstands which "were configured like trees with blossoms (1 Kgs 7:49), thus resembling a small orchard."⁸⁶ For the Holy of Holies, he constructed two massive cherubim overlaid with gold (1 Kgs 6:23-28). These angelic guardians "spread *their* wings over the place of the ark" and "made a covering over the ark and its poles from above" (1 Kgs 8:7). Heiser notes that "the effect of this was that the cherubim wings formed the seat of a throne for Yahweh, and the ark was his footstool."⁸⁷

Like the Tabernacle, the Temple was the center of public worship for the nation of Israel. Prior to the coming of Christ, the Temple "in Jerusalem" was **the** prescribed location for worshipping God (John 4:21-24). There, the people of Israel presented themselves before the presence of the Lord. There, they worshipped Him through sacrifice and praise. There, they received atonement of sin. There, they fellowshiped with the Living God. The Temple in Jerusalem was God's chosen location to dwell among and meet with Israel, His Old Covenant people. The

⁸⁰Ibid., 40.

⁸¹Flavius Josephus, *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. by William Whiston, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 848.

⁸²Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*, 253.

⁸³Josephus. *Josephus: Complete Works*, 848.

⁸⁴Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 71.

⁸⁵Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*, 81.

⁸⁶Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 71.

⁸⁷Heiser, *Chapter 12: God's Address*, 10.

people of Israel were not authorized to worship God anywhere other than His Temple in Jerusalem. In his dedicatory prayer, Solomon underscored the centrality of God's Temple, when he repeatedly implored Yahweh to hear supplications offered "toward **this place**" (1 Kgs 8:29, 33, 35, 38, 41, 44) [**emphasis mine**]. God responded to Solomon's prayer by saying, "My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered **in this place**" (2 Chr 7:15) [**emphasis mine**].

Jesus Christ: The Ultimate Temple of God

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17). Truly, the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate temple of God and the fulfillment of all preceding Old Testament sanctuaries. In his writings, Kline describes Christ as "the archetypal temple."⁸⁸ Similarly, it has been stated that "the New Testament refers to Christ appropriately as a temple," "because he was the beginning of the new creation, especially in his resurrection."⁸⁹ Concerning Christ, Arturo Azurdia writes:

He is the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. He is the ark to rescue the people of God. He is the holy Angel of Yahweh. He is the seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed....**He is the new temple**, the source of living water, the manna that gives life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, and the Father's true vine. He is the spotless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and the resurrected lion from the tribe of Judah. He is the ascended Lord, the ruler of the Church, and the returning Judge of all men [**emphasis mine**].⁹⁰

Christ as God's Temple in the Gospel of Matthew

In His Gospel, the Apostle Matthew testifies that Jesus Christ is God's true Temple in that He assumed two key functions of the Temple. First, under the Old Covenant, the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, was **the** specified location where an Israelite found atonement of sin from Yahweh. However, in the New Covenant, forgiveness of sin is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, as He alone has divine authority "to forgive sins" (Matt 9:6). Christ is not only 'the location' where one finds atonement of sin, but He is also the One who forgives transgressions as well. Second, under the Old Covenant, the Temple served as **the** specified location where the sons of Israel entered into Yahweh's presence. Under the New Covenant, Christ is the ultimate manifestation of the presence of the Living God, as "His name Immanuel," meaning "God with us," clearly indicates (Matt 1:23). Furthermore, the Spirit testifies that no one knows "the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*" (Matt 11:27). "There is now no access to the Father apart from the shed blood of Christ, not now in worship, and not in the future in glory."⁹¹ Not only is Christ the ultimate manifestation of Yahweh's presence to mankind, He is also mankind's only means of access to the Living God.

"I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here" (Matt 12:6). With these words, Christ boldly declared that the splendor and glory of the Temple was totally eclipsed by His presence. Concerning Matthew 12:6, Martin writes: "It follows from this authoritative pronouncement that He is the true Lord of the Temple and its worship is about to cease, as it is

⁸⁸Kline, *Images of the Spirit*, 26.

⁸⁹Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 170, 176.

⁹⁰Arturo G. Azurdia, *Spirit Empowered Preaching: Involving the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 1998; reprint 2003, 2006), 62.

⁹¹Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 193.

superseded by a new order.”⁹² No longer would the Temple in Jerusalem serve as the center of God’s public worship. Instead, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself would now assume this function, as “God’s presence is more manifest in Him than in the Temple.”⁹³ Jesus is greater than the temple, “because he is assuming the role of the sacrificial system, but he is also now, instead of the temple, the unique place on earth where God’s revelatory presence is located. God is manifesting his glorious presence in Jesus in a greater way than it was ever manifested in a physical temple structure.”⁹⁴ Similarly, Ross states that “since the Lord is greater than the temple, he would be the center and means of worship.”⁹⁵

The Lord Jesus Christ had “suddenly come to His temple” (Mal 3:1) and found it “a robbers’ den” (Matt 21:13). Jesus’ cleanses the temple as an act of judgment, because “the Jews had made the temple into an economic enterprise instead of a place of worship. Christ’s radical act in the temple was a parable of judgment against the temple, not only because of its misuse, but because it represented Israel’s rejection of God’s word and commandments and ultimately of Jesus himself.”⁹⁶ In addition, the hearts of the Jewish people were focused upon the Temple and not the Lord who inhabited the Temple. The Temple “was getting in the way of true worship,” as it “focused everyone’s attention on externals.”⁹⁷ Because their hearts were far from the Lord (Matt 15:7), the Jews failed to see that “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth” (Exod 34:6) was in their midst in Jesus Christ. As Riddlebarger states, “God’s people rejected their Messiah, the true temple;” as a result, “God would now reject the earthly temple.”⁹⁸

Once Christ ratified God’s covenant [i.e. the New Covenant] on Calvary, the sacrifices which continued in the temple were an abomination to God. When Christ was cut off from his own, the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. From that moment forward, the temple became desolate, and acceptable sacrifices ceased. The events which transpired in A.D. 70 with the Roman assault on Jerusalem and its temple were now assured⁹⁹ [brackets mine].

Christ as God’s Temple in the Johannine Scriptures

Like Matthew, the Apostle John presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the ultimate Temple of God. On two occasions, he describes the God-Man using ‘tabernacle’ language. In John 1:14, we learn that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” Interestingly, the word (*eskenōsen*) John uses for “dwelt” is derived from a Greek verb (*skēnoō*) which is related to the noun *skēnos* meaning “tent.”¹⁰⁰ A. Blake White comments, “John uses ‘dwelt’ (from *skēnoō* – ‘tabernacled’) to show that God now dwells with his people through Jesus, the true temple.”¹⁰¹ Revelation 21:3 states that “**the tabernacle of God** is among men, and **He** shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and **God Himself** shall be among them” [emphasis mine]. John also refers to Christ as a temple in such

⁹²Martin, *Worship In The Early Church*, 22.

⁹³Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 178.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 385.

⁹⁶Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 179.

⁹⁷Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 383.

⁹⁸Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 167.

⁹⁹Ibid, 156.

¹⁰⁰Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 929.

¹⁰¹A. Blake. White, *The Newness of the New Covenant* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 2008), 30.

passages as Revelation 21:22 and John 2:19-21. Referring to the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:22 states: "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple." In John 2:19-21, Jesus "speaking of the temple of His body" tells the Jews: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Christ likewise fulfills Zechariah 6:12-13, "which repeats that the messianic 'branch...will build the temple of the LORD', and then says he 'will...rule on His throne' and 'be a priest'."¹⁰² Moreover, the beloved disciple presents Christ as the antitype of two particular pieces of Tabernacle/Temple furniture. For instance, the golden table of showbread spoke of Christ as the "bread of life" (John 6:48), "the living bread that came down out of heaven" (John 6:51), and the sacred lampstand typified Christ as "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

Like earlier temples from which flowed streams of 'living water,' the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of 'living water' in the New Covenant. Many New Testament verses verify this particular truth. In His exchange with the Samaritan woman, Jesus said: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." Revelation 7:17 states that "the Lamb," that is Christ, is the One who guides God's people "to springs of the water of life." In John 7:37-39, it is written: "Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying: "If any man is thirsty, **let him come to Me and drink. "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.'"** **But this He spoke of the Spirit,** whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified" [**emphasis mine**]. Observe that "Jesus alludes to the water flowing from Ezekiel's end-time temple in John 7:38 and interprets it of himself and of the Spirit in relation to believers, a passage that further develops the 'living water' theme of John 4."¹⁰³ Jesus' own testimony is that He "fulfilled the image of Ezekiel foretold in chapter 47 of his prophecy, when he spoke of water flowing from the sanctuary."¹⁰⁴ Note that "if Jesus is the true temple of God, he alone gives us the 'living water' which takes away the thirst of human sin and longing."¹⁰⁵ The Son of God dispensed His 'living water,' when He baptized His followers with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2 and in its Apostolic extensions: Acts 8; 10; 19).

Like Matthew, the Apostle John also describes the imminent termination of the Temple in Jerusalem as the center of worship. In John 4:21-24, the Lord Jesus said the following to the Samaritan woman whom He encountered as Jacob's well: "Woman, believe Me, **an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father ... an hour is coming, and now is,** when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" [**emphasis mine**]. The temple situated on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem was a mere shadow of the reality now being manifested under the New Covenant in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. As the One for whom the Temple stood had come, the Temple was no longer necessary for the worship of Yahweh.

Just as the Old Covenant sanctuaries delineated the way by which an Israelite was to approach the Lord, John's Gospel unquestionably presents the Lord Jesus Christ as **the only way** to God. Jesus unashamedly testified, "**I am the way,** and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father, but through Me**" (John 14:6) [**emphasis mine**]. In John 10:9, Christ also proclaimed, "I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved." The Lord Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, and He is the only door into the eternal kingdom of God. Whoever rejects the Son of God, as the Scriptures say, "does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23). Since the Lord Jesus is the only way

¹⁰²Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 194, 218.

¹⁰³Ibid., 345.

¹⁰⁴Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 80.

to the Father, it naturally follows that the only worship pleasing to God is that which is mediated through His Son. “True worship is only in him because only he can provide eternal life—only through him can anyone come to the Father.”¹⁰⁶ Christ’s “continuing presence with His people in the Holy Spirit makes our worship a reality and not (as it would otherwise be) an empty form (Philippians iii, 3).”¹⁰⁷ All true worship is **His** worship, as He lives in His people through the Holy Spirit. In other words, we participate in His worship of God. This principle is seen in Gerrit Dawson’s words on prayer:

Because we are united to our ascended head, we participate in his oneness and communion with his Father. So we have a triple relation to Jesus in prayer. First, as God the Son, he is prayed to by us; Jesus is the object of our prayer. But second, Jesus also prays for us as our High Priest, reconciling us to the Father, making our prayers acceptable in him. And, third, he prays in us, through the Holy Spirit, who is sent from the head throughout the body, joining all the members as one and joining all the members in vital life and energy to the ascended Lord. Our prayers, then, first, middle and last, are all in Christ.¹⁰⁸

Christ as God’s Temple in the New Testament Epistles

The New Testament Epistles also present the Lord Jesus Christ as Yahweh’s true Temple. The reader is reminded that it was the manifested presence of God which ultimately constituted the Old Testament sanctuaries as temples. This principle even holds true with the God-Man, Jesus Christ. In Colossians, the Spirit proclaims that in Christ “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9) and “it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him” (Col 1:19). More specifically, the ultimate temple of God is Christ’s resurrected body, which is “the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation” (Heb 9:11). Christ is the true temple of God in His perfect humanity as “the fullness of Deity” dwells within Him.

The author of Hebrews describes the Old Testament Tabernacle as “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Heb 8:5). Without a doubt, the Tabernacle was “a copy and shadow” of God’s Celestial Temple, but this ‘tent-temple’ ultimately typified the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, just as the Tabernacle was the only means of entering into Yahweh’s blessed presence, it is only through Jesus Christ that the elect have “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). Second, the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle prefigured the Lord Jesus. For instance, the brazen altar foreshadowed His once-for-all-time sacrifice “to put away sin” (Heb 9:26-28), and the altar of incense speaks of Christ’s current high priestly ministry of intercession on behalf of His New Covenant people (Heb 4:15). Even the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place prefigured the Lord Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews declares that the Lord Jesus opened for His people “a new and living way” into God’s presence “through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Heb 10:20). Lastly, the Ark of the Covenant pictured both Christ’s propitiatory work and the immanent presence of God in Christ. The God-Man Jesus Christ is the One and only mediator “between God and men” (1 Tim 2:5). In conclusion, the reader surely must concur that the ‘temple’ “imagery pointed forward to Jesus” and Him alone.¹⁰⁹

The Church

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 385.

¹⁰⁷Martin, *Worship In The Early Church*, 17.

¹⁰⁸Gerrit S. Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 139-140.

¹⁰⁹Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 77.

The New Testament unquestionably presents the Church, the Body of Christ, as a temple of God. For instance, 1 Peter 2:5 describes believers “as living stones,” who “are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Similarly, the Apostle Paul says that God’s New Covenant people “are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16). In Ephesians 2:19-22, he writes: “You are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, 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.” The Church is “a spiritual temple, erected to God’s glory, and for His worship.”¹¹⁰

Although the Church, like the individual believer, exists to be a temple of God, she does so only by virtue of her union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 states that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” When the Lord Jesus Christ poured out His ‘living water,’ that is, the Holy Spirit upon His people at Pentecost, He first formed the Church, His spiritual Body, and forever united His people to Himself. Concerning Spirit baptism, Merrill Unger has correctly stated:

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is...that divine operation of God’s Spirit which places the believer in Christ, in His mystical body, the church, and which makes him one with all other believers in Christ. The baptism makes them one in the life of the Son of God Himself, sharing His common salvation, hope, and destiny. Thus, this major Bible theme concerns intimately and vitally the believer’s position and experience, his standing and state.¹¹¹

Elsewhere, he writes that this divine operation “introduced into the world a new temple, the church.”¹¹² The Scriptures clearly evidence the Church’s mystical union with her Savior. For instance, Christ is currently seated at the Father’s “right hand in the heavenly *places*” (Eph 1:20), and Ephesians 2:6 states that God “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus.” This union is also seen in the area of church discipline, as Christ promised His people: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst” (Matt 18:20). In Colossians 3:1-3, the Apostle Paul urges the believers at Colossae to fix their minds “on the things above,” because their “life is hidden with Christ in God.” In *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ’s Continuing Incarnation*, Dawson writes: “Though fully human still, and thus embodied, Jesus is yet fully God and able to communicate himself to the members of his body across all distance of realms, dimensions, hours or miles. This is accomplished by the work of the blessed Holy Spirit, who is able, beyond comprehension, to connect those who seem impossibly separated.”¹¹³

Scripturally speaking, the manifestation of God’s presence is **the** ultimate mark which distinguishes a Biblical temple. Like all the preceding temples, the Church also serves as ‘a sanctuary,’ where the Lord manifests Himself in a special way. The Scriptures present the Church as “the temple of the Living God” (2 Cor 6:16), “a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22), and “the temple of God” in which “the Spirit of God dwells” (1 Cor 3:16). The Church is “the Spirit’s shrine...a Temple not made with hands.”¹¹⁴ Another has stated that “the church is now that place where God’s glory resides and where God dwells with his people,” who are all “living stones in Christ Jesus.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰Martin, *Worship In The Early Church*, 10.

¹¹¹Merrill F. Unger, *The Baptism & Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 21.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 122.

¹¹³Dawson, *Jesus Ascended*, 51-52.

¹¹⁴Martin, *Worship In The Early Church*, 23.

¹¹⁵Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 121.

Levy witnesses to the truth of Scripture saying: "Today God does not dwell in a physical structure but in a spiritual body called the church. The figure is very impressive. The Temple was holy and set apart for God's service; likewise, the church is holy and consecrated to His service. Collectively, God dwells in each believer by the Holy Spirit, forming us into His Temple."¹¹⁶

According to His eternal purpose, God elected a specific people whom He would fashion into a sanctified community whose ultimate purpose would be to worship Him. This worshipping community is none other than the Church which God "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). In the epistles, the Apostle Paul frequently describes the Church using the analogy of a human body. Our omnipotent Creator fashioned the human body as a singular organism produced by the complex interface of numerous intricate sub-systems. Each sub-system with its own highly specialized set of organs and tissues is necessary for the proper functioning of the whole body. Just like the human body, God has sovereignly equipped individual believers with spiritual gifts which are necessary for the proper functioning of the Church (1 Cor 12:11). In Romans 12:4-5, the Apostle Paul writes: "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." He concludes in the following verse that "since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let each exercise them accordingly*" (Rom 12:6). Furthermore, the Spirit testifies that these sovereignly-bestowed spiritual gifts are to be lovingly used "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7) and strengthening of "the body" (Eph 4:15-16). Whenever the Church assembles, individual believers are to employ their spiritual gifts in "serving one another," "so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 4:10-11). Thus, *the public worship of the New Covenant Church should be a Spirit-orchestrated symphony in which individual believers properly employ their spiritual gifts in order to exalt and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Before Christ ascended to "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3), He entrusted His disciples with the following charge: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:19-20). Thus, the Great Commission stands as the New Covenant antitype of Adam's covenantal commission to fill, subdue, and rule over the earth (Gen 1:28). Just as Adam was commanded to expand the 'garden-temple' of Eden throughout the whole earth, so also the believer-priests of the New Covenant have been entrusted with the task of expanding the Church, the spiritual temple of God, throughout the world. Empowered by the Spirit of God, the priests of the New Covenant will succeed in bringing all God's elect to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ultimate Temple of God.

Conclusion

The temple is one of the many rich themes woven throughout the pages of Scripture. It enriches our understanding of worshipping God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24) and helps us to discern the Christocentric nature of all Scripture (Luke 24:27). It is hoped that this study of God's Word has demonstrated that the temple motif performs a central function in public worship for the Church today. It has been shown that the temple is a God-ordained, covenantally-established sanctuary wherein the Lord chooses to sovereignly manifest Himself to His covenant people and receive their service and worship. In summary, when God created the heavens and the earth, He fashioned them to be His cosmic 'temple'. In the pre-fall covenant, the Lord manifested Himself to Adam in the 'garden-temple' of Eden. Under the Old Covenant, Yahweh dwelled among the people of Israel in the Tabernacle, and later in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. In the New Covenant, God reveals Himself

¹¹⁶Levy, *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah*, 21-22.

in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is the ultimate temple of God and the fulfillment of all preceding Old Testament sanctuaries. Furthermore, God sovereignly constitutes the Church and the individual believer to be temples of God through their union with Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. Yes, “the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him” (Hab 2:20). Amen.

[\[http://ptsco.org/showcase.htm\]](http://ptsco.org/showcase.htm)