

Redeemed Humanity and Temple Theology: Defining God’s Presence on New Covenant Terms

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant themes in Scripture is God’s dwelling among his people. As it unfolds in the biblical storyline, there is a natural gravitation toward the subject of a temple. Thus, the emergence of a “temple theology” motif. This is largely why the subject still receives so much attention in both higher critical and evangelical scholarship today. Literature abounds with volumes produced on the importance of temples in ancient backgrounds,¹ the history of Israel,² and biblical theology.³ Yet one idea underlying all the different angles of temple research is the uniform concept of God’s presence in heaven somehow manifesting a localized, theophanic residence on the earth. This supernatural convergence between heaven and earth unfolds throughout the Old Testament (OT), beginning with the Garden of Eden.

It then develops further through the function of a tent-tabernacle after the exodus, and later transitions to an actual temple, whether it be Solomon's, the one built by the post-exilic Israelites, or the one erected by Herod. From here, temple praxis is eventually directed at the person of Christ himself, subsequently fleshed out through the reality of the church as God's people, and ultimately culminates in the renewal of the earth as a "temple" of heaven itself in the eternal state.

However, one question that continues to cause notable debate in evangelical scholarship is the theological viability of a future literal temple. So much so that we want to engage how this inquiry should be approached in light of how New Testament (NT) writers interpret temple ideas through the prism of the finished work of Christ. To do so, we will 1) summarize the concept of a temple in categories defined by the OT and the Mosaic economy; 2) highlight how temple realities are interpreted through New Covenant and Christological categories; 3) note various points in history where attempts to re-establish a literal temple have been attempted; 4) mention some proposals that evangelical dispensational interpreters advocate regarding the necessity of a future temple; 5) and finally mention several concerns that have not been sufficiently answered by those who advocate such a view.

CLARIFYING OT TEMPLE LANGUAGE

The underlying etymology of the English word *temple* derives from the Latin term *templum* and the preceding Greek word *temenos*. *Temenos* was typically used to describe a piece of land designated for some assigned purpose, whether to be used by kings or dedicated to a special event or deity.⁴ Likewise, the Latin *templum* was used in the context of signs that were perceived to be pointing to good or bad events that were to come. They could be designated places in the sky or specified geographical locations. Objects like shrines or sacred structures could also be labeled as *templum*.⁵ Furthermore, the term was used in various contexts to describe consecrated spaces, including buildings and other structures where high officials or deities may convene.⁶ So, there was almost always an inherently religious tone to the word.

Relatedly, it is common knowledge that the concept of a localized sacred structure far precedes Greco-Roman culture. In antiquity, temples were a

kind of tangible merging between the heavens (or skies), the earth (or the physical realm), and other worlds (heaven, the underworld, afterlife, etc.).⁷ Whether it be Babylonian, Egyptian, Assyrian, or any other kingdom that was a contemporary of Israel in the ancient Near East (ANE), temples were perceived as designated throne rooms for designated deities.⁸

Echoes of this imagery emerge in Genesis 1–2 where two complementary accounts describe the Lord creating the heavens and the earth so he could manifest his presence among two earthly human ambassadors, Adam and Eve. The key feature is the special place that they were given. They were blessed with provisions, delegated with authority over creation, and privileged to spread God’s image throughout the whole earth. Their calling was to reflect God’s heavenly character and power in the earthly realm. We also see that the Lord created a specific garden in Eden located somewhere in the “East.” He made it lush with vegetation, full of animal life, and supplied with water from a river that ran through the garden and branched off into four others. Eden was overflowing with beauty and blessing — it was almost like heaven on earth.⁹

Eden was also somewhat distinct from the rest of the earth for several reasons. It had two trees that had no rival throughout the rest of the earth, those being the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and a tree of life. It was also where the Lord communed with Adam and Eve. We see examples of this when God brought Eve to Adam to be his wife, as well as when he came to confront them in their sin. And unfortunately, it was ground zero for humanity’s judgment because Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, forbidden to return.

Before this tragedy, though, Eden served as the first address shared by the God of heaven and the first two earthly inhabitants. This is why the prophet Ezekiel, for instance, later calls Eden “the garden of God” (Ezek 28:13) and likens it to God’s “mountain” (Ezek 28:14).¹⁰ It was where heaven and earth met, and yet ironically parted ways. What’s more, its features were not forgotten because centuries later, the apostle John speaks about heaven coming to the earth (Rev 21–22). He alludes to Eden-like traits of a flowing river from God’s throne (Rev 22:1), the tree of life being available to the nations (Rev 22:2), the curse of sin no longer having any sway (Rev 22:3), and creation no longer depending on the sun or moon as before because heaven’s new address will be the whole earth (Rev 22:5).¹¹

Therefore, just as Eden was lost, it is regained once more, even surpassed. But the question is: how?

1. God's Presence on a Mountain

After sinful humanity went into exile by forfeiting the divine presence in Eden, the Lord began taking measures so his heavenly domain could unite with the earth once again. Unfortunately, sometimes such a goal includes judgment. The Lord was compelled in one instance to bring a cataclysmic flood on Noah's day. On another occasion, he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because their wickedness had become so decadent. In another instance, we see the Lord confounding the languages of the people at the Tower of Babel event because they attempted to regain his presence on their own terms. Instead of obtaining divine communion by their own power, they were forced to do what Adam and Eve were commissioned to do before they sinned, namely spread throughout the whole earth.

Now, in contrast to the Lord's presence resisting the ongoing evil of humanity, there are many other moments where God expresses his desire to reconcile with his creation. He constantly communicates with believers such as Noah and the great Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He spoke through direct interchanges, dreams, visions, angels, and prophetic utterances. And in response to his interaction with these men, we often see these leaders building altars to praise the Lord because of his various provisions. Such acts not only served as a means of approaching him in worship. They were liturgical landmarks that represented the Lord's presence because he had accepted the sacrifices that were made on such altars.¹² So, even though Eden had been lost, the Lord's presence could still be experienced on his terms of sacrifice and faith. Similarly, the restoration of the divine presence began to be teased out in covenantal agreements. We begin to see this in the one he made with Abraham. The Lord began to reveal how he would restore the nations of the human race by channeling blessings through one future nation (Israel) of which Abraham would be the father.

It is at this point that God's Eden-like presence takes a significant turn. The people of Israel eventually found themselves in Egypt in the twilight years of Jacob's lifetime because of his son Joseph's provisional care. But after that generation of Hebrews left the scene and their population grew, God's people were later enslaved by an evil Egyptian Pharaoh. This set the stage

for the Lord to remember his promises to Abraham about a specific land for his promised people, commissioning Moses to lead Israel in the great deliverance of the Exodus. By the time this major event had run its course, the Egyptian deities and authorities had been trounced, the Egyptians were humiliated, their leaders destroyed, and Israel left triumphantly on their way to Canaan. Following Egypt's defeat, the Lord used a cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night to navigate the Hebrew people through the Sinai terrain (Exod 13:21–22). So, in a sense, he was beginning to manifest his presence for Moses and all Israel to see.

As they made their way across the Sinai plains, it was here that the Lord made a covenant with Israel, which included an agreement that his presence would be in their midst. However, God's manifestation on Mt. Sinai revealed that his presence would be experienced in an entirely different way from that of Eden. Adam and Eve had communed with the Lord in the garden as innocent creatures in a right covenantal standing. Now Israel stood on the horizon of receiving a new agreement. The Lord was going to reinstate his presence among a remnant of fallen humanity. Such a hope emerges early on when the Lord declares, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God" (e.g., Exod 6:6–7; 19:5). He would tangibly and locally abide in Israel's midst, as opposed to any other nation.

Still, before this promise was fulfilled, Israel received a preview of the sheer power of the Lord's presence. The people were instructed to prepare themselves ceremonially and not approach the mountain without permission. If any person or animal came too close, they would be killed (Exod 19:10–15). The Lord promised that within three days, he would "come down" on the mountain. Tall mountains were often considered the homes of divine beings since it was seldom that anyone could climb them.¹³ But in this case, Israel had justification to be in awe. God was coming down the mountain. And on that day, the Lord did not come in the "cool of the day" as he did in Genesis 3. The mountain was hidden by smoke and fire as if a giant thunderstorm had taken over its peak. What sounded like a trumpet bellowed, with the mountain shaking violently because of the noise of the divine storm.

One can, no doubt, see a key shift in the story of God's presence. In the early parts of Genesis, the divine presence was peaceful, glorious, and tranquil. Here it is ominous, overwhelming, even dangerous. The problem is that

while God's presence in Eden was something his people (Adam and Eve) could share, now it was something to be guarded so his people (Israel) would not be destroyed. So much so that when the Lord later instructed Moses to let Aaron come up with him, he warned that if the leaders or people came up uninvited, he would "break forth upon them" (Exod 19:24). If Israel followed the Lord's commands, the beauty of the divine presence could still be seen. We read examples of this when Moses, Aaron, his two sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of the nation communed with the Lord on the mountain. They shared a meal on the ground, glistening as though it were made of clear sapphire (Exod 24:9–11). Later when Moses had to revisit Sinai, he returned down to the people with his face shining because it reflected the luminous glory of God (Exod 34:29–34). The dilemma, however, was that Sinai was not Israel's final destination. They were being led to the southern region of Canaan to receive the Abrahamic promise of the land. Thus, the pressing concern was this; how could the people behold the glory of the Lord while at the same time being protected from its brilliance and overwhelming purity? Answer: the divine presence would have to become mobile.

2. God's Presence in a Tent

Since Sinai was just a stop along the way to the land of promise, the Lord gave Moses instructions to build a portable structure where his divine presence could rest as the people continued their journey (Exod 25–31). The same God who had banished the first couple from Eden and almost dismantled Sinai with thunder and fire was now going to condescend to a tent, literally in the midst of the people. The English word describing this tent with which Bible readers are most familiar is the term "tabernacle," which means "dwelling place." God, whose address is the heavenly realm, once again takes up an earthly dwelling place.¹⁴ He stands above the heavens with the earth as a footstool, while at the same time having a place where he can commune directly with Israel. The tabernacle also is referred to as the "sanctuary," meaning that this tent is sacred ground, and in other instances, it is described as a "tent of meeting." Here, the stress is on the fact that the tabernacle (the place where God dwells) or sanctuary (the sacred place) is where the Lord can convene with his people, whether it is Moses, the later anointed Aaronic priests, or certain other individuals.¹⁵

Israel stayed at Sinai while in the process of receiving the divine floorplan for this tabernacle and subsequently building it (Exod 19:1; Num 10:11). Upon completion, Exodus concludes with a dramatic ceremony where the Lord's consuming glory descended into it. When it was time to move, it would rise back into a cloud. This ritual of the Lord camping with the people continued from Sinai to Canaan. As a matter of fact, the tabernacle was still in existence when King Solomon began to build the temple although its central piece of furniture, the ark of the covenant, had been removed years earlier during the ministry of Eli as the High Priest.

As we mentioned previously, many ancients thought highly of mountains and gardens. Mountains were revered because they were largely unexplored, being seen as places that only deities could inhabit. Likewise, gardens were the envy of many due to their luxurious climates and wealth of agrarian resources. These scenes were now going to be merged in this tabernacle-tent. It would reflect—even storehouse—the awesomeness of the heavenly glory which was witnessed on Sinai as well as Eden itself. This was accomplished by assigning a certain location for the tabernacle as well as pieces of furniture that were to be placed in and around it. Regarding the former concern, the tabernacle was to be erected with the twelve tribes (except for the Levites since they were the priestly tribe) in specific spots around the tent. The reason was so God's presence was directly in the middle of the nation as a whole. The rectangular compound surrounding the tent entailed a high fence that only had one gate at the eastern wall. This restricted people to enter only from that direction, which reflects the similar eastern entrance to Eden (Gen 3:24).¹⁶

Along with each piece of furniture—which alluded to heavenly realities—the tent itself conveyed Edenic overtones. It was divided into two partitions: the first room into which the priests entered was the holy place, and then beyond a collection of curtains (a veil) was a second room called the holy of holies. God sat here, and unlike pagan kings, no earthly entourage was allowed in his presence. In the holy place where the priests served stood a lampstand made of gold with seven candles (six branches). It provided light within the tent's quarters and it was located just outside the room of divine presence, thereby somewhat replicating the function of the tree of life in Eden.¹⁷

The most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle was the famous ark of the covenant, located within the holy of holies. Inside this acacia wood box, which was overlaid inside and out with gold, stored key heirlooms of God's provisions for Israel during their journey to Canaan, including the stone tablets of the law that Moses later put there at Horeb, a jar of manna (the heavenly bread that the Lord had given to Israel in the wilderness), and Aaron's staff that actually blossomed (a sign that the Lord had chosen Aaron's tribe to be the priests). On top of the box was the sacred table of atonement, or mercy seat, which was guarded by two installed images of cherubim whose wings covered this sacred place of divine presence. The angelic guards who watched over Eden's paradise after humanity fell now guarded the Lord's heavenly presence among the Israelites.

Finally, there were numerous purposes for this tabernacle's existence, but we only want to emphasize how it maintains continuity with the divine presence theme in the biblical story. Originally, heaven converged with earth at its inception when humanity was placed in Eden. When that union ruptured, the Lord eventually re-established a new earthly presence among a remnant nation of Adam's children, through whom he would use to heal other nations. It commenced at Sinai, where God made a covenant with his people. Following this agreement, Israel moved forward with the Lord's presence by their side. Sacred space was now mobile. A simulation of Eden (and for that matter, heaven) was now moving with the people to the new land of promise. The Lord's presence returned to his people, but this time in a world wrought with sin. Therefore, the tabernacle also reminded God's people that while he could approach them, they could not approach him. This is why a means of atonement was provided, along with the tent of meeting, so the people's sins could be forgiven and they could be cleansed from the everyday pollution of the fallen world.¹⁸ Just as the Lord covered Adam and Eve's sinfulness in the garden, now he gave Israel a means of covering their sin in the sacred tent.

3. God's Presence in the Temple

The tabernacle was the place where God's presence rested from the time of the Canaan conquest to the establishment of the monarchy. It was first installed at Bethel ("House of God") after Israel entered the Promised Land. This was a region originally identified by Jacob (Israel) as God's house after

he saw a vision of angels traversing upon staircases (or a ladder) between heaven and earth.¹⁹ Then later the tent was moved to Shiloh and remained there until the time of Eli the high priest.

During this time, one misconception that the Israelites came to embrace was that the ark of the covenant guaranteed divine blessing. They thought that if they took it into battle, it would automatically ensure a victory. Tragically, this was not the case because the ark was eventually taken after a battle with the rivaling Philistines. However, just as the Israelites tried to presume upon God's presence and blessing, the Philistines made the mistake of thinking they could control it. What they discovered was that, unlike other pagan ancient near eastern deities, the Lord of Israel had homefield advantage no matter where the ark was placed. So, after experiencing a horrendous series of events, the Philistines surrendered the ark and it was stored in Kiriath-jearim.

Years later, after David finally became the second king of Israel, the ark was brought to the newly established city of Jerusalem.²⁰ David placed it in a tent and later planned to build a temple so the Lord's presence could be treated as true royalty, having its own palace in which to dwell. However, David was forbidden to fulfill that task. Instead, his son Solomon completed the project of building the temple after he became king. When it was finished, the three motifs of God's presence — garden, mountain, and tent — came together in this new structure. The temple was surrounded by garden-like decorum; it was built on Mount Zion, itself in Jerusalem; and the tabernacle-tent was placed in the center of the temple building.

The temple highlighted assorted features of God's character. Each of the temple's features was intended to point to the Lord's majesty, sacredness, and power because architecture is essentially artwork in which we live. Just as art is often a visual expression of an idea in creative form, buildings and/or homes typically reflect the personality and status of its residents.²¹

By anchoring the tabernacle in the Promised Land, it exalted the Lord's faithfulness. Previously, the tabernacle was the sign that the Lord was going to keep his promises to Israel because he was moving along with them from Egypt to Canaan. Now the temple acted as a means of closure. It was fixed on Mount Zion in the capital city. It represented security, stability, and safety because the Lord lived among the people at a permanent address. Because the temple was where the Lord dwelt, it was the place where

heavenly decisions were made — not just for Israel's fate but the surrounding nations as well (cf., Ps 29:10; 99:1–5; Amos 1:1–15). Zion was the center of world — not literally in some geographical sense — but theologically because everything was under the Lord's authority. The Lord's Oval Office was now the temple.

It would be remiss, however, to stop with the observation that the temple reflected God's character and authority. It also mirrored his heavenly habitat. The temple was built to provide a visual aid illustrating the otherworldly nature of heaven. But the only way an earthly structure could achieve such a goal was if it replicated previous encounters between heaven and earth. This is why much of the temple was overlaid in gold, riddled with carvings of trees and flowers, and filled with cypress and olive wood. It was a cubicle version of a garden. At the same time, it maintained continuity with the tabernacle because its inner chambers were placed in the temple. And to top it off, the temple again was established on Mount Zion, which made it just as sacred as Sinai, where the Lord originally married himself to Israel. It also pictured God's rule over creation by instilling two enormous cherubim standing side-by-side with their wings touching each other. The image conveyed was that of a kind of seat where the Lord sat over creation, with the ark being his footstool.²² The temple was a kind of microcosm of heaven within the Promised Land among the earthly people of Israel.

Now while it is easy to see why the temple was central to Israel's understanding of the Lord and their identity as his people, the nation unfortunately applied their previous distortion of the ark of the covenant to the temple. They believed that the mere possession of the building ensured God's blessings. Yet the temple (just like Eden, Sinai, and the tabernacle) only harbored special status when the Lord chose to reside in it. His presence was contingent upon obedience to the covenantal obligations that were documented in the Law. Israel was to abide by this divinely received constitution in order to be in a right standing before the Lord. If the Law was violated without pending repentance or atonement, it listed various curses that could fall upon the people, with exile being the pinnacle of judgments. This ended up being the exact fate of Israel in 587 BC. The Babylonian armies invaded Jerusalem, destroyed Solomon's temple, and uprooted many of the Jews to take them back to Babylon as captives.

Banishment from the Promised Land was indicative of a dire reality — God’s presence had departed from the temple.

Still, we cannot stop there because God does not. The promise of judgment was never the final word. He did not abandon his people. The Lord extended the promise of blessing and restoration. We see this good news arriving after the demise of the Babylonian empire and the rise of the Persians. King Cyrus the Great permitted the Israelites to return to their homeland. After three major phases of exiles returning to the Promised Land, the Israelites were able to rebuild their lives, which included restoring another temple. This was a display of God’s faithfulness to Israel, no doubt, because he promised that the glory of this new temple could supersede that of Solomon’s (Hag 2:4–9).

For a while, this renewed focus on the temple panned out well. Many of the earlier prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as the current prophets including Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, all spoke about how the restoration of the temple would bring healing to Israel and the nations. But as history records, the Jewish people once again began to violate their covenantal obligations. This resulted in constant conflicts with surrounding nations, which ended in the desecration of the temple during the Maccabean period.

Subsequent conflicts maintained political tensions, especially during the early stages of the later Roman Empire’s growth. By the time history approached the birth of Christ, the temple was in such need of repairs that King Herod the Great had it completely renovated and expanded. The problem was that the Jews did not control the temple nor did they have power over their land. They were exiled in their own neighborhoods under the thumb of the Romans, awaiting the divine presence to vindicate them and reconvene the temple-harmony between heaven and earth. This expectation helped set the stage for the ministry of Christ.

TEMPLE LANGUAGE IN THE NT

The future prospect of God’s renewed presence among his people remained central to the Jewish faith coming into the first century. But by the time Christ’s arrival, the temple was a bit of a cruel irony. It was a visible reminder of everything absent from Israel’s hope. Although it stood in Jerusalem, the Jews had no control over the priesthood, no Davidic king ruled from

Jerusalem, and Israel's borders belonged to Rome.²³ Ironically, then, the temple triggered a certain amount of bewilderment because there were so many things that the Lord's presence had not accomplished, which, in turn, made it both a source of hope and disappointment.²⁴

It was this crisis of national identity that helped create the volatile setting into which Christ was sent. Israel wanted to know that the Lord's temple-presence would one day address all their concerns.²⁵ And this is partly why we see the Gospels apply divine presence language to Christ. For example, Matthew—in his account of the angelic announcement Christ's birth—claims that his arrival marked a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about a son who would be born named Immanuel, meaning "God with us." We also see in Luke's account of Jesus's birth that angelic hosts proclaimed to nearby shepherds that the God of the *highest* (or the heavenlies) had brought peace to the *earth*. Luke also recounts Jesus's circumcision where he was brought to the temple in Jerusalem. A man of God named Simeon held him, declaring that the baby was the Lord's salvation, which he was accomplishing in the "presence" of the people, both Jew and Gentile. From here, the Gospels continue to expand this theme of Jesus as the divine temple-presence in various ways.²⁶

1. Jerusalem's Temple and Christ as the Embodiment of a Heavenly Temple

The gospels present a tension between what the temple was *supposed* to be and who Jesus *actually* was. The temple was intended to be the Lord's permanent address among his people. He had communed with Adam and Eve in Eden. He had covenantally bonded with the Israelites at Sinai and in the tabernacle. He resided with the nation in the land of promise via the temple. Now the arrival of Jesus marked a new chapter in this story. He was the divine presence in mobile-human form.

We see this point in John's Gospel where Christ is portrayed not as deity clothed in a dark cloud over a mountain, or a tabernacle room shrouded in fabrics, but as God in the flesh. He came in human form to "dwell" or "tabernacle" among the nations—Israel in particular and the Gentiles in general (John 1:14–18). And instead of watching the glory of God from afar at the bottom of Sinai or by proxy through the eyes of the high priest, John says that everyone was able to see his "glory." People were able to hear his teachings and see his miracles. We even catch a glimpse of the power of God's

presence once more when the Jewish authorities came to arrest Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. John claims that when Jesus said he was the one they were seeking, they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:6). When their motives were exposed by the gravity of his presence, they collapsed in trepidation.

The transfiguration was another dramatic example of Christ being a walking temple. Jesus went up on a mountain with Peter, James, and John where he then revealed the glory of the divine presence.²⁷ Yet unlike Moses, Jesus possessed the glory within himself, reflecting the same divine aura of his Father. His face glowed like Moses's did, just not for the same reason; the divine glory shone from the inside out instead of merely reflecting an external source. So, as opposed to a portable tent being carried across the wilderness or a temple fixed on a mountain, the divine presence was now encased in a human being. The Son was a living, breathing temple. The Lord's address between heaven and earth was transitioning from Mount Zion to the heavenly Son who had come to earth.

At first glance, one would assume that such a reality would inspire hope, and for some it did. But for others, this connection between Jesus and the temple raised serious concerns. Why? Because some Jews found it difficult to see the expected Messiah as a new temple when Herod's temple was still standing in Jerusalem. This dilemma caused quite a divide between Jesus and the religious leaders of his day because the temple was their political bread and butter. We see this conflict rising on at least two fronts. First, tensions rose when Jesus occasionally claimed to be greater than the temple. Jesus contended that his position as the Son of Man (or the heavenly agent of his Father's kingdom) gave him authority to (1) indict those who misunderstood the purpose of the temple, and (2) transcend its importance. In other words, what the temple originally did, he could do supremely better. Yet if this were true, the religious leaders would be put out of business. No more money changing. No more extortion. No more leverage.

This led to the other part of the impasse between Jesus and his opponents, which was his shocking prediction that the temple would be destroyed. This bold claim appeared to be an affront to Israel's hopes. However, in reality, it was a charge of divine judgment against the Jerusalem's corrupt leaders. Jesus was essentially saying that they were going to cut off because of their lack of integrity. Note here that the temple itself was not the problem. On

the contrary, as a faithful Jew, Jesus held the temple in high esteem. His zeal for the Lord's dwelling place was so fervent that at least on one occasion he forcefully dispersed the moneychangers from the temple because they had made it into something it was never supposed to be. It was intended to be a light to the nations and a house of prayer to the one and true living God. Instead, it had become a place for bartering, trade, and possibly even corrupt business deals. So, while Jesus claimed that the temple would be sacked, he still revered its role in Israel's heritage.

What balanced out his respect for the temple with his declaration of its demise was the fact that the covenantal agreement undergirding its existence (the Mosaic covenant) was being phased out. Jesus, as the new source of the divine presence, was ushering in a new covenant. This is why he occasionally alluded to himself as a temple because, in a sense, he was reliving the temple's story. Just as God's enemies had destroyed it, so would the corrupt leaders of Israel and the Roman authorities put Jesus to death. Just as the temple had been defiled, so would a son of perdition (namely Judas) betray the Son of Man to unjust leaders. Really then, Jesus spoke of two temples, one that was to be torn down (i.e., Herod's temple) and another that would be raised up (i.e., his body).

2. Christ Surpasses the Tabernacle/Temple's Functions

Christ's fulfillment of the various services that the temple provided is the second major NT emphasis. An immediate case in point is the frequent allusions between the furniture of the tabernacle-temple and Christ himself. For instance, early on in the book of Revelation, Jesus is the one, like a Levitical priest in the tabernacle, who walks among the candlesticks. Yet instead of watching over the temple's furniture, he now inspects his people—the Church.²⁸ He also is the one who gives the Holy Spirit so people can worship the Father regardless of their geographic location. The day was coming when bickering over the sacredness of Mount Zion (for the Jews) or Mount Gerazim (for the Samaritans) would be irrelevant (John 4:19–23).

Additionally, the temple's location as the place where atonement and forgiveness of sin could be obtained was key. By following the sacrifices that were documented in the Law, which culminated in the annual Day of Atonement, the temple was the spot where Israel could have their sin problem addressed. The only hitch, as the Book of Hebrews makes clear,

is that the temple could only enforce the benefits of the Mosaic covenant. This meant the temple sacrifices were ongoing, not permanent. Likewise, sacrifices were also safeguarded by the numerous laws against ceremonial uncleanness. One may not even qualify to approach the temple if these rules were broken. But Christ overcame both these barriers.

When it came to uncleanness, the problem was that it could be transferred from person to person, while cleanness could not—unless Jesus was involved. He could touch lepers and make them whole, heal physical deformities, cast out demons, and raise the dead. He was able to absorb the stigma of uncleanness and still remain clean. Even beyond that, he himself established a titanium steel covenant where a day of atonement only had to occur one time (Heb 7:27; 10:10). Once it did, the mercy seat of the divine presence was triumphantly replaced by a Messiah who now sits on the heavenly throne as the resurrected Lord.

3. The Church is a New Covenant Temple

The corresponding language between the temple and Jesus is later applied to his people who are brought together by his death and resurrection. These connections can be seen in John's gospel where Jesus promises his followers that the Spirit will be "in" them, thereby making them true worshippers where being located on a specific mountain will be irrelevant. In Luke's account, the disciples are promised to receive the Spirit, which comes to pass in Acts 1–2. Then in Acts 2, flames of fire fall upon each disciple—(in an upper room, not the temple mount)—harkening back to the supernatural blazing that filled Solomon's temple and the violent storm that hovered over Mount Sinai.

This idea of believers being indwelt by the Spirit and consequently reflecting temple realities is carried over by various NT authors in passages that are well-known. For instance, Paul describes believers (and the church) as temples in whom the Spirit dwells. He also claims that the very bodies of believers are temples as well, so they should be used for holy purposes. Believers are literally sacred space.²⁹ Similarly, Peter claims that believers are "living stones" who are being built into a "house" as a priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. Those stone language reflects the stones of the tribes of Israel that were worn by the high priest. Now Jesus is the high priest in the heavenlies with his apostles as stones in the foundation

of God's city and we are the covenantal benefactors. This is also why Hebrews speaks about the believer's ability to offer the sacrifice of praise to God with which he is pleased. The image is of a priestly worshipper in the temple offering one's expected service.

4. A Renewed Earth will be a Temple

Temple theology is also extremely important in John's visions recounted in the apocalypse. We see the word being used by the glorified Christ himself when promising believers that those who persevere will be columns in his temple. Such a promise receives later clarification when Revelation records that a temple space is located in God's sacred throne room of heaven. This reading is further supported by Revelation 14–16 where this "temple" is described as being in heaven where angels declare the Lord's will that is to come upon the earth. One heavily disputed usage of the word occurs earlier in chapter 11 where John is told to measure a temple space, which echoes the same commission Ezekiel was given in his temple vision. However, if it is literal, then it is being placed in contrast to God's heavenly temple that is mentioned just a few verses later in 11:19.³⁰ Thus, the vision would be saying that God has two temples, one on earth and the other in heaven. Be this as it may, Revelation ends with a cosmic-apocalyptic picture of heaven and earth converging through the image of a city touching down on earth. In its description, John claims that this new heaven and earth function as a city, garden, and temple simultaneously.³¹ The Lord will dwell with his people. To be fair, though, we recognize that the question at this point is not so much about whether temple language is applied to the church. Dispensational and non-dispensational interpreters alike agree on this. The issue is whether such connections prohibit any further theological significance for another literal temple building.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE AFTER 70 AD

The 70 AD fulfillment of Jesus' prediction that the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed was a pivotal event in the history of Judaism for three major reasons. First, it marked a serious divide between the status of non-messianic Judaism and the early Jesus movement that eventually became known as Christianity.³² Second, the temple's demise forced Jewish people

to exchange their understanding of communal solidarity and atonement—which had centered around temple categories like sacrifice and a Levitical priesthood—to a new system dictated by rabbinic traditions. Third, the temple's demise was a historic landmark showing that the Mosaic economy had transitioned to a time of Christological fulfillment and this new age was not going to be subverted.

However, none of these factors changed the fact that many Jews would continue to long for a newly established temple. There were several occasions where attempts were made to do just that. One occurred in the early second century during the Shimon Bar Kokhba revolt. In 118 AD when Hadrian became the new Roman emperor, he extended favor to the Jews by allowing them to return to Jerusalem and reconstruct another temple. In a short amount of time, Hadrian changed his policy by demanding that the temple site be relocated. This decision led to a violent back-and-forth conflict between Rome and the Jewish population. The attempted revolt resulted in Hadrian trying to place a city in Jerusalem named after himself and the Roman deity Jupiter, many surviving Jews being sold as slaves or deported to surrounding regions like Egypt, and a steady level of persecution being levied against surviving Jews until Hadrian's reign was over in 138 AD.³³

Almost two centuries later, another opportunity to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem emerged during the reign of Falvius Clauias Julianus, otherwise known as Julian the Apostate. Being the nephew of Constantine and the cousin of Constantius II, Julian began his reign as emperor in 361. He had abandoned the Christian faith in exchange for choice versions of Greek philosophy and even forms of occultic mysticism.³⁴ In time, he expressed interest in rebuilding the temple for the Jewish community. Scholars speculate on what Julian's motivations may have been for such a project. A minimal consensus is that accomplishing this feat would be Julian's way of discrediting the prophecy of Jesus because the temple could be re-established for renewed Jewish praxis.³⁵ Whatever his other reasons may have been, the project never gained much traction because Julian was killed in a battle and subsequent emperors put an end to the endeavor.

Finally, a chance to erect another temple came in the early seventh century when Persian forces took control of Jerusalem by defeating Christian Byzantine forces. Amidst the conflict, the Persians mounted support from different parts of surrounding Jewish populations. Because of the success of

this alliance, it was announced that the temple would be able to be rebuilt in Jerusalem once more. But the peace with Persia was short lived and the temple project was subsequently revoked. Moreover, the temple situation took an even greater turn for the worse when the crushed Christian population became an inadvertent precursor to looming Muslim conquests just twenty years later. These events set the stage for the Arab construction of the Dome of the Rock, the ultimate tangible renunciation of Jewish temple.³⁶

FUTURIST EXPECTATIONS OF A LITERAL TEMPLE

The fervor for rebuilding a Jewish temple has continued since these early centuries. But no historical moment in the modern era has created such a stir as the establishment of a modern state of Israel in the mid-twentieth century. The birth of a Jewish “state” in 1948 was the product of numerous sociopolitical factors and its success has set the perfect backdrop for many to think a new temple could become a reality in the foreseeable future. Many express concerns with such a possibility because of the potential conflicts it could cause, while numerous Jewish coalitions and aggressive Zionist ideologues eagerly anticipate this project getting underway.³⁷ Likewise, a third temple project remains a major topic of discussion among many believers worldwide.

The pitch of this debate within Christian circles is often heightened by a variety of American conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists who advocate assorted forms of dispensational premillennialism. They are convinced that Scripture requires the existence of a future temple for two primary reasons. One is that it is part of a chain of events related to the return of Christ. The other is that one must exist as a partial prophetic fulfillment of promises God made to Israel. What makes this perspective so intriguing is many dispensationalists stress that “two” temples must one day be erected in Jerusalem. The first one will be built before or during a future time of divine judgment upon the earth, commonly known as the Tribulation Period (or the Great Tribulation). This belief is based on a conflation of several key biblical texts, with the conclusion being that a temple will be rebuilt in Israel only to be defiled by a nefarious figure sometimes labeled as the Abomination of Desolation, the Man of Lawlessness, the Antichrist, or the Beast.³⁸

More specifically, this perspective is often based on interpretive connections between a prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27, certain claims Jesus made in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 19), and some of Paul’s observations in 2 Thessalonians 2. The first passage is known as the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, where Daniel uses apocalyptic imagery to describe a series of events that will transpire in the last, or seventieth “week,” including a figure who will mount an assault upon Israel and defile the temple. Centuries later, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus refers to this prophetic utterance about the temple’s desecration, linking it to another apocalyptic vision in Daniel 7 regarding the coming of the Son of Man. Dispensational interpreters conclude that this language is referring to the second coming of Christ. So, because the “coming” imagery is connected to the temple’s demise depicted in Daniel 9, many postulate that another temple must exist in the future because Christ did not return in the first century. The argument continues from here with an appeal to Paul’s similar account, where he tells the Thessalonian believers that the Day of the Lord would not arrive until the “man of lawlessness” is revealed when he exalts himself in the “holy place” or the temple, only to be destroyed by the Lord at his coming.³⁹ The overall point then is that a literal Jerusalem temple must exist before Christ’s return because of an eschatological confrontation that must take place at that precise location.

Many dispensational interpreters also believe a second future temple will exist after the Parousia when Christ establishes a millennial reign on the earth. This perspective is based on a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, which views the 1,000-year period mentioned in vv. 1–10, as a segment of time that transpires between Christ’s return and the eternal state. Additionally, dispensationalists contend that the millennium is a divinely designated time window for OT prophecies of a restored national Israel to be fulfilled. For this scheme, after the Tribulation period ends and Christ’s second coming, an intermediate geopolitical Jewish kingdom will be established. Israel will be restored, with Jerusalem serving as the political epicenter of the world.

Once Jesus begins this theocratic reign as the glorified Messiah, another structure will be erected in fulfillment of many prophetic expectations, including the reinstatement of Israel’s corporate worship (Isa 56:7; Jer 33:18; Zech 14:16–21; Mal 3:3–4) as well as the realization of Ezekiel’s famous heavenly vision of a new temple (Ezek 42–48). It will be supervised by

the remnant priestly line of Zadock because of a covenantal promise that the Lord made to this Aaronic descendant. These priests will oversee various sacrifices that will be offered during Christ's millennial reign. Conversely, dispensationalists who propose this view differ on the purposes of these sacrifices. Some argue that they will be performed as a means of memorializing the work of Christ, similar to how the Lord's Supper is practiced by the church in the present age.⁴⁰ Others, who disagree with this view, contend that temple sacrifices will be offered as a means of purifying the ceremonial uncleanness of non-glorified worshippers during the millennium.⁴¹

In response to these proposals, I would like to conclude with four considerations. They are not intended to address whether there will be an actual tribulation or premillennial intermediate earthly kingdom. My concern here is how it can be feasible to expect some type of temple to exist that has prophetic and theological significance, since the people of God now exist in the context of the inaugurated stage of the New Covenant, awaiting its culmination in the new creation.

1. How Should OT Language About a Future Temple Be Interpreted?

The first issue to address regarding the biblical viability of a future temple is hermeneutical in nature. This is because the lion's share of debate centers on how one should understand OT language that speaks about an eschatological temple, especially the one envisioned by Ezekiel. Discussions about such a possibility — and numerous other issues related to eschatology for that matter — inevitably bog down into an interpretive quagmire when dispensationalists clash with various nondispensational evangelicals who often are covenantal in their theological orientation. The underlying reason for this impasse is whether future temple language in Scripture should be understood literally, typologically, Christologically, or, to reduce the discussion to its lowest common denominator, “nonliterally.”

What should be kept in mind, though, is that this polemical back-and-forth is really fueled by two deeper points of contention. First, wrestling with how to interpret OT descriptions of a future temple from the original historical perspectives of Israel's prophets is one set of challenges. But more concerns emerge when trying to discern how these initial prophecies should be read in light of later NT revelation, which interprets OT hopes through

the person and work of Christ. Or to touch the methodological nerve more acutely, one must ask if New Covenant fulfillment is always linear, having a strict one-to-one correspondence between OT promise and NT fulfillment. Sometimes this is indeed the case, while in other instances, it simply is not.⁴² Nevertheless, dispensationalists usually contend that the amount of emphasis on a restored temple, including Ezekiel's meticulous details of one, requires at least a bare minimum belief that one will be erected one day. Yet nondispensationalists usually counter that certain claims about the significance of Christ's redemptive work prohibit such literalistic expectations.

Coupled with this tension is a second ordeal in deliberating this topic, namely that if one does embrace a "literal" interpretation of OT future temple passages alongside New Covenant categories, one still has to ask how much of these depictions are to be understood that way. For instance, dispensationalists will sometimes argue that the future millennial temple is the one of which Ezekiel speaks. It will include a newly established priesthood through Zadock, a revised sacrificial system, and an ornate structure in Jerusalem. However, what about the added claims of specified priestly purification rituals, a river that flows through the Judean desert until it eventually "heals" the Dead Sea, the disregard of topographical details regarding the land of Israel when the twelve tribes are restored, the dimensions of the temple and city being described in multiples of five, and lastly, the promise that this temple will remain the seat of God's throne forever (43:7, 9), not just a thousand years?⁴³

Likewise, the entire depiction in Ezekiel is experienced via a series of heavenly visions that are described with many literary features of apocalyptic imagery. If everything in these visions is to be interpreted "literally," then should the same approach be applied to other visions in the book, like Ezekiel's description of God's divine chariot in chapter 1 or the valley of dry bones in chapter 37? This approach is hard to maintain. The former appears to be describing God's universal rule over creation despite the fact that Israel is in exile, while the latter stresses God's ability to bring Israel back from exile even though the nation is considered as good as dead. Consequently, appealing to the necessity of literal interpretation does not really answer the question as to whether a future temple is theologically or prophetically necessary because all interpreters put limits on what should be

understood as “literal” and what is not. A better strategy is to acknowledge that there are certain ways in which the New Covenant directly connects with OT eschatological hopes and there are other instances where elements of OT eschatology are reconfigured in light of what Christ has accomplished for believers within Israel and all the nations.

2. A Temple in Revelation 20?

A second major factor in this discussion that warrants attention is the dispensational insistence that many of OT temple expectations find their fulfillment in the millennial era described by Revelation 20. The glaring problem with this proposal is that regardless of one's interpretation of the millennium in general, absolutely nothing is said in this series of visions that supports an Israel-centric, theocratic, geopolitical kingdom reigning throughout its duration. Granted, there are key references in Second Temple Jewish literature that reflect strands of thought supporting a belief in some kind of intermediate Messianic kingdom.⁴⁴ Some even argue that Paul allows for such a reality in his discussion of the return of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15.⁴⁵ And regardless of one's views on this latter point, Revelation clearly emphasizes that Christ is the glorified, resurrected Messiah who will reign over the earth with his people. Nonetheless, even if one accepts a premillennial reading of Revelation 20, John only describes two events that will occur. One is that Satan will be supernaturally bound so he is unable to deceive the nations. The other is that devoted followers of Christ, who were faithful unto death, will be resurrected so they can rule with Christ (regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile). Therefore, the emphasis is upon Satanic defeat as well as the vindication of all of God's people by reigning with Christ together on earth.

Furthermore, not only does Revelation 20 omit any reference to a temple, or even the possible need for one. As we have already mentioned, Revelation 21–22 is replete with temple imagery when John describes his visionary encounter with a heavenly Jerusalem that converges with the earth. The idea being described here is God's abode in heaven becoming unified with creation itself. The world is renewed, thereby becoming a “temple” itself. The restoration of “Jerusalem” is fulfilled in that believers of all the nations now enter the heavenly kingdom, or city, that has come to the earth.

And unbelievers are excluded from this city because they are not part of this Messianic kingdom.

So, to venture beyond these basic points by inserting a collection of Israel-centric components — including a temple — into a premillennial scheme is essentially a contrived enterprise based on hermeneutical assumptions and precommitments to OT expectations that do not fit the narrative flow of what Revelation explicitly describes.⁴⁶

3. A Temple as a Place Where God's Presence Dwells?

A third key concern requiring more attention is how a future temple can exist as a legitimate locale for God's designated presence on earth, whether it be in the present age, a potential intermediate one, or the eternal state. Stated another way, how can a future tribulation temple or millennial temple be legitimately described as "sacred space"? During a future tribulation, will a non-messianic-centered temple be a place where the presence of the Lord dwells? Will the Holy Spirit indwell saints during this tribulation as well as a designated structure on the temple mount in Jerusalem? Or, as it pertains to a millennial temple, will there be a designated building standing alongside the glorified resurrected Messiah? Neither Daniel nor Ezekiel delve into such complexities. These kinds of scenarios must be proposed in attempts to harmonize various accounts of eschatological hopes. The difficulty, however, is that the spectrum of prophetic expectations for Israel's restoration cannot always be interpreted in a linear fashion because the NT repackages them in larger cosmic (and earthly) categories. To think otherwise creates all sorts of conundrums. For example, what does it mean to speak about glorified resurrected believers (who are temples in which the Spirit dwells) observing and living alongside non-glorified believers who must participate in quasi-Mosaic rituals in a post-Old-and-New Covenant temple?

4. A Temple is Governed by a System: The Problem with a Future Sacrificial System

Finally, if certain dispensational evangelicals continue to insist on the need for a future temple — whether it is during an upcoming tribulation period or an intermediate millennial kingdom — they must propose functional categories to justify its existence. And once again, they usually do so by arguing for a renewed sacrificial system and priestly order. This is quite

a daunting task because it is difficult to reconcile this proposal with the theological trajectory of the New Covenant that moves from a former sacred building to Christ (i.e., the incarnate temple that was destroyed and raised again), his people (i.e., a priesthood of people who form an organic temple indwelt by the Spirit), and ultimately the earth itself (i.e., a temple in which heaven itself dwells). Thus, a fair question must be asked. How can we proceed—or revert—to some revised version of a quasi-Mosaic economy since Christ's death and resurrection abrogate any clean/unclean distinctions and nullify any need for further means of atonement.

Some dispensationalists counter these points by arguing that New Covenant categories do not mitigate against a future temple economy. There are those who point out that Ezekiel himself spoke about the future New Covenant that would work in the hearts of Israelites so they could be restored as God's obedient people. At the same time, he also speaks about the famous temple with its various sacrifices and priests. as the argument goes, then, the millennial period marks a new era between the church age and the eternal state where sacrifices will be practiced either as a way of memorializing Christ's word of redemption or resolving the clean/unclean reality that will exist during the millennium because there will be believers worshipping the Lord in an intermediate theocratic kingdom in non-glorified bodies.⁴⁷

Here, we will only focus on two problems with this proposal. First, it should be noted that neither Ezekiel nor any OT prophet portrays the restoration of Israel and creation in terms of glorified and non-glorified believers cohabitating an unrestored earth with one party requiring priestly and earthly temple services while the other is exempt. That proposal only emerges as one tries to reconcile a certain premillennial reading of Revelation 20 with OT depictions of Israel's eschatological hopes. It is true that Ezekiel and other prophets speak of a temple because it is a way of promising Israel that she will be delivered from the plight of exile and potential national extinction. This is relatively clear. Yet as this hope develops throughout NT revelation, the temple restoration project expands beyond the reestablishing of sacred space in the land of Israel. Instead of a temple being temporarily—or permanently—rebuilt in the earthly city of Jerusalem, the Christian hope expands to a larger scale where heaven's Jerusalem arrives on earth, thereby establishing a planetary temple.

The second problem with this view (as it pertains to the millennium) is that one must nuance some sort of qualified non-Mosaic, non-New Covenant system to justify how certain temple sacrifices are offered for non-glorified believers living in a temporary theocratic kingdom. For dispensationalists who argue that millennial sacrifice will reflect on Christ's atonement in a similar way that present-day communion does, this misses a key point which is that the Eucharist looks forward as well as backward. Scripture admonishes believers to partake and remember what Christ did as well as anticipate what he will do when he returns. So, what would be the future hope of post-Parousia sacrifices? Furthermore, how does the reality of the church coincide with these parameters? How does the church of glorified Jews and Gentiles headed by a glorified resurrected Messiah correspond with a national geo-political temple enacting memorial sacrifices? One would have to ask if the church ceases to exist temporarily, if not permanently.

Finally, in response to other dispensational ideas such as the necessity to address clean/unclean distinctions during the millennium, two concerns deserve mention. One is that Revelation 20 provides no commentary whatsoever on such a question. One must insert it because of certain theological expectations on how OT prophecies must be fulfilled in congruence with specific futurist demands. The other issue is that if Christ nullified the ceremonial clean/unclean distinction for believers in the present age as well as the age to come (as Hebrews clearly prescribes) and no mention of this dilemma is made in Revelation's discussion of the millennium, then it seems that one is forced to do one of two things. One must either contend that the OT has much to say about an intermediate age where temple sacrifices are required when the NT offers no commentary at all. Or one must conclude that no sacrificial system is to be expected after Christ's return, and if this is the case, then the validity for a future temple evaporates as well.

- 1 Cf., Gregory J. Wightman, *Sacred Spaces: Religious Architecture in the Ancient World* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2007); Mark J. Boda and Jamie R. Novotny, eds., *From the Foundations to the Crenellations: Essays on Temple Building in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2010); Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013); and Deena Ragavan, ed., *Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2013).
- 2 E.g., John Day, ed., *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007); Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); R. E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016); and Andrew R. Davis, *Reconstructing the Temple: The Royal Rhetoric of Temple Renovation in the Ancient Near East and Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- 3 Cf., G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2004); G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2014); and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019).
- 4 Cf., K. W. Bolle, "Temples," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Berard L. Marthaler, Gregory F. LaNave, Jonathan Y. Tan, et al., eds., vol. 13 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003) 805–06; Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, trans., John McHugh (New York, 1961), 271–344; and Yehezkel Kaufman, *The Religion of Israel from Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, trans. and abridged by Moshe Greenberg (London: George Allen & Unwind LTD, 1961), 302–303.
- 5 Bolle, "Temples," 805.
- 6 Bolle, "Temples," 805.
- 7 J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 18.
- 8 There are several other Hebrew and Greek words that the Old and New Testaments use to describe temples and other temple-like structures. A thorough survey can be seen in Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 13–17.
- 9 This is partly why temple language is used in the creation account, especially as it pertains to the Edenic setting. See discussion of this in John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 179–87.
- 10 Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 46–47 Also, for detailed treatments of the role of mountains in temple-like depictions of theophanies, see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 9–24, 98–106; L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* (Dissertation: University of Bristol, Trinity College, May 9, 2011), 7–19; and R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 1–16.
- 11 See a fully orbited treatment of this comparison in David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1–22.5*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 238 (New York: Sheffield, 2003).
- 12 See the discussion of this point in Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 100–3.
- 13 Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 44–5. This is possibly why the earlier nations attempted to build the Tower of Babel so they could have a heavenly perspective without a mountain view.
- 14 R. E. Averbeck, "Tabernacle," in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2003), 809; Hays, *Temple and Tabernacle*, 28–62.
- 15 More in-depth discussion of these terms can be found in Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 807–12.
- 16 Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 176. Others suggest that the Israelites were forced to face the west when entering the Tabernacle because it opposed the surrounding sun worshippers who always faced the east when praying or worshipping.
- 17 Averbeck, "Tabernacle," 817; Gordon Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–24.
- 18 The latter idea of "pollution" refers to the OT concept of uncleanness. Being ceremonially unclean did not necessarily convey the idea of being morally corrupt. It primarily referred to being contaminated or unfit to come into God's presence. Such uncleanness was indicative of death, decay, or imperfection, not evil actions in every case. See discussion of these points in Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 4 (2000), 637–57.

- ¹⁹ Often temple sanctuaries were depicted as having multiple levels. See Brant Pitre, "Jesus, the New Temple, and the New Priesthood," *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008), 55.
- ²⁰ David's first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem was a disaster because he did not follow the Law's instructions on how to transport it (see 1 Sam 6:1–11; 1 Chron 13:1–14).
- ²¹ P. P. Jenson, "Temple," in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*, eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2012), 767.
- ²² Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 224–25.
- ²³ Cf., George Athas, *Bridging the Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023), 586–90; Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 10–12; and Martin Goodman, "The Temple in First-Century Judaism," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, ed. John Day (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 459–68.
- ²⁴ A large portion of section of the article is based on my content that can be found in Brandon D. Smith and Everett Berry, "The Temple," in *They Spoke of Me: How Jesus Unlocks the Old Testament* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2017), 155–75.
- ²⁵ In actuality, there were strands of Judaism that looked forward to some sort of future eschatological temple, although its expression on earth was to be fulfilled by the arrival of some sort of heavenly temple. See treatment of this point in Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 10–11.
- ²⁶ See Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 183–90.
- ²⁷ Also, the Father's presence then encompassed the mountain and he spoke in affirmation of his Son's identity. Cf., discussions on this point in Patrick Schreiner, *The Transfiguration of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024), 93–128; and Brant Pitre, *Jesus and Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024), 86–108.
- ²⁸ Scripture goes on to extend the theme of Christ as the true temple to his people, the Church. Because he gives the Spirit to them, the divine presence now indwells them, thereby making their bodies individually holy (sacred) and making them a holy people.
- ²⁹ This view is disputed among some in NT scholarship. The contention is that Paul only claims the corporate church is indwelt by the Spirit. See an overview of this proposal in Nicholas G. Piotrowski and Ryan Johnson, "One Spirit, One Body, One Temple: Paul's Corporate Temple Language in 1 Corinthians 6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 4 (2022), 733–52.
- ³⁰ Most likely, in line with the language of the book of Hebrews, John is highlighting that God's heavenly temple is symbolized by Jerusalem's earthly temple. See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2005), 293–94.
- ³¹ Or as Eyal Regev states, "For John and his readers, there is no coming back from heaven ..." [meaning no way for an earthly temple to supersede a heavenly one]; "the next logical step could only be a New Jerusalem, with God and the Lamb as its Temple." See Regev, *The Temple in Early Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 209.
- ³² An excellent overview of this historical divide can be referenced in Israel Jacob Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans., Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).
- ³³ A helpful overview of this brief assessment can be found in John M. Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem: Past, Present, and Future* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 127–50.
- ³⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 118–19.
- ³⁵ Wilken, *First Thousand Years*, 119–23.
- ³⁶ More helpful details on these events can be found in Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem, The Biography: A History of the Middle East* (New York: Vintage Books, 2024), 191–213.
- ³⁷ Examples include the Temple Mount Faithful, Yeshivar Ataret-Cohanim, and the Jerusalem Temple Foundation. See an overview of such groups in Lundquist, *The Temple of Jerusalem*, 211–23.
- ³⁸ One of the best overviews of these titles and its specific referent can be found in Bernard McGinn's *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).
- ³⁹ Paul's language here is dependent upon Dan 11:36 and Ezek 28:2. See Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 278–80. Also, the Greek word translated with the English term "temple" is used to refer to the holy place in temple, not just the temple itself. See treatment in Gary S. Shogren, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).
- ⁴⁰ One can find a survey of dispensational proponents in Jerry Hullinger's helpful article "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July-September 1995), 279–81.

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- ⁴¹ E.g., Hullinger, "The Problem of Animal Sacrifices in Ezekiel 40–48," 285–89; Hullinger, "The Divine Presence and Uncleaness: The Rationale for Ezekiel's Millennial Sacrifices," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 652 (2006), 405–422; idem., "Two Atonement Realms: Reconciling Sacrifice in Ezekiel and Hebrews," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 32 (2007), 33–63; idem., "The Function of the Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January 2010), 20–57; idem., "The Function of Sacrifices in Ezekiel's Temple: Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April 2010), 166–79; idem., "The Compatibility of the New Covenant and Future Animal Sacrifice," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (Spring 2013), 47–66; and John C. Whitcomb, "Christ's Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel," *Grace Theological Journal* (1985), 201–17.
- ⁴² An excellent book that provides numerous examples of this dynamic between prophetic expectation and fulfillment, especially as it pertains to apocalyptic, can be found in D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002).
- ⁴³ Cf., other helpful examples regarding this point in Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapter 25–48*, *The New International Commentary on the OT* (Grand Rapids: 1998), 501–06; and Dean Davis, *The High King of Heaven* (Enumclaw, WA: Redemption Press, 2014), Chp 16.
- ⁴⁴ See a concise survey of Jewish sources regarding this belief in Larry Helyer, "The Necessity, Problems, and Promise of Second Temple Judaism for Discussions of New Testament Eschatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004), 612–14.
- ⁴⁵ E.g., Wilbur B. Wallis, "The Use of Psalms 8 and 110 in 1 Corinthians 15:25–27 and in Hebrews 1 and 2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972), 25–29; and idem., "The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20–28," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (1975), 233–37.
- ⁴⁶ In many ways, the traditional dispensational expectations of future temple and restored Israel rise and fall on a premillennial reading of Revel 20. One can see this in an entire volume devoted to the defense of a future eschatological temple of Jerusalem. The book spends thirteen chapters summarizing the various components of Ezekiel's vision, but then has to connect all of its proposals to Revelation 20 in chapter 14. The reason for this is because evidence for an intermediate kingdom in the NT is scarce and the disputed occurrences where one is discussed omit any reference to a potential temple. See John W. Schmitt and J. Carl Laney, *Messiah's Coming Temple: Ezekiel's Prophetic Vision of the Future Temple*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014).
- ⁴⁷ Again, one can consult the works of Hullinger mentioned in note 39 to see detailed arguments for this idea.