

# Temple

## THEME VIDEO NOTES

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

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

## Contents

Creation is a Temple	2
The Eden Temple	14
Eden Outpost	18
Jesus: The Temple Reality	20

# Creation is a Temple

---

SECTION 1

GENESIS 1-2:3

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

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

“The Hebrew Bible is replete with descriptions of creation as a tabernacle which God has pitched (Psalm 104; Job 9:8; Isaiah 40:22), or a house that God has established (with pillars, windows, and doors: Job 26:11; Gen 7:11; Ps 78:24). Consequently, the temple of Zion, as a sanctuary that God has established, becomes a microcosmic metaphor for creation itself.” – W.A. Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, 54.

# Literary Design of Genesis 1:1-2:4

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

*But chose the tribe of Judah  
Mount Zion which he loved.*

And **he built his sanctuary** like the heights  
Like **the land** which **he has founded** forever.

PSALM 78:68-69

ALL SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS  
ARE FROM THE NEW AMERICAN  
STANDARD BIBLE (NASB), UNLESS  
OTHERWISE STATED. EMPHASIS  
ADDED.

1:1 Summary Prologue [7 words]

*In the beginning, God created **the skies and the land***

1:2 Exposition of Prologue in 3 lines [7x2 words]

Now, the land was wild and waste (tohu va-vohu)  
And the darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (tehom)  
But the breath of Elohim was hovering over the face of the waters (hamayim)

<b>Tohu</b> - wilderness, unorder, chaotic		<b>Vohu</b> - uninhabited, empty, no residents	
<b>Days 1-3 - Order out of Chaos</b>		<b>Days 4-6 - The Habitation of the Ordered</b>	
A	<b>Day 1</b> [1:3-5] "light" called "day" "let there be light" "divide between...and between" "good"	<b>Day 4</b> [1:14-19] "lights" "let there be lights" "divide between...and between" "good" Rule the day/night	A'
B	<b>Day 2</b> [1:6-8] Sky dome in the waters Dome called "heavens" divides the waters "divide between...and between" A: waters below B: waters above	<b>Day 5</b> [1:20-23] Sky and water creatures Creatures in the waters and the dome of the heavens "good"/"created" A: water-swarmlers below + sea monsters B: Sky flyers above Blessing: "fruitful, multiply, fill the land"	B'
C	<b>Day 3</b> [1:9-13] Dry land emerges from the waters A: land emerges from the waters [1:9-10] "good" B: Plants and fruit trees emerge from the land C: the land brought forth vegetation [1:12] "good"	<b>Day 6</b> [1:24-31] Land creatures A: Beasts emerge from the land C: "let the land bring forth beasts" [1:24] "good"/"created" B: Creation of adam to rule the land "very good" Blessing: "fruitful, multiply, fill the land" Rule the land	C'

2:1 Summary Epilogue: "Thus were finished **the skies and the land** and all their host

2:2-3 Exposition of Summary

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

# From Creation to Tabernacle to Temple

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

## Repetition of 7's

Creation and Sabbath	Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath	Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath	Jerusalem Temple Completion
Seven days open with divine command: "And God said..." Day 1 - Genesis 1:5 Day 2 - Genesis 1:8 Day 3 - Genesis 1:13 Day 4 - Genesis 1:19 Day 5 - Genesis 1:23 Day 6 - Genesis 1:31 Day 7 - Genesis 2:1-3 Sabbath	Seven speeches open with divine command: "And Yahweh spoke to Moses..." Speech 1 - Exodus 25:1 Speech 2 - Exodus 30:11 Speech 3 - Exodus 30:17 Speech 4 - Exodus 30:22 Speech 5 - Exodus 30:34 Speech 6 - Exodus 31:1 Speech 7 - Exodus 31:12 Sabbath	Seven acts of obedience to the divine command complete the tabernacle: "And Moses did _____ just as Yahweh commanded Moses." Act 1 - Exodus 40:19 Act 2 - Exodus 40:21 Act 3 - Exodus 40:23 Act 4 - Exodus 40:25 Act 5 - Exodus 40:27 Act 6 - Exodus 40:29 Act 7 - Exodus 40:32-35 Divine rest	Seven petitions of Solomon upon the completion of the temple: "Blessed be Yahweh who spoke to my father David." Petition 1 - 1 Kings 8:31-32 Petition 2 - 1 Kings 8:33-34 Petition 3 - 1 Kings 8:35-37a Petition 4 - 1 Kings 8:37b-40 Petition 5 - 1 Kings 8:41-43 Petition 6 - 1 Kings 8:44-45 Petition 7 - 1 Kings 8:46-53 Seven day feasts

## Culmination of 7's

Creation and Sabbath	Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath	Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath	Jerusalem Temple Completion
Seventh day culminates in Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3)	Seventh speech emphasizes the "sign of Sabbath" (Exodus 31:12-17)	Seventh act of obedience "completes" the tabernacle	Solomon has two seven-day feasts to dedicate the temple (1 Kings 8:65)

(Chart continued on next page)

## Repeated Words

Creation and Sabbath	Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath	Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath	Jerusalem Temple Completion
"and God saw all that he had done, and behold, very good. And there was evening and morning, the sixth day." (Genesis 1:31) + "And God blessed the seventh day."		"and Moses saw all the work they had done, and behold, just as YHWH commanded, so they did, and Moses blessed them." (Exodus 39:43)	Then the king faced about and blessed all the assembly of Israel, while all the assembly of Israel was standing." (1 Kings 8:14)
"and the skies and the land were completed (כל"יה)." (Genesis 2:1)	"and it came about when he completed (כל"יה) speaking to Moses on Mt. Sinai." (Exodus 31:18)	"and Moses completed (כל"יה) the work (מלאכה)." (Exodus 40:33)	"and Solomon built the temple and he finished (ה"לכ) it." (1 Kings 6:14)
"and God rested (שב"ת) on the seventh day..."		"and the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of YHWH filled the tent." (Exodus 40:34)	"and the cloud filled the house of Yahweh." (1 Kings 8:10-11)
"... from all his work (מלאכה)... and God blessed (בר"ך) the seventh day and made it holy (קדש)." (Genesis 2:2-3)	"you shall keep the Sabbath for it is holy (קדש) for you... Six days let the work(מלאכה) be done, and on the seventh day it is a Sabbath of Sabbath." (Exodus 31:14-15)	Aaron and his sons are brought before the tent for seven days in the ordination ceremony (Leviticus 8-9, see 8:35)	"In the eleventh year, in the ... eighth month, the temple was finished throughout all its parts and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it." (1 Kings 6:38)  "And the work (מלאכה) of the pillars was finished." (1 Kings 7:22)  "Thus all the work (מלאכה) that King Solomon performed in the house of the Lord was finished." (1 Kings 7:51)

## Tragic Disruptions

Creation and Sabbath	Tabernacle Designs and Sabbath	Tabernacle Completion and Sabbath	Jerusalem Temple Completion
Temptation and fall narrative: Genesis 3	Temptation and fall narrative: Exodus 32	Temptation and fall narrative: Leviticus 10	Temptation and fall narrative: 1 Kings 9:1-9 and 11:1-13

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

JON LEVENSON, COSMOS AND MICROCOSM, 86.

# Cosmic Geography in Genesis 1

Think of the planet earth. What comes to mind? Many would picture a satellite image of our planet amidst a vast solar system. In the ancient world, they had a very different conception of the cosmos. Throughout the biblical creation accounts, we can construct an accurate view of their three-tiered cosmos. Let's walk through some Scripture together to put ourselves in the shoes of the ancient readers.

## Tier 1: The Skies

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

### A. The sky-dome separates the waters above and below

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

GENESIS 1:6-8

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

PROVERBS 8:27

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

JOB 26:10

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

PSALMS 19:1, 4

## B. The waters above and below

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

GENESIS 7:11-12

*Praise him from the skies, praise him in the heights...  
Praise him skies of the skies, and **the waters above the skies***

PSALMS 148:1, 4

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

PSALMS 104:5-13

## C. The stars in the dome

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

GENESIS 1:16-17

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

PSALM 148:1-3

## D. The heavenly temple

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

PSALMS 11:4

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

ISAIAH 66:1

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

PSALMS 18:6-10

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

PSALMS 29:10

## Tier 2: The Land

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

### A. The land is a disk whose center is Jerusalem

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

EZEKIEL 38:12

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

PSALMS 48:1-2, 10

*Hear my cry, O God;*

*Give heed to my prayer.*

**From the end of the earth I call to You** when  
*my heart is faint;*

*Lead me to **the rock** that is higher than I.*

PSALMS 61:1-2)

### B. Land disk is bordered by sea

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

JOB 38:8-11

**I made the sand a boundary for the sea**,  
*an everlasting barrier it cannot cross.*

*The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail;  
they may roar, but they cannot cross it.*

JEREMIAH 5:22

*May he also rule **from sea to sea***

*And from the river to the ends of the earth.*

PSALMS 72:8

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

PROVERBS 8:27-29

### C. Land is floating upon the sea

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

PSALMS 24:1-2

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

PSALMS 93:1-4

### D. Mountains reach/support the sky dome and are a portal of heaven and earth

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

2 SAMUEL 22:8

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

PSALMS 48:1-2

### E. Land is supported by the pillars underneath

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

PSALMS 75:3)

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

PSALMS 18:13-15

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

JEREMIAH 31:37

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

PROVERBS 8:28-29

## Tier 3: The Waters/Underworld

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

### A. The waters below the land

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

PSALMS 24:1-2

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

EXODUS 20:4)

### B. The deep abyss is the grave/pit

Save me, O God,  
For the **waters** have threatened my life.  
I have sunk in **deep mire**, and there is no foothold;  
I have come into **deep waters**, and a **flood**  
overflows me.

May the **flood** of water not overflow me  
Nor **the deep** swallow me up,  
Nor **the pit** shut its mouth on me.

PSALMS 69:1-2,15

### C. The pit and sheol (“the grave”) is also the deep waters

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

PSALMS 88:3-7)

The **cords of death** encompassed me,  
And the **torrents** of ungodliness terrified me.  
5The cords of **Sheol** surrounded me;  
The snares of **death** confronted me.

PSALMS 18:4-5

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

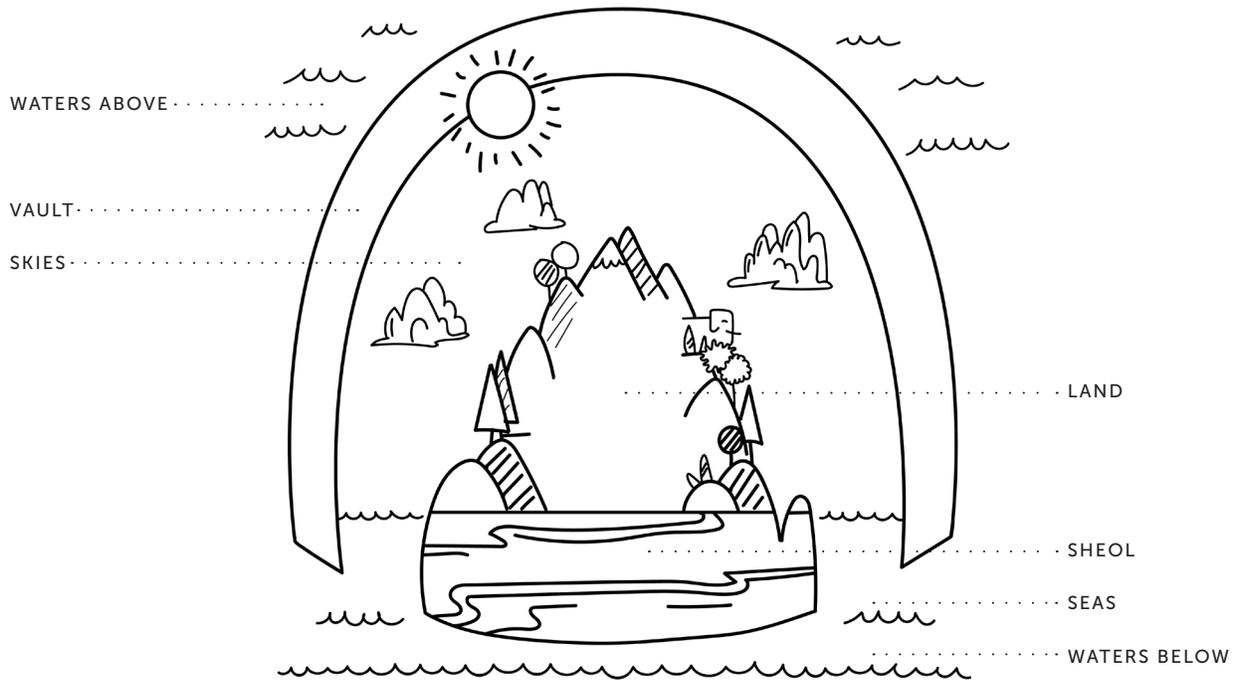
PSALMS 115:16-17)

### D. Vertical and horizontal horizons are often combined

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

PSALM 139:7-9

# Tying it all Together

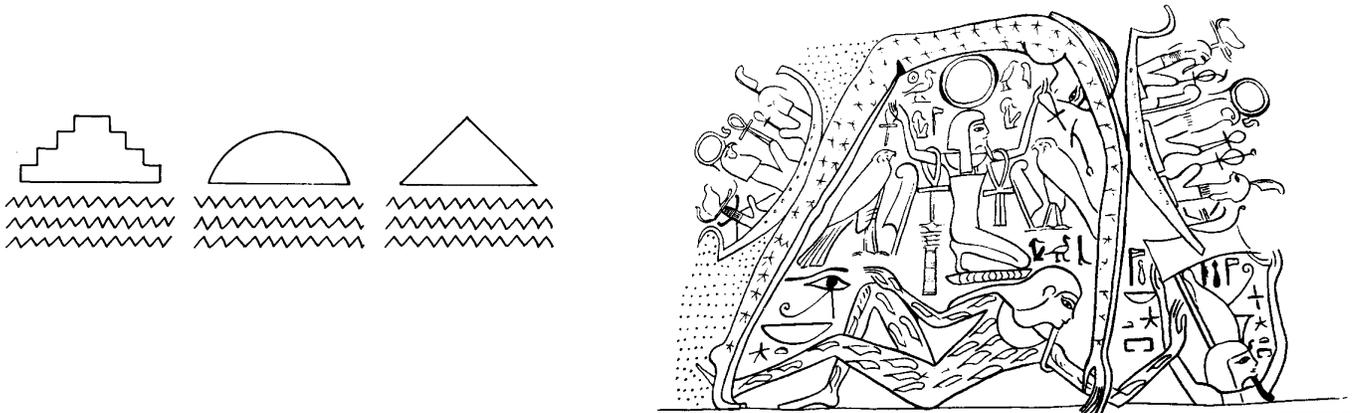


## Other Ancient Visualizations of the Cosmos

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

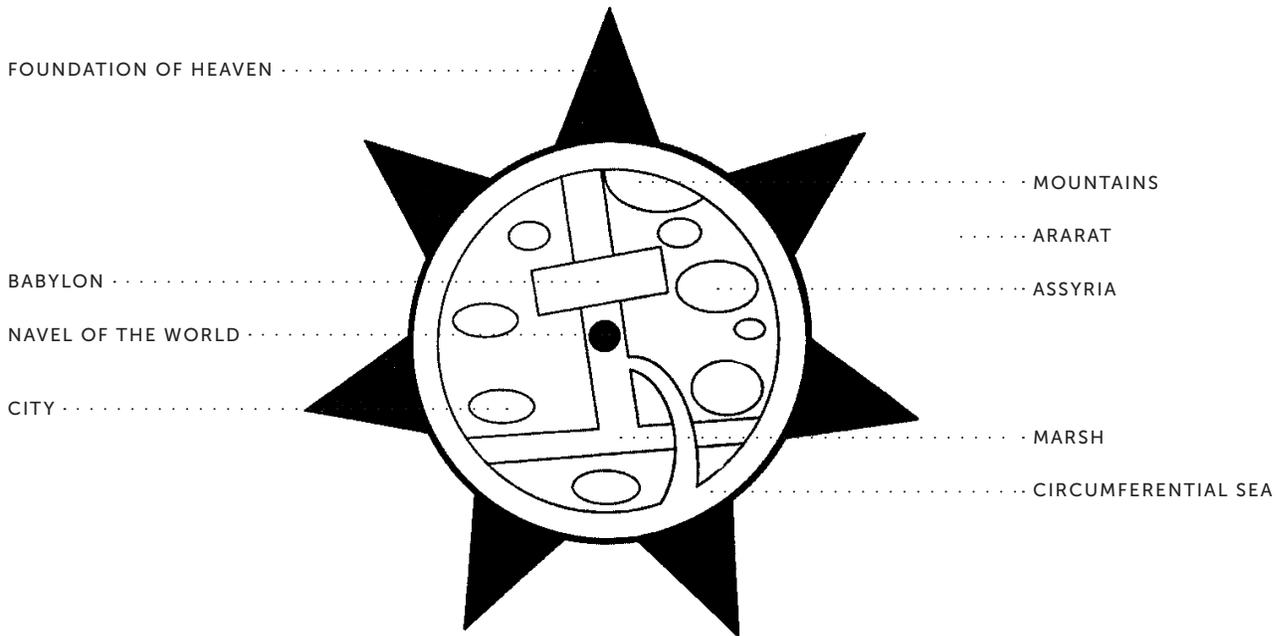
### Egyptian Conceptions

On the left are various Egyptian representations of the primeval hill, the first entity to rise from the water of chaos. The idea is that the world evolved from this primeval hill. On the right the sun-god Re is portrayed as traversing the heavens daily in an invisible boat. The sky forms a barrier between the waters above the heavens and the waters below the earth.

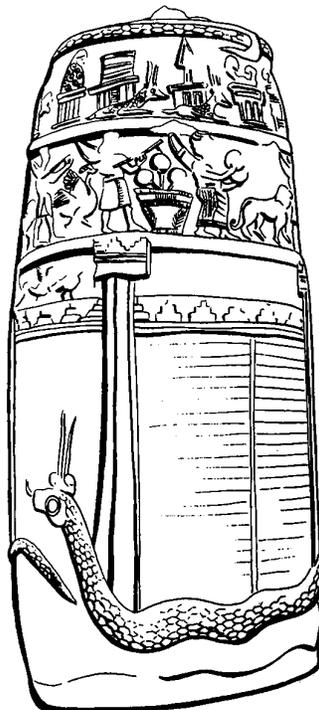


## Babylonian Conceptions

The Babylonian Sippar Map: The 6th century BC map presents a flat circular earth, bordered by a circumferential sea. The solid dome of the heavens ends at the horizon and is supported by seven pillars.



Late Kassite kudurru (boundary stone) from Susa (ca. 1180 B.C.). The multi-part picture of the world distinguishes an upper heavenly sphere, an earthly realm, and the underworld. Discussed in the text.



## What can we learn from these other ancient conceptions?

*"It should be evident that within the worldview of the ancient Near East, including the Hebrew Bible, their physical-technical and poetic-mythical statements and conceptions are not susceptible to consistent separation. To the ancient Near East, the empirical world, as manifestation and symbol, points beyond its superficial reality. A blurring occurs between the actual and the symbolic, and conversely between the symbolic and the actual. This openness of the everyday, earthly world to the spheres of divine life and bottomless, devastating lostness is probably the chief difference between ancient Near Eastern conception of the world and our own, which views the world as a virtually closed mechanical system. The principal error of conventional representations of the ANE view of the world lies in their profanity and lifelessness. In the biblical and ANE conception, the world is open and transparent to things above and beneath the earth. It is not a lifeless stage. The universe is thoroughly alive, and, therefore, the more capable of sympathy with humans and of response to the rule of its creator, on whom both humanity and the universe directly depend. Certainly we have here more than a poetical personification of the cosmos, when it is invited to shout for joy!"*

OTHMAR KEEL, THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BIBLICAL WORLD: ANCIENT NEAR  
EASTERN ICONOGRAPHY AND THE BOOK OF PSALMS, 56.

# The Eden Temple

---

SECTION 2

GENESIS 2:4 - 3:24

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

## What does “Eden” mean?

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

1. A proper geographical term, Eden (as in all modern English translations)
2. An adjective meaning “liquid luxuriance, watery abundance”

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

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

PSALM 36:9-10

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

JEREMIAH 51:34 (NASB)

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

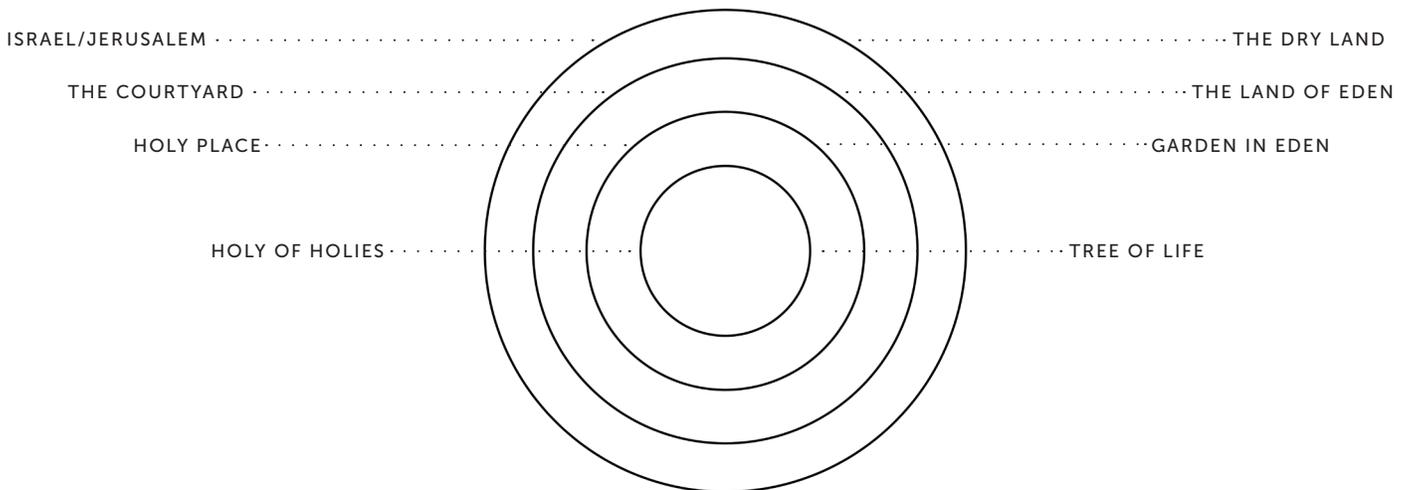
In summary, this word is part of the larger Eden as cosmic mountain motif that grounds this text in a larger design pattern that extends forward to the mountains of Ararat, Bethel, Sinai, and Jerusalem.

# The Symbolic Topography of Eden

Remember the three-tiered cosmos (skies-land-sea) depicted in Genesis 1? The garden of Eden also connects with the three-tiered design found in Genesis 1 and the tabernacle and temple.

	Cosmos in Genesis 1	Cosmic Geography in Genesis 2-3	Tabernacle/Temple
Tier 1	Skies	Cosmic mountain The middle of the garden	Holy of holies
Tier 2	Land Trees Animals Humans	The garden in Eden	Holy place Menorah = tree Cherubim = animals Priests = humans
Tier 3	Sea	The land outside the garden	Courtyard = Bronze sea (1 Kings 7:23)

The geography of Eden within the dry land of Genesis 1-3 depicts a three-part topography. This conception of the garden of Eden on the dry land provides a symbolic template for Israel's tabernacle temple, especially as described in Ezekiel's ideal/restored temple (Ezekiel 40-48).



*"In Genesis 2-3 Eden is not explicitly described as a mountain, but this can be best understood by a careful reading of many biblical texts that symbolically identify Eden with Zion. Through the temple ritual on Mt. Zion, the cosmic images of Eden became an earthly reality. Genesis 2:10-14 mentions the four great rivers that proceed from Eden and water all the earth. One of these cosmic streams is the Gihon, which appears only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the main source of Jerusalem's water... This connection between the Gihon of Eden and of Jerusalem is not the result of fuzzy or illogical mode of thought on the part of the biblical authors. This symbolic matching reflects Zion's cosmic and spiritual importance... The image of Jerusalem's cosmic stream is no more inappropriate than similar imagery applied to Jerusalem in Psalm 48:1-3 ("Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the entire earth, Mt. Zion in the far north") or Isaiah 2:1-4 ("Mt. Zion will be raised up as the highest of all mountains on earth"). In the symbolic world of Israel's temple liturgies, ordinary space became sacred space, the meager water spring of the city became a cosmic river, and the little knoll of Jerusalem became Mt. Zion, the highest mountain on the earth, and Jerusalem a peripheral city in the ancient world, became the center of the earth (Ezekiel 38:12)."*

GARY ANDERSON, THE COSMIC MOUNTAIN: EDEN AND ITS EARLY INTERPRETERS IN SYRIAC CHRISTIANITY, 192-93.

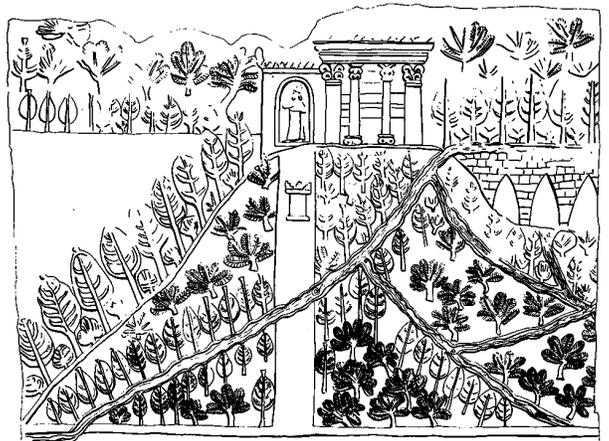
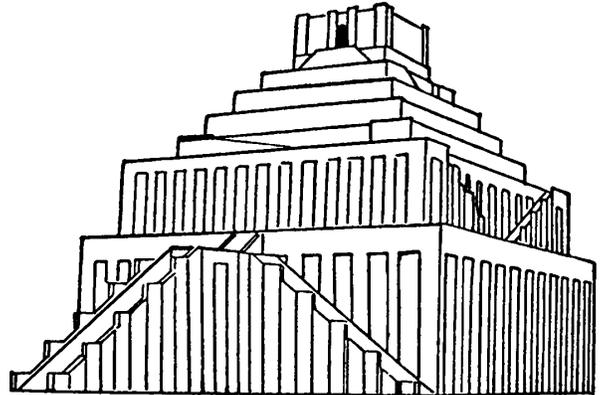
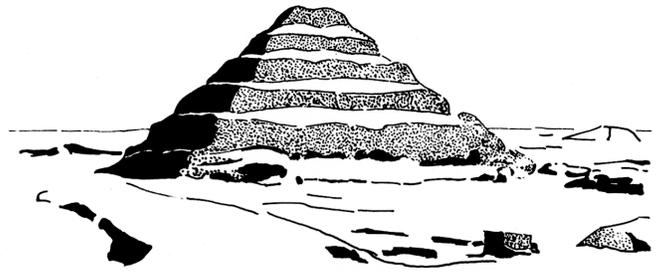
# Primeval Hills of the Ancient World

The concept of Eden described as a cosmic mountain temple would not be unfamiliar to ancient readers. The great pyramids of Egypt, ziggurats of Babylon, and ancient palace gardens all pay homage to these concepts.

The pyramids have the form and also (in the understanding of the ancient Near East) the character of the primeval hill. In the pyramid of Djoser, these aspects coincide with that of a double staircase, which is probably intended to enable the ascent of the deceased into the heavenly world. The Egyptian words for “climb” and “ascend” are determined by a double stair.

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

Nineveh: palace of Assurbanipal (668–626. b.c.); BM 124939A. R. D. Barnett and W. Forman, *Assyrische Palastreliefs*, fig. 134. A. Jeremias, *Das AT im Lichte des AO*, fig. 18. BHH, vol. 3, cols. 1385f. Drawing after a photograph in the British Museum.\*\*



# Adam and Eve: Priests of the Garden

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

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

## Rebellion: The New Normal

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

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

MICHAEL MORALES, WHO CAN ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD. 49.

# Eden Outpost

---

SECTION 3

THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY CONTINUES

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

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

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

## Outpost Destroyed

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

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

*The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.  
Now it will come about that  
In the last days  
The mountain of the house of the Lord  
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,  
And will be raised above the hills;  
And all the nations will stream to it.  
And many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
To the house of the God of Jacob;  
That He may teach us concerning His ways  
And that we may walk in His paths."  
For the law will go forth from Zion  
And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
And He will judge between the nations,  
And will render decisions for many peoples;  
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,  
And never again will they learn war.*

ISAIAH 2:1-4

*Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," declares the Lord. "Many nations will join themselves to the Lord in that day and will become My people. Then I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you. The Lord will possess Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.  
"Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He is aroused from His holy habitation."*

ZECHARIAH 2:10-13

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

EZEKIEL 47:1-2

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

# Jesus: The Temple Reality

---

SECTION 4

THE NEW TESTAMENT STORY

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

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

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*

JOHN 1:1-2

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

JOHN 1:14

*So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body.*

JOHN 2:18-21

# The People of Jesus Become the Temple

After his resurrection, Jesus said that God's presence would come to dwell in and among his followers, so that they could become mini-temples. The promise comes true, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell amongst the first believers during Pentecost.

*He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

ACTS 1:8

*Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."*

*But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:*

*'And it shall be in the last days,' God says,  
'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;  
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
And your young men shall see visions,  
And your old men shall dream dreams;*

*Even on My bondslaves, both men and women,  
I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit  
And they shall prophesy.*

ACTS 2:1-13

*Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."*

ACTS 2:37-38

After this event, the good news spread throughout the ancient world. Communities of people sprung up where God could rest and rule. Some of the New Testament authors picked up on the deeper meaning behind this, describing the vision of the church as a temple. It was no longer a building, but people!

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

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

*And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1 PETER 2:4-5

## Looking Forward to Renewed Creation

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

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

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

REVELATION 21:1-7

*Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.*

REVELATION 22:1-5

# Sources

---

Gage, Warren Austin. *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology*. Winona Lake, IN: Carpenter Books, 1984.

Levenson, J. (2014). *Cosmos and Microcosm*. In *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-centered Theology*.(p. 86). Leuven: Peeters.

Morales, Michael. *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic, 2015.

Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, trans. Timothy J. Hallett (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 56, 114-15, 396.

Walton, John H., and Andrew E. Hill. *The Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004.