

DIMENSIONS OF THE TEMPLE: THE TEMPLE ACCOUNT IN 1 KINGS 5-9
COMPARED WITH ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLE PARADIGMS

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To my mother.

I hope that this is something she would have liked.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Studies of the Solomonic Temple rely on the account found in 1 Kings 5-9 as the most extensive source available for understanding the form and function of the ancient temple. The text is more detailed than the many other examples of this genre known to the ancient Near East.¹ Still every scholarly address of this text begins by naming its shortcomings. Although the description is superfluous by Mesopotamian standards, there is a great deal of information left to be desired. The description includes several curious features such as archaic terminology and incomplete measurements, yet seemingly vital features do not appear in the account.² For instance, the narrator provides ample description of the interior of the temple and its appurtenances but tells virtually nothing of the outer appearance of the temple building.³ Also, the altar, certainly a fundamental part of ancient Near Eastern temples, is only mentioned in passing.⁴

A number of approaches are employed to compensate for what 1 Kings 5-9 lacks. Scholars often look to the archaeological record for supplementary information; but even though Jerusalem is one of the most heavily excavated sites in the Holy Land,

¹ Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, JSOT Supplement Series 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992).

² For example *tsela'ot* and *yatsia'*. Compare the size of the walls at 1 Kings 6.5-6, 8-10 with the dimensions of each room at 6.11-13, 16-20. The measurements given at 6.2-3, 17, 20 do not allow for walls because the exterior of the temple measures exactly to the sum of the three interior rooms's size.

³ Compare 6.2-36 with the detail in 7.13-51. Note that Hurowitz has shown that length and brevity in temple descriptions is irrelevant to emphasis and importance. Instead, the longest passages tend to be those that describe the expensive materials or the fine decorations. Hurowitz, *House*, 243-44.

⁴ 1 Kings 8.64

archaeologists have yet to find definitive evidence of Solomon's temple or his empire.⁵ However, the field has made valuable contributions to the general understanding of temples in Syria-Palestine and the greater ancient Near East. Several structural parallels exist between the temple described in 1 Kings 5-9 and temples excavated in Anatolia and Syria, and the decorative motifs of Solomon's temple correspond to known Phoenician examples.⁶

Scholars also look to other descriptions of the temple to solve the problems of 1 Kings 5-9. They frequently cite 2 Chronicles 2-7 and Ezekiel 40-43 in this regard, and they sometimes include the Books of Ezra-Nehemiah, which discuss rebuilding the temple upon return from the Exile, and Josephus and other late writers who address the temple.⁷ Again, however, these sources offer very little in the way of trustworthy detail. From one source to another, both biblical and non-biblical, the temple accounts vary in measurement, layout, and focus. The disparity can be accounted for in a number of ways. First, it is likely that the temple underwent renovations and additions including its major phases of destruction and rebuilding; thus the variation in the texts may show different phases of development. Also, several temple references do not coincide chronologically with an actual phase of the temple. Instead, like Ezekiel 40-48, which is cast in a

⁵ Excavations in the area believed to have been the site of the temple are not permitted. For a broad discussion of the archaeological remains of Jerusalem during the monarchy see Jane M. Cahill, "Jerusalem at the Time of the United Monarchy: the Archaeological Evidence," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, SBL Symposium Series 18, eds. by Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killbrew, 395-406 (Leiden: Brill, 2003) and "Solomon's Jerusalem: The Text and the Facts on the Ground," in the same volume, 103-116.

⁶ The temple at 'Ain Dara, for example, corresponds to the layout of Solomon's temple. John Monson, "The New 'Ain Dara Temple: Closest Solomonic Parallel," *BAR* 67, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 22-35. Both are understood as examples of the *megaron* or long-room type that spread from Anatolia to Syria. Volkmar Fritz, "What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" *BAR* 13, no. 4 (July/August 1987): 38-49. Victor Hurowitz, "Inside Solomon's Temple," *Bible Review* 10 (April 1994): 24-37, 50.

⁷ C. T. R. Hayward. *The Jewish Temple: A Non-biblical Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996).

visionary mode, the description may anticipate a future temple or, like 2 Chronicles 2-7, aggrandize the memory of a fallen temple.⁸ Finally, differences arise out of the varied agendas of each account. Often, narrators describe the temple in a way that illustrates their theological and social concerns. That is, the form and decoration of the temple were not described in order to preserve a record of the building; instead the descriptions were heavily charged with the ideology of the narrator. For example, Ezekiel expresses a concern for piety and strict purity as a means of maintaining the LORD's presence and support. These emphases pervade his description of the temple in the form of restrictive boundaries (courtyards, walls, etc.) that allow access based on ancient Israel's tribal hierarchy.⁹ Thus, the temple was a popular metaphor for expressing values and beliefs.¹⁰

A recent trend in Israelite naology has abandoned the quest for a technical reconstruction of the temple. Instead, the temple accounts are interpreted for their symbolical value, often making use of established interpretive practices from the social sciences. Elizabeth Block-Smith has written articles investigating the value of the temple

⁸ The Chronicler omits, embellishes, or alters certain portions of the account. It is also possible that the Chronicler had the same sources available when composing his description that the author of the Books of Kings employed. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler as Historian*. JSOT Supplement Series 238 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). Also Steven L. McKenzie, *The Chronicler's Use of the Deuteronomistic History*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1984).

⁹ Levenson, Jon Douglas, *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40-48*. Harvard Semitic Monograph Series 10 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars, 1976).

¹⁰ For example, Claudia V. Camp, "Storied Space, or, Ben Sira 'Tells' a Temple," in *Imagining Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social, and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan*, JSOT Supplement 359, eds. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt, 64-80 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002). The temple has become a symbol for eschatological expectations as well. The apocalypse of 4 Ezra describes a heavenly temple/Jerusalem that will be revealed at the end of days (9.38-10.59). Yigael Yadin describes modern example of a similar expectation: "some years ago I gave a lecture to some very pious Rabbis here in Mea She'arim about the plan of Solomon's Temple. I spoke about one theory, and another theory, and a third theory; and I said that if today we were faced with the problem of rebuilding Solomon's Temple it would cause a terrific debate among people how to build it. Then an old Rabbi stood up and said, 'Professor Yadin, do not worry, when the time comes, it will come ready-made by God from heaven.'" Discussion of David Noel Freedman, "Temple Without Hands," in *Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion*, ed. Avraham Biran, 29 (Jerusalem, Israel: Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology, 1981).

decorations as ancient Near Eastern symbols.¹¹ Clifford Mark McCormick compares the temple in 1 Kings 5-9 to the dedicatory inscriptions for Sennacherib's Palace in Nineveh, viewing both as "verbal icons" inspired by the narrator's ideology.¹² Others like James Flanagan and Jon L. Berquist apply critical spatiality theories to ancient built environments, looking into the perspective and social situation implied by a particular ordering of space.¹³

This study makes use of information from all three approaches in that it examines the built environment of the temple described in 1 Kings 5-9 in the context of the accepted status and function of ancient Near Eastern temples. Text and artifact are used to recreate the context of the ancient Near Eastern temple with an emphasis on the basic function and status of that structure within the community. From this standpoint, Solomon's temple as described in Kings appears as a set of symbols that coalesce to represent the particular ideological stance of the narrator. To this end, the text is treated as a complete whole without regard to other biblical descriptions, which maybe driven by disparate ideological purposes. This interpretation will not only show how Solomon's temple (as described in 1 Kings 5-9) conforms to the ancient Near Eastern temple paradigm, but it will also shed light on the illustration as the craft of an narrator and/or editors with an explicit ideological purpose and agenda for the temple.

¹¹ "Who is the King of Glory? Solomon's Temple and Its Symbolism," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager, 18-31 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994). Also, "Solomon's Temple: The Politics of Ritual Space," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. Barry M. Gittlen, 83-94 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002).

¹² Clifford Mark McCormick, *Palace and Temple: A Study of Architectural and Verbal Icons*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 313 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002).

¹³ Gunn and McNutt, "Imagining," 14-29.

CHAPTER II

INTERPRETING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

“Once the temple description is no longer approached with the creation of a visual reconstruction as the goal, one is able to read the text as a literary creation of the historian structured by the ideology of the author. The structure and arrangement of the temple functions iconographically to present the reader with a particular image of the deity and how one should relate to the deity.”¹⁴

Understanding meaning from architecture begins where buildings begin—with a definite purpose and intention. Constructed space is not merely a “random assemblage of things.”¹⁵ Instead, every manipulation of the human environment fulfills a human need or desire. A particular need demands a particular architectural layout and component parts.¹⁶ An obvious corollary to this foundational element is the idea that a built environment is meant to be used. As “molded theaters of human activity” buildings carry evidence of the society and culture to which they cater. Everything from construction technique to materials to location testifies to a specific cultural context.¹⁷ Add to this the non-fixed features of an environment (decoration, utensils, furniture, and etc.), and the portrait of a specific time, place, and way of life becomes even clearer.¹⁸

¹⁴ McCormick. *Palace and Temple*, 130.

¹⁵ Amos Rapoport, “Cross-Cultural Aspects of Environmental Design,” in *Human Behavior and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research*, vol. 4 *Environment and Culture*, eds. Irwin Altman, Amos Rapoport, and Joachim F. Wohlwill (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 11.

¹⁶ Paul Frankl, *Principles of Architectural History: The Four Phases of Architectural Style, 1420-1900*, trans. and ed. by James F. O’Gorman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 157-61.

¹⁷ Frankl, *Principles*, 159.

¹⁸ Thomas J. Schlereth, “Material Culture and Cultural Research” in *Material Culture: A Research Guide* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985).

As a whole, the built environment and its pieces constitute a community's material culture.¹⁹ Anthropologists have a dizzying array of definitions for material culture, but the most instructive is, somewhat oddly, that of Howard W. Marshall in his study of folk architecture in Missouri:

Material culture is the array of artifacts and cultural landscapes that people create according to traditional, patterned, and often tacit concepts of value and utility that have been developed over time, through use and experimentation. These artifacts and landscapes objectively represent a group's subjective vision of custom and order.²⁰

As Marshall explains, material culture consciously or unconsciously incorporates values and social standards. That is, surroundings offer "cues" that guide accepted modes of thought and behavior within a culture.²¹

As an illustration, consider two restaurants. The first provides a long buffet and vinyl booth seating. The second is an expensive, gourmet restaurant with loungers, tablecloths, and low lighting. Though the basic activity is the same in both establishments, they require different behavior. In the more casual restaurant, guests seat themselves and assemble their own meals: it is a relaxed and informal environment, endorsing a specific behavior through its atmosphere of décor and layout. The second, fancier restaurant encourages more formal behavior. There is a correct way to speak and act; rules govern everything from how to hold a wine glass to appropriate dress. Usually these standards are not spoken. Instead they are implied by the environment. Because of

¹⁹ As opposed sociological cultural data (evidence documented by fieldwork observation of human behavior) or ideological cultural data (evidence usually in the form of written or oral data). In the case of the temple accounts, evidence of material culture is conveyed through ideological data. Schlereth, *Material Culture*, 2.

²⁰ *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie: A Regional Culture in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 17.

²¹ Rapoport, "Cross-Cultural," 7.

the inherent message of a built environment, it is one of the most tangible expressions of human values and social standards.

However, interpreting the meaning and message of constructed space requires intimate knowledge of a culture. For instance, a child, being less familiar with his or her community and culture, is less liable to understand environmental cues. Returning to the restaurant example, the casual or elegant surroundings of the two venues are lost on the child who has little experience dining out.²² The same is true in the case of finding meaning in environments removed from one's personal social and cultural context. Though some points may be obvious, a constructed environment implies meaning most accurately and fully when viewed in the proper context. Imagine interpreting a gothic cathedral removed from its context. The decorative elements (spires, towers, etc.) might look heavy and overbearing, especially to an audience familiar with the minimalist school of architectural design; but within the proper context, one would know that the design was an improvement on Romanesque architecture, and that it was meant to be light and airy, suggestive of the Christian souls' aspired ascendance to heaven.

Returning to our temple agenda, built environment analysis does not directly apply for these are written records of material culture, not the actual material culture. McCormick bridges the gap in his explanation of the temple account in 1 Kings as a "verbal icon."²³ That is, the narrator of the description relays the proper cues for understanding space to his audience. The limited, unspecific accounts—testified to by the litany of theoretical reconstructions made by biblical scholars—suggest that their purpose was not to record scientifically the Jerusalem temple's actual appearance and

²² Rapoport, "Cross-Cultural," 9-10.

²³ McCormick, *Palace and Temple*, 41.

construction. Instead, it seems that the narrator intended to communicate certain ideas through the temple to illustrate a “vision of custom and order,” purposefully selecting and modeling components of the temple to convey this message. The task is to uncover that vision and order presented through verbally constructed space.

The objective operates on the assumption that the texts, like actual built environments, are not “random assemblages of things.” According to the principles of communication—which are especially applicable in the ancient world considering the relative rarity of the written word—this study assumes that the text was written (or assembled) with an express purpose and message.²⁴ The inclusions, inconsistencies, omissions, and other problems presented to the modern reconstructionist had real meaning in their original context: they are not simply unfortunate results of the “brainless redactor’s” shoddy work.²⁵

With these criteria in place, we proceed to a model for interpreting the (verbally) constructed space of the Jerusalem Temple transmitted through the Books of Kings. The first step to understanding the “cues” presented in the accounts is to become familiar with the culture and cultural cues known to the biblical narrator(s). The cornerstone of our investigation, then, relies upon our understanding of ancient Near Eastern temple culture. Fortunately, the institution is well documented in the archaeological record and in numerous literary genres from the ancient Near East. This context will serve as a lense through which we can properly understand the biblical temple accounts as manifestations of the principles guiding other ANE temples. In the process, the “cues” of the text will

²⁴ Miguel Civil, “The Sumerian Writing System: Some Problems,” *Orientalia* 42 (1973): 21-34.

²⁵ A phrase used by Jon D. Levenson, “The Temple and the World,” *Journal of Religion* 64, no. 3 (1984): 275-98. McCormick’s study is based upon the same assumption, *Palace and Temple*, 89.

be interpreted in hopes of arriving at the ideological purpose guiding the presentation of the temple space.

CHAPTER III

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEMPLES

“In the ancient Near East up to approximately late Hellenistic times, there was a common ritual language and praxis centered around great temples, a common ‘temple ideology,’ which transcended language and cultural and political boundaries and which survived the rise and fall of empires.”²⁶

Some of our very earliest evidence of civilization in the ancient Near East attests to the prominence of the temple in society. Tablets uncovered at Girsu in Southern Mesopotamia that date to the mid-third millennium BCE show that the temple controlled vast resources including agricultural and livestock holdings and played a large role in the distribution of vital commodities and textile production. The wealth, organization, and apparent influence of these temples inspired the “temple-state theory,” which framed the emergence of civilization as centered on the temple’s predominant role in the first urban settlements. Although scholars have since recognized the flawed evidence for this theory, the archaeological record still demonstrates that temples were a powerful force in early society.²⁷

Despite the many technological innovations, social developments, and cultural variances that mark ancient Near Eastern history, certain aspects of temple status and function display remarkable consistency both geographically and diachronically. Of

²⁶ John M. Lundquist, “The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East,” in *The Temple in Antiquity: Ancient Records and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1984), 54.

²⁷ John F. Robertson, “The Social and Economic Organization of Mesopotamian Temples,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, 4 Volumes., ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Schribner, 1995), 443-452.

course changes occurred, but most took place within the boundaries of accepted temple tradition. For example, Akhenaton's radical reform of the Egyptian pantheon did not actually change the institution of the temple; instead, his reforms centralized power by claiming the exclusive prominence of one temple, the temple at El-Amarna, and one god. Through the course of his reforms, he monopolized the traditional status and function of the temple for himself and the royal family.²⁸

Because of the temple's institutional stability in the ANE, we are able to formulate a common temple "vocabulary" or set of characteristic features. John Lundquist has written a series of essays attempting to do just that. He enumerates a set of characteristics of ANE temples, including the following items:

1. Temples were the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain.
2. The cosmic mountain represented the primordial hillock.
3. Temples were associated with the "waters of life."
4. Temples were built on sacred, set-apart space.
5. They were oriented toward the four world regions.
6. Successive ascension toward heaven was implied in their architecture.
7. Their plan and measurement were divinely revealed to the king.
8. Temples were the central, organizing, and unifying institution of ancient Near Eastern society; and its destruction or loss was calamitous to the community.
9. The temple facilitated daily rituals of washing, clothing, anointing, feeding, etc. of the cult image or supplicants.
10. Temples were associated with the realm of the dead.
11. They were the site of sacral, communal meals
12. Temples contain the "tablets of destiny."
13. The temple was closely associated with law and justice.
14. They were the place of sacrifice.
15. The ritual of the temple was enshrouded in secrecy.
16. Divine word was revealed through the temple.
17. Temples played an important economic role in ancient Near Eastern society.
18. Temples were an instrument of political influence.²⁹

²⁸ William H. Stiebing, Jr., *Ancient Near Eastern History and Culture* (New York: Longman, 2003), 180-87.

²⁹ See note 1 and also, "What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, eds. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 205-19.

Although Lundquist's list is a valuable resource, there are a number of important difficulties created by its features and format. First, though Lundquist admits that every characteristic cannot be found "without regard to time, space, and cultural uniqueness," the list presents the danger of oversimplifying ancient Near Eastern temples and in turn misunderstanding their importance. But the continuity he claims to justify the list of motifs crumbles if it is impossible to see their broad manifestation irrespective of time, place, or culture. Despite its value, Lundquist's list ignores the relationship between certain motifs he names and forces a relationship between others.

The solution is to organize the traditional characteristics of the ancient Near Eastern temple as a set of three serial principles: (1) the temple possesses a supra-earthly cosmological status (2) that allows communication between realms with the purpose of sustaining and/or improving the human environment (3) which, in turn, legitimates certain social and cultural fixtures, including the institution of kingship, creation of law codes, and economic control. Some articles of Lundquist's list are better understood as manifestations of these principles, which take different forms and emphases through the chronological development of different cultures. This model addresses the relationship between traditional temple characteristics and accounts for absences or changes without requiring the abandonment of a truly applicable temple typology of the ancient Near East.

The following discussion expands these three serial principles and examines evidence from Egypt, Canaan, Syria, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. Though biblical evidence is cited, the information contained in the main temple account (1 Kings 6-8) is

best addressed in the following section which concentrates on the flavor of these ancient Near Eastern temple attributes found in the description of Solomon's temple.

The Cosmological Status of the Temple

The heart of the ancient Near Eastern temple's role in society was the special cosmological status it possessed. In the temple, the boundaries among the heavens, the earth, the realm of the dead, and diluvial extremes of the cosmos were more flexible.³⁰ No matter what cosmology a culture recognized, the temple was the meeting place of the different realms on the map. Moreover, temples claimed to have achieved this status simultaneously during creation or other mythologically formative moments in their history. The roles filled by the temple were legitimated and perpetuated by this supra-earthly status and incomparable lineage.

Each culture expressed the cosmological status of the temple differently, but often symbols evoking creation and otherworldly terrain were employed. Some among these were so widely used that an ancient Near Eastern repertoire of cosmological "status symbols" is easily identified. The most popular were elements of heavenly or primordial landscapes including the following symbols: the ben-stone or primeval mound, the cosmic mountain, and bodies of water linked to the "atmosphere" of water surrounding creation. We find the cosmological status of temples clearly articulated in ancient Near Eastern mythology.

³⁰ Though contact with these realms was possible outside of the temple, no other place equaled the temple's power in this respect. For example, an open air altar in the country-side or the private residence were acceptable places to make sacrifice or offer a prayer, activities that contact the divine realm. Baruch Levine, "The Language of Holiness: Perceptions of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible," in *Backgrounds for the Bible*, eds. Michael Patrick O'Connor and David Noel Freedman, 241-56 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987).

We begin in Egypt, where every major temple claimed the status of having been erected contemporaneously with creation of earth. Each temple proclaimed to commemorate the *ben*-stone or the primordial mound. The ben-stone was the first dry land created in the classic Egyptian creation mythology. Similarly, the primordial mound was the point where earth first appeared from the waters, an image possibly inspired by the emergence of dry land, teeming with life, after the annual inundation of the Nile River subsided.³¹ From this vantage point creation took place.³² The following text describes Thebes as the site of creation where Mut (here identified with the goddess Sekhmet) established her cult seat:

Thebes is *normal* beyond every other city. The Water and land were in her for the first times. Then sand came to delimit the fields and to create her ground on the hillock; thus earth came into being . . . Her majesty came as the Sound Eye and the Beneficial Eye, to bind the land thereby together with (her) *ka*, coming to rest and alighting in Ishru in her form as Sekmet, the Mistress of the Two Lands. “How rich she is,” they say about her, “in her name of Thebes!” . . . Every other city is under her shadow to magnify themselves through Thebes. She is the *norm*.³³

Another example comes from Heliopolis where the god Atum was believed to have created the ben-stone before all else.

Atum-Khepri, thou wert high as (the) Hill.
Though didst shine forth as *Benben*
In the *Benben* temple in Heliopolis
Thou didst spit out Shu;
Thou didst spew out Tefnut.³⁴

³¹ Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and The Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972), 26-27.

³² Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 147. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 26-27. The Creation Myth by Atum and others also express this belief, James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Third Edition with Supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3.

³³ “Thebes as the Place of Creation,” in *ANET* (see note 33), 8.

³⁴ R. O. Faulkner, trans., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

That is, from the primeval hill, called “the high sand,” Atum created the *ben*-stone before creating the first two gods, Shu and Tefnut. The myth describes the temple’s origin as on par with or even preceding the creation of other cosmological features as important as the first gods. If creation of the world—including the various realms—happened at an earthly location, the idea that the location possessed the ability to access those elements created thereupon is not difficult to conceive. Hence, the names of Egyptian temples portrayed their status as a link between realms. The temple at Heliopolis was called “Heaven of Egypt,” and Karnack was called “Heaven on Earth.” Innumerable other texts show the connection, saying the temple is “like the *akhet* of the earth.”³⁵

Moving east, the cosmological status of temples was frequently expressed with the idea of the “cosmological mountain” in Canaanite, Israelite, Syrian, and Anatolian literature. Mountains are common features of the region’s landscape; and as remote and imposing locales, they were thought of as the dwelling places of the gods. Two mountains figure most significantly in Canaanite mythology: Casius, Baal’s mountain, and Amanus, which is associated with El.³⁶ The *Baal Cycle*,³⁷ a myth from Ugarit, tells of the god Baal’s rise to kingship. His struggle against Yamm (the sea) and Mot (the lord of the underworld) establishes a power hierarchy among the gods but also creates natural order. The final result, Baal’s temple on his holy mountain, is the center of the natural order created by his ascension. Though the text does not deal explicitly with creation, it

³⁵ Bernd Janowski, “Der Tempel als Kosmos—Zur kosmologischen Bedeutung des Tempels in der Umwelt Israels,” in *Ägypten: Tempel der gesamten Welt*, ed. Sibylle Meyer, 41-58 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

³⁶ Benjamin Mazar, “Yahweh Came out from Sinai,” in *Temples and High Places* (see note 10), 5-9.

³⁷ Simon B. Parker, ed. *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, Society of Biblical Literature Writings of the Ancient World Series 9 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1997), 87-180.

does establish Baal's temple in the context of creating or ordering cosmic realms.³⁸ Elements from the *Baal Cycle* have been found throughout the region, and texts supposing its themes are even more ubiquitous as there was a lively exchange among Canaanite, Hittite, and Hurrian religions.³⁹

The theme appears to have been known in Israelite culture as well. Richard J. Clifford and other scholars have shown how the Hebrew Bible shares "the idea of the storm god's victory over the Sea that establishes cosmic order as well as his victorious return to his mountain house where the newly won kingship would be proclaimed."⁴⁰ A stunning example comes from the celebration of the LORD's victory over pharaoh at the Red Sea in Exodus 15.1-18:

Sing to the LORD for he is highly exalted,
Horse and chariotry he has cast into the Sea . . .
You blew with your breath, Sea covered them.
They sank like lead weight in the dreadful waters.
You faithfully led the people whom you redeemed;
You guided in your might to your holy encampment.
The peoples heard; they shuddered; horror seized the inhabitants of Philistia . . .
You brought them, you planted them in the mountain of your heritage,
The dais of your throne which you made, LORD,
The sanctuary, LORD, which your hands created.
Let the LORD reign forever and ever.

³⁸ Actually, it is Baal's *palace* that is built. However, as shown below, temples were conceived of as grand living quarters—palaces—for the gods on earth. Menahem Haran, "Temple and Community in Ancient Israel," in *Temple in Society*, ed. Michael V. Fox, 17-26 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1988).

³⁹ A letter from the reign of Zimri-Lim uncovered at Mari (1780 BCE), for example, uses the same metaphors. Mark Stratton Smith, "Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel," *CANE* (see note 27), 2031-33. Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 34-97.

⁴⁰ As Clifford notes, the relationship is not always symmetrical. In the example that follows, it is pharaoh, not the sea, who is defeated *in* the sea. See Psalm 29 for an image of god defeating the sea. "The Temple and the Holy Mountain," in Madsen, *Temple in Antiquity*, 107-24. Also see John Day, "Ugarit and the Bible: Do They Presuppose the Same Canaanite Mythology and Religion," in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible*, Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur 11, eds. George J. Brooke, Adrian H. W. Curtis, and John F. Healey, 35-52 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994).

On the one hand, this passage shows an affinity with the Canaanite tradition found in the *Baal Cycle*; on the other hand, it sets the LORD's sanctuary on his holy mountain within a critical, formative moment in Israel's sacred history. Like other examples from the ancient Near East, this temple begins simultaneously with the creation of cosmic order—Yahweh's supremacy over pharaoh (another god) and natural forces such as the sea. The temple retained its place as a link between heaven and earth as Sinai developed into Zion and the tabernacle developed into the temple.⁴¹

Furthermore, rabbinic literature clearly articulates the belief Sinai/Zion as the place of creation, the navel of the earth:

“The Holy One created the world like an embryo. As the embryo proceeds from the navel onwards, so God began to create the world from its navel onwards, so God began to create the world from its navel onwards and from there it spread out in different directions . . . ‘These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created on the day the Lord God made the earth and heaven’ (Gen. 2.4). The offspring of heaven were created from heaven, and the offspring of the earth were created from the earth. But he sages say, both were created from Zion . . . as the Bible says, ‘From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shone forth’ (Ps. 50.2).⁴²

These passages clearly understand the Mount Zion as the omphalos, the point from which creation proceeded. Again, we have the site of the temple as the heavenly vantage point of creation. It follows that this site's special heavenly association enables its potential for contact between realms.

Two other biblical texts stand out as illustrative of the link between heaven and earth. The first is Jacob's dream at Bethel. In this story, Jacob stops to sleep for the night and has a dream: “there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to

⁴¹ Mazar, “Yahweh,” 10-20.

⁴² Passages from the Talmudic tractate b. Yoma 54b. Sonaino Classics Library on CD-ROM. Windows Version. (Chicago: Institute for Computers in Jewish Life, 2001).

heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.” Suddenly, the LORD is standing beside him. He makes a covenant with Jacob, who wakes up to exclaim:

“Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!’ And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’⁴³

Jacob frankly demonstrates how a place on earth—notably called Bethel, which is identical to a biblical Hebrew term for the temple, “house of god”—can have special access to the divine realm. After realizing the sanctity of the space, he marks it the space by anointing his pillow-rock with oil and vows to return and build “God’s house.”⁴⁴

No less famous among biblical tales is the Tower of Babel narrative. Here, humankind designs to build a “tower with its top in the heavens” in hopes of avoiding confinement to the earth. Plans are thwarted, however, when the LORD confuses their language and leaves humankind unable to conspire.⁴⁵ Again we have an example of the link between heaven and earth.

Mention of the ziggurat brings us to the literature of ancient Mesopotamia, where the idea of the temple as a cosmological center thrived as well. Again, temples are connected to primordial events and thereby conferred a cosmological status as a portal between realms. For example, the Sumerian myth *The Creation of the Pickax* says of the temple of Inanna in Nippur:

The lord did verily produce the normal order,
The lord whose decisions cannot be altered,
Enlil, did verily speed to remove Heaven from Earth,
So that the seed (from which grew) the nation could sprout (up) from the field;

⁴³ Genesis 28.10-17

⁴⁴ Genesis 28.22

⁴⁵ Genesis 11.1-9

Did verily speed to bring the Earth out from the Heaven [as] separate
[And] bound up for her the gap in the “bond of Heaven and Earth”
So that the “flesh producer” could grow the vanguard of mankind.⁴⁶

The sanctity of the present temple is due to its history as the site where earth created mankind. Its name was *dur-an ki*, “the bond of heaven and earth” because it was the heavenly vantage point of earthly creation. Other Mesopotamian temples names recall similar circumstances: the temple in Babylon called *É-temenanki*, or “House of Heaven and Earth”; in Aššur, “House, the Mountain of the Universe”; at Larsa, “House, Link of heaven and Earth.”⁴⁷ *Enuma Elish* describes the pedigree to a temple of Ea in Nippur that reaches back to the time of creation:

When Apsu he had made prone, drenched with sleep,
Mummu, the adviser, was powerless to stir
He loosened his band, tore off his tiara,
Removed his halo (and) put it on himself.
Having fettered Apsu, he slew him.
Mummu he bound and left behind lock.
Having thus upon Apsu established his dwelling,
He laid hold on Mummu, holding him by the nose rope.
After Ea had vanquished and trodden down his foes,
Had secured his triumph over his enemies,
In his sacred chamber in profound peace had rested,
He named it “Apsu,” for shrines he assigned (it).
In that same place his cult hut he founded.⁴⁸

In the same story, Babylon and the temple of Marduk are founded after Marduk shapes the earth:

The counterpart of Esharra, which I have built over you,
Below, I have hardened the ground for a building site,
I will build a house—it will be my luxurious abode!
I will found therein its temple,
I will appoint cellas, will establish my sovereignty.
When you come up from the Apsu for assembly,

⁴⁶ Samuel Noel Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, Revised Edition (New York: Harper, 1961), 52-53.

⁴⁷ Clifford, *Cosmic Mountain*, 15.

⁴⁸ Pritchard, *ANET*, 61.

You will spend the night therein, (it is there) to receive all of you.
When you des[cend] from heaven [for assem]bly,
You will spend the night therein, (it is there) to receive all of you.⁴⁹

These texts show the primeval origin of the temples. Moreover, like the other examples, they point to the temple as the site of creation. As the point from which the realms were created, it follows that the same point offers access between the realms of the expressed worldview.

Several elements of ancient Near Eastern temple form and layout communicated their connection as well. Egyptian pyramids, which are likely mortuary temples meant to connect the deceased pharaoh with his afterlife in the non-earthly realms, mimicked the shape of the primordial mound. Frequently, astrological scenes were painted or carved into the ceiling of temples, depicting the sun's travel through the universe. Also, temples were oriented to right angles toward the Nile River so that their "eastern" side viewed the life-giving river and the "western" side faced arid, uninhabitable desert.⁵⁰ The astronomical scenes and orientation showed both the temple's important role in the course of life (birth in the fertile river plain to death—or the afterlife—in the desert) and also its important position in the universe as a place where realms converged.

The Mesopotamian ziggurat provided a means for the god to descend from the heavens. At its peak, there was a "high temple" for the god when he inhabited the heavenly realm, and at the base was a "low temple" to receive the god when he descended to the earthly realm.⁵¹ One ziggurat in Sippar was even named "The Staircase

⁴⁹ Prichard, *ANET*, 502.

⁵⁰ John Baines, "Palaces and Temples in Ancient Egypt," in Sasson, *CANE* (see note 27), 313.

⁵¹ Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 187-89.

to Holy Heaven,” showing how the temple’s staircase shape was more than a style but actually served to literally allow the god to ascend and descend.⁵²

Just as literature of ANE cultures identified the site of the temple with the locales of creation, the remarkable continuity of the temple’s sacred space testified to this concept as well. Archaeological evidence shows that temples were built over the foundations of previous temples, creating an actual historical legacy of the temple. For example, on the island of Elephantine, a temple complex used during every period of pharaonic history and beyond has been excavated. At the lowest level, a small brick hut commemorated a niche created by three huge granite blocks (nearly 12 feet high), which were probably appreciated for their primordial and cosmic status. The temple began as a brick hut ca. 2900 BCE and endured through Ptolemaic times.⁵³ The phenomenon continues today as Christian or Muslim holy sites preserve space considered sacred by their ancient forerunners.

ANE temples often displayed their connection with otherworldly realms through water. The many different worldviews of the region included an enormous body of water that surrounded the universe (heaven, earth, and the underworld). The literary evidence for the nether-waters of the universe is as ubiquitous as the waters they describe. In the *Baal Cycle* mentioned above, Yamm (the sea) is the cosmological counterpart to the underworld (Mot’s abode).⁵⁴ The creation story in Genesis, wherein order (creation) is surrounded by chaos (the deep), is well known; in the second telling of the story, the

⁵² H. W. F. Saggs, *Civilization before Greece and Rome* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), 57.

⁵³ Jan Assmann, *In Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 39.

⁵⁴ See note 12.

waters rise from below the earth to water the garden.⁵⁵ *Enuma Elish* contains the same concept: Marduk creates the firmament out of Tiamat's slain body.⁵⁶ A Babylonian map of the world shows the same encircling ocean.⁵⁷

Evidence that these waters were accessible through the temple comes from a number of sources as well. Lundquist sites the quaint example found in Lucian's *De Dea Syria* 13:

The inhabitants of the Holy City tell a tale at which we may rightly be amazed, how in their land a great chasm opened up and took in all the water of the flood; and when this happened, Deukalion set up altars and built a temple over the hole sacred to Hera [Atargatis]. I myself saw the hole, a quite little one, which is beneath the temple.⁵⁸

Biblical legend contains several versions a story connecting the Jerusalem Temple to the Deep. *Midrash Shmu'el*, chapter 26, tells how King David sought to ensure the site of the temple consisted of virgin soil. He dug 1500 cubits below the surface and found a pot sherd, a sign that humans had been present on the site. After David's expression of disappointment, God gave the sherd a voice that cried:

"This is not my original place, but when the world was split asunder (at the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai) I descended here. If you do not believe me—behold, *Tehom*, the Deep, lies beneath me!"

The waters of the Deep rose to engulf David before Ahitophel pronounced a word that arrested the waters. In other versions, David dug a shaft from the temple to the waters,

⁵⁵ Genesis 1-2.4; 3.6

⁵⁶ Prichard, *ANET*, 60-72.

⁵⁷ Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 81.

⁵⁸ Lundquist, "Common Temple Ideology," 67.

which were given an assortment of cosmologically or mythologically significant attributes.⁵⁹

Egyptian temples displayed a close connection with cosmic waters as well. The motif of abundant vegetation and animal life coming from water permeated their architecture and decoration. Relief works show water teeming with fish, alligators, hippopotami, and snakes amid bunches of papyrus reeds and lilies. The floor of the temple symbolically represented the waters of the universe (the Nile River) near to the time of their separation from chaos.⁶⁰ Also, whole boats or representations of boats could be found within temples; the god (or pharaoh) was meant to travel on these boats to complete cosmological journeys. For example, a relief from the burial chamber of Tuthmosis III shows gods towing the barque of the sun god along the waters of the cosmos through the underworld.⁶¹

Massive tanks of water were incorporated into temple complexes to commemorate a temple's link to cosmic waters. At Karnak, there was a massive reflecting pool in the precinct of Amun and a large sacred lake in the precinct of Mut. A large limestone basin representative of those found throughout Mesopotamia and Syria was uncovered at Gudea's temple at Lagash. The basin is decorated with a row of goddesses hovering in the air and identical goddesses walking on a stream of water. Water flows from the vases of the hovering angels into the vases of those walking on

⁵⁹ Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual*, 2nd Edition (New York: KTAV, 1967), 54-104.

⁶⁰ Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, *Image of the World and Symbol of the Creator: On the Cosmological and Iconographical Values of the Temple of Edfu* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985), 8-67. Assmann, *In Search of*, 35-37.

⁶¹ John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001), 146. A version of the accompanying myth can be found in Prichard, *ANET*, 11-12.

water and finally out into the stream of water below their feet. Inscriptions from Gudea's building accounts mention basins that probably correspond to this artifact:

(From the stones' sides) they made basins.
They (the stairs and basins) stand in the house.
The stone basin which stands in the house
Is (like) the pure house of the *gudu* never lacking in water.⁶²

The water's never-ending supply and the fact that the goddesses (each has a set of horns) are agents moving the water down from the hovering figures to the walking figures suggests a non-earthly source for the water.

The previous discussion shows how ancient Near Eastern cultures considered the temple to be a link to non-earthly realms. The primordial mound, the cosmic mountain as the habitat of the gods, and the waters surrounding the universe are earthly symbols that mimic features of the heavens and thus establish the link between realms. But these symbols are multivalent, as they also express the potential for abundance and wellbeing offered by the temple, which brings us to the second serial principle guiding ancient Near Eastern temple function and status.

Contact and Influence through the Temple

The temple's object as a link between heaven and earth was to allow contact between realms; ancient Near Eastern cultures sought this contact in hopes of sustaining or improving the human environment. More clearly, ancient Near Eastern cultures hoped to maintain the presence and pleasure of a patron god in the temple in hopes of reciprocal benefaction on the part of the deity. Therefore, the temple was modeled as an earthly

⁶²CA 23:6-7 and CA 29:5-6 as translated by Claudia A. Suter, *Gudea's Temple Building: The Representation of an Early Mesopotamian Ruler in Text and Image*, Cuneiform Monographs 17 (Groningen: Styx, 2000), 62.

residence or palace for the god and bestowed with luxurious comforts to ensure the god's contentment. As such, rituals and offerings were designed to gratify the god's senses.⁶³ Many bestowed the god with hygienic care by bathing and anointing a cult image within the temple. Similarly, music was used to delight the god's ears and incense burned to please the god's sense of smell. Riches ranging from fine clothing and jewelry to land and livestock indulged the god by adding to the wealth of his or her temple. Often the gifts consisted of food offerings to the god. These ranged from diurnal bread and wine offerings to large animal sacrifices depending on the religious calendar and other circumstances. A savory description of this idea is found in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which describes the gods as hungry and thirsty after the human population—a source for food and drink offerings—had been destroyed. But the chosen survivor, Utnapishtim, offers a sacrifice, and its smell sates the gods' appetites:

I let out all to the four winds and offered a sacrifice.
I poured out a libation on the top of the mountain.
Seven and seven cult vessels I set up,
Upon their pot-stands I heaped cane, cedarwood, and myrtle.
The gods smelled the savor,
The gods smelled the sweet savor,
The gods crowded like flies about the sacrificer.⁶⁴

Over time, belief in the gods' anthropomorphic needs subsided and the treatment of the gods was understood more as indulging and pampering the god rather than meeting its needs.⁶⁵

⁶³ Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 205-29.

⁶⁴ Epic of Gilgamesh, Standard Babylonian Version, II 155-61. Pritchard, *ANET*, 95.

⁶⁵ For instance, some versions of the tale have the gods eating the sacrifice. Jeffrey Tigay has proposed that this was purposefully edited out over 1000 years to more accurately describe how ideas of how the gods consumed sacrifices evolved. *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 224-28, 293-96.

But these gifts were not given altruistically. Rather, they were meant to influence the god and “obtain and secure the maximum of material welfare for the whole of the community.”⁶⁶ For instance, the incantations of the Hittite *Evacatio* hoped to win over the gods with gifts (food, drink, and sweet smells) and obtain their support of the Hittite king and the army fighting on his behalf:

‘Turn with favor toward the king and queen! Give them life, good health, long years (and) d[ays]!’ At the feet of the gods they strew out a leavened loaf (and) cheese, fruit [and figs]; they pour out wine, honey and fine oil mixed together, and he speaks as follows: ‘see at your feet I have placed for you, Cedar-gods, [a leavened loaf] (and) a cheese. So abandon the enemy country and come back to the blessed, fine, (and) wonderful Hatti land! Evil, evil sickness, fever, hunger, plague, pest, bad word . . . wipe out at the Hatti land and give it [to all] [the enemy]!’⁶⁷

Like other ANE dedicatory texts, this example conveys the rationale of bestowing such treatment on the gods for reciprocal support. Further examples locate the ritual care of the gods in the temple and expound on the ancient motives. Foremost were interactions that sought to persuade the gods to maintain natural order to benefit human life. The daily cult of Amun in the temple at Karnak, for example, included actions and utterances to care for the god, but the actions were also full of cosmological significance. The simple act of breaking the seal to enter the god’s chamber was accompanied by the utterance, “The clay is broken; the cool waters are opened; the veins of Osiris are drawn,” which corresponds to unleashing the fertile Nile waters during irrigation, conceived of as Osiris’ body fluids.⁶⁸ Another example comes from Sargon the Great’s “Display Inscription,” where the anticipated rewards are more explicit. After listing the many rich

⁶⁶ Patai, *Man and Temple*, 1.

⁶⁷ Prichard, ANET, 351-353.

⁶⁸ Wyatt, *Space and Time*, 59-160.

offerings he made to Aššur, he says, “for the gift of health and length of days, for the stability of my rule, I fell on my knees in adoration, poured out my prayers before him.”⁶⁹

On the one hand, an offering could be understood from the perspective of fear: a community cared for the god to protect itself from the wrath of the gods (drought, floods, earthquakes, etc.) and ensure the gods’ support in wartime. On the other hand, it could also have a more positive purpose: the luxurious treatment of the god in his or her temple was meant to secure the god’s promotion of fertility, making the city’s population, its livestock, and its fields produce and recreate the abundance symbolized by the temple’s primordial character. Thus, the primordial symbolism of the temple also carried connotations of the potential for recreating the earth’s primordial, pristine state of bounteousness and ease.

We have seen how ancient Near Eastern societies believed the temple served as a connection between cosmic realms and how communities depended on that link for their well being. It is also important to understand that this connection required the cooperation of the god(s) in the form of their choice to use or inhabit the temple and make that connection available. The presence and pleasure of the god was critical to the wellbeing of the community; it was not, however, guaranteed. Again the Hittite *Evocatio* addresses a god’s political abandonment of his or her temple, which would render the connection invalid. Moreover, it is a delightful and useful illustration of the religious reality of the ancient Near East where the abstract and unseeable could be manipulated by human action. The text describes how attackers of a city enticed its gods to abandon their temple. Diviners placed various gifts—including bread, cheese, wine, fruit, honey,

⁶⁹ Richard D. Barnett, “Bringing God into the Temple,” in *Temples and High Places* (see note 10), 10-20.

and fine oil—along paths leading away from the city, asking the gods to turn their patronage toward the invading people instead of the city under siege:

Turn your backs on the enemy country and on the wicked p[eople]; turn your eyes toward the king and queen! They will give you holy offerings. So [come here] in favor and receive your offerings with both hands . . . Come forth from the enemy country and from evil uncleanness!⁷⁰

The gods might leave their temple for trails of sweets and intoxicants, but more often ANE cultures worried they would leave because of human pollution of the sacred area that was basically heaven on earth. Therefore, there were strict rules to maintain the purity of the temple precinct, which banned certain people, behaviors, and other potential pollutants.

The architectonic structure of temple complexes expresses this concern as well. A clear attempt to separate sacred space from the surrounding profane human habitat can be seen throughout the ancient Near East. The divine presence occurred in the cella or holy of holies. This was the innermost room of the temple building. A system of corridors, courtyards, walls, or gates were used to make this location even more removed from the outside world. Areas of the temple complex increased hierarchically in their sacred charge as one neared this part of the temple. Thus the outermost courtyard of a temple would be “less holy” than the cella but “more holy” than the profane land surrounding the temple complex. So the level of holiness increased in a temple complex as one came closer to the central, innermost chamber.

A multitude of temple styles and layouts were employed in the ANE. Still, a few examples will illustrate how protection of sacred space was achieved by division. First, the Ramesseum, the mortuary temple of Ramesses II in western Thebes, is firmly nestled

⁷⁰ Prichard, *ANET*, 351-53.

a larger temple complex nearly four times the size of the temple itself. To arrive at the sanctuary, one had to pass through a series of enormous pylons, courts, staircases, hypostyle halls that stretched over 80 meters! The amount of enclosure and darkness increased as one went deeper into the recesses before arriving at the cella, the *axis mundi*.⁷¹ Second, the form of the ziggurat discussed above also displayed a correspondence between proximity to heaven and interiority. As one went up the levels in the tower, the surroundings became more and more heavenly in character.⁷² Similarly, the temple of Baal at Ugarit was probably a multi-level structure wherein the height corresponded to proximity to the realm of the gods. The various stages of Temple H at Hazor show how concern for separation increased as the city grew. Originally, the temple was a thick-walled rectangular building with three main parts, which successively rose in elevation: an outdoor porch; a three-part room; and a larger innermost room with a niche carved in the back wall for the cult statue. A series of improvements made this niche more and more removed from the outside. A wall was added to make the niche its own separate room. A courtyard and external buildings were placed outside of the entrance to the temple. Then, the porch was turned into another enclosed room, and the entrance to the temple was taken off the axis of the doors leading to the niche.

Like the graduated division of structure and plan, there existed a corresponding hierarchy of people allowed to enter certain zones depending on their class and level of purity. Access to the actual temple was usually restricted to religious elites like priests and high-ranking government officials (who were often one in the same). Moreover, the

⁷¹ Baines, "Palaces and Temples," 310.

⁷² Annie Caubet, "Art and Architecture in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *CANE*, 2671-91.

temple contained internal divisions as only the high priest was allowed to enter the cella or holy of holies, and this was limited to important festival celebrations and rituals.⁷³

Societal and Cultural Institutions Supported by the Temple

This brings us to our final principle guiding Ancient Near Eastern temples—the social institutions created by the status and function of the temple. A monopoly on divine will was created because communication with the divine realm was possible within the temple and because the temple was restricted to elites. Elite classes invoked this special relationship as support for certain social institutions. Foremost of these was the office of kingship. Everything in the ancient mind was a result of divine action (in one way or another), and kingship was no exception. The Sumerian King List describes how kingship was lowered from heaven, having originally been a divine office.⁷⁴ Likewise, a Hittite account shows that kingship was once a divine office.⁷⁵ The Hebrew Bible tells how the first Israelite kings were chosen by god.⁷⁶ The Memphite Theology shows how the dual monarchy, “centered in Memphis, realized a divine plan.”⁷⁷

We have countless records of ancient Near Eastern rulers that ascribe personal success to the god or gods that gave them their position. Šuppiluliumas of Hatti called himself, “the great king, the king of Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god.”⁷⁸ An inscription of Ashurnasirpal II’s describes his divine election equally well:

⁷³ Haran, *Temples*, passim. Lundquist, “What is a Temple?” 218-219.

⁷⁴ Pritchard, ANET, 265-266.

⁷⁵ Pritchard, ANET, 120-121.

⁷⁶ 1 Samuel 9.15-16; 10.1, 17-26.

⁷⁷ Frankfort, *Kingship*, 33.

⁷⁸ Pritchard, ANET, 318.

(This is) the palace of Ashurnasirpal, the high priest of Ashur, chosen by Enlil and Ninurta, the favorite among all of the great gods—the legitimate king, the king of the world, the king of Assyria.⁷⁹

An ancient Near Eastern king was imagined as the earthly representative of the gods. Even if he himself was considered a god, like Egyptian kings or Naram-Sin of Akkad, he was the heavenly mouthpiece, charged with the task of caring for and leading humankind. He was the second step in a bridge connecting the gods to their people. The god communicated through the temple with the king, who in turn relayed heavenly decisions to the people. As such, important political, economic, and religious decisions flowed from the gods through the temple to the king and finally out to his kingdom.⁸⁰

The establishment of law collection is an excellent example of this chain of command. One of the most famous, the code of Hammurabi, begins:

When lofty Anum, king of the Anunnaki, (and) Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, the determiner of the destinies of the land, determined for Marduk, the first-born of Enki, the Enlil functions over all mankind, made him great among the Igigi, called Babylon by its exalted name, made it supreme in the world, established for him in its midst an enduring kingship, whose foundations are as firm as heaven and earth—at that time Anum and Enlil named me to promote the welfare of the people, me Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince, to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak, to rise like the sun over the black-headed people, and the light up the land. . . . When Marduk commissioned me to guide the people aright, to direct the land, I established law and justice in the language of the land, thereby promoting the welfare of the people.⁸¹

Hammurabi invokes divine sanction as support for the laws he pronounces. Moreover, this introduction demonstrates several key points for our discussion and serves as a fine conclusion. First, it describes the creation of natural order and places the establishment

⁷⁹ Pritchard, ANET, 558.

⁸⁰ Frankfort, *Kingship*, 34.

⁸¹ Pritchard, ANET, 163-180.

of Marduk's seat in Babylon, thereby granting Marduk's temple a cosmological status and an otherworldly legacy. This connection is reiterated by the description of kingship as "as firm as the heaven and the earth" and its ordination (even the specific kingship of Hammurabi) reaches back to creation. This also shows how the office of kingship carries with it the ability to communicate between realms. Lastly, the introduction makes clear these communication abilities allow the king to fulfill the function of his office, to propagate divine will.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEMPLE ACCOUNT IN THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

“The Deuteronomistic Historian embedded a verbal icon within his national history in the form of the description of the temple built by Solomon. The icon embodies the historian’s own ideology regarding proper religious practice and relationship between humanity and the deity.”⁸²

The description of Solomon’s building efforts found in 1 Kings 5-9 is the starting point for inquiries into the Jerusalem temple. Authors frequently refer to this description when creating a sketch for the temple. Difficulties with the text are resolved with information derived from 2 Chronicles 2-7, Ezekiel 40-43 and elsewhere. Further solutions are found within the archaeological record. Our concern, however, is not to recreate the ancient building. Still text and artifact provide an excellent entryway to our endeavor for they suggest two valuable criteria for confronting the Jerusalem Temple. Rather than trying to piece together one temple from three descriptions, this thesis understands each temple account as motivated by unique theological concerns and historical circumstances. As such, the study allows the information to take on its own meaning within the particular context and ideology of the narrator(s). And rather than using ANE temples for structural comparison, this study utilizes the function and status of ANE temples to recreate its proper cultural context. With these criteria in place, the 1

⁸² McCormick, *Palace and Temple*, 130.

Kings temple account emerges as unified and cogent. Moreover, the final image of the temple fits well within the broader purpose of the Books of Kings and the Deuteronomic history.

Scholars recognize the present form of the text as a patchwork of sources, genres, and editorial hands. The narrator refers the reader to a number of additional sources, including the Acts of Solomon,⁸³ the Book of Annals of the Kings of Judah,⁸⁴ and the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.⁸⁵ Though none of these survives today, they may have been incorporated into the Book of Kings. Various genres from contracts and treaties to poetry to ritual descriptions have been recognized, and based on linguistic and ideological characteristics, several authorial hands have been identified as well. Despite its motley manufacture, the temple account in its present form has been carefully stitched together into a fine work of intelligent literary craft and continuity. Gary N. Knoppers has shown that the account consists of a complex series of symmetrical, balanced actions and discourses. The exceptions to this organization highlight the singularity of particular elements, straying from the larger form for the sake of emphasis.⁸⁶ The unity applies not only to the structure of the story but also to its message. Throughout, the account's chief concern is to portray the temple as (1) an effective, divinely ordained connection between heaven and earth (2) for proper communication and contact with the LORD (3) to secure the prosperity of the state and its ruler. Thus, it operates within the paradigm of ANE temples, depicting a manifestation (though possibly ahistorical) of the three guiding

⁸³ 1 Kings 11.41

⁸⁴ 1 Kings 14.29; 15.7,23; 22.45

⁸⁵ 1 Kings 14.19; 15.31; 16.5, 14

⁸⁶ Gary N. Knoppers, "Prayer and Propaganda: Solomon's Dedication of the Temple and the Deuteronomist's Program," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (2004): 229-54.

principles previously set forth. The narrator creates this picture not by imparting exhaustive technical data but by offering his audience selected “cues” for interpreting the constructed space of the temple.

Like ANE temples, 1 Kings places the temple within formative events in Israel’s mythology/history. Although Solomon’s reign and building projects are far removed from the creation of the earth, the description of the temple, the rituals, and Solomon’s prayers place it firmly within Israel’s sacred history. The narrator shows the dedication of the temple as the culmination of a divine plan/promise that began with the Exodus.⁸⁷ First, an important function of the temple is to house the ark, the symbol of divine presence that accompanied Israel through the Exodus. The temple is painted as the final, permanent resting place of the ark:

Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out the wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt.⁸⁸

Thus, the transfer of the ark from the mobile tent to the fixed temple represents the end of Israel’s journey. Solomon’s temple is not, then, an innovation but the *ne plus ultra* of a divine plan set in motion long ago, thereby assigning the temple an unparalleled, divine history like that claimed for other ancient Near Eastern temples.

The poles for carrying the ark have ceased to serve in their original function. Nonetheless, they are included—with emphasis on their visibility, which marks their

⁸⁷ Also McCormick, *Palace and Temple*, 130, 149-190.

⁸⁸ 1 Kings 8.6-9

significance as part of the constructed space—to signal the developments in Israel’s sacred history that culminate with the temple. In a similar vein, the narrator highlights the tablets inside of the ark and their Sinaitic origin. For good measure, the Sinaitic theophany—the thick cloud—is revealed to show the LORD’s endorsement of the continuity. Finally, Solomon’s words reiterate the development of the divine plan by juxtaposing the LORD’s dwelling in the thick darkness (Exodus) and the temple (fulfillment of Sinaitic promise).⁸⁹

The narrator may have had a primordial history in mind as well. Martin Buber noticed long ago the similarity between statements concluding the work of creation and the building of the tabernacle.⁹⁰ The frequent announcements that the work of the temple was “finished” might allude to these previous constructions. Compare the concluding remarks of the three projects (creation, the tabernacle, and the temple):

And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had done.⁹¹

In this way all the work of the tabernacle was finished; the Israelites had done everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses.⁹²

The house was finished in all its parts, and according to its specifications. He was seven years in building it.⁹³

Though the narrator of 1 Kings was most concerned with the immediate continuity of the temple with the tabernacle; the extended continuity with the tabernacle and creation may have been implied as well.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ 1 Kings 8.10-13

⁹⁰ *Die Schrift und ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), 39ff.

⁹¹ Genesis 2.2

⁹² Exodus 39.32. See also, 39.42-43; 40.33; 39.43.

⁹³ 1 Kings 3.38

Further allusions to creation bestow a primordial lineage on the temple. The number seven appears frequently in the description of the temple and the date formulae. Jon Levenson interprets the repetition as an allusion to the creative week, drawing a connection between the completion of creation and the construction of the temple. Solomon takes seven years to build the temple, it is dedicated during the Feast of Booths (a seven day festival in the seventh month according the Deuteronomist), and Solomon recites seven dedicatory petitions.⁹⁵ As in creation, God brought about an environment in which he can rest through the creation of the tabernacle.⁹⁶ Likewise, 1 Kings displays continuity with the mention of Solomon's rest from his enemies as the impetus for building the temple.⁹⁷ Also, the account repeatedly describes Israel and Solomon as enjoying a state of rest.⁹⁸ "Sabbath and the sanctuary represent the same moment in the divine life, one of exaltation and regal repose."⁹⁹ By drawing on the motif of seven creative days and the notion of "resting" upon completion of creative work, the narrator reinforces the continuity between similar events, thereby claiming a primeval ancestry for the temple as the fruition of the original creative process.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Michael A. Fishbane. *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 12-13. See also Hurowitz' study of Mesopotamian parallels, *House*, 235-242.

⁹⁵ 1 Kings 8.31-53

⁹⁶ Genesis 2.2, Exodus 20.11, Psalm 132.8, Deuteronomy 12.10

⁹⁷ Noted by McCormick, *Palace*, 142-43.

⁹⁸ 1 Kings 4.25; 5.4; 8.56. The temple and the Sabbath are equated in Leviticus 19.30 and 26.2. Levenson, "Temple and the World," 288-89.

⁹⁹ Levenson, "Temple and the World," 288. Levenson builds on the thesis of Moshe Winfield, who proposed that "that the priesthood in Israel actualized by means of the Sabbath the completion of the acts of creation in the same way that the peoples of the ancient Near East actualized in their cultic dramas the primordial event." "Š bb t, Miqd š, W haml kat H'," *Bet Miqra* (5737.1977): 188.

¹⁰⁰ The Ugaritic Baal Cycle says that Baal's temple rose out of a fire which burned for seven days. The duration of 7 for temple-building timeframes may be a typological creation of uncertain origin. Hurowitz, *House*, 227.

Aspects of the temple's form and decoration suggest a link between creation and the temple. First among these are elements that recall the primordial landscape (in the case of Israel, the lush Garden of Eden, populated by humans and the divine). The cherubim are, of course, heavenly beings related to the primordial landscape through their task of guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden and transport of the divine throne.¹⁰¹ Their appearance within the temple portrays the temple as a non-earthly space inhabited by a non-earthly presence. The arrangement of the cherubim suggests the transition to divine space. Cherubim appear in three places: on the bronze stands that mark the approach to the temple, in relief on the inner walls of the temple, and in the round in the innermost sanctuary. As one progresses deeper within the temple, the presence of the cherubim increases. They are part of a decorative motif on the lavers that merely suggests proximity to the divine realm. Within the temple, cherubim surround the observer with a powerful, non-earthly presence and watchfulness.¹⁰² Finally, the majesty and fierceness of the creatures fills the scene of the *debir*: the wings of the enormous, gold cherubim span the breadth of the chamber showing the pervasive divine presence. Therefore, the cherubim not only signal the primordial landscape through mythological associations, but they also illustrate divine presence in the innermost chamber. Coupled with the recurring tree and floral motifs, the cherubim decoration recreates the landscape of the Garden of Eden.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Genesis 3.24, Psalms 18.11, 80.2, 99.1, 2 Samuel 22.11

¹⁰² McCormick, *Palace*, 135.

¹⁰³ Block-Smith, "Solomon's Temple" 90-91.

The enormous bronze sea in the courtyard of the temple also recalls primordial circumstances.¹⁰⁴ Some scholars have understood the sea as commemorative of the storm god's victory over the forces of chaos (as in the Baal Cycle from Ugarit).¹⁰⁵ However, this interpretation is tenuous. For one thing, there is no real winner in the Baal Cycle, "for no deity wields ultimate power."¹⁰⁶ Also, though imagery of a divine battle with the sea can be found in the Hebrew Bible, there is no clear tradition of the creation of the world being accomplished through a battle with chaotic powers.¹⁰⁷ Finally, though the bronze tank does hold a massive body of water, nothing about its appearance suggests that it has been conquered. The bronze sea does rest upon the backs of four groups of three oxen facing the cardinal directions, but this is a far cry from the "smiting pose" or the posture of Naram-Sin on his famous stele.

Instead, it seems more likely that the bronze sea functions along the same lines as the ubiquitous motifs of vegetation and the cherubim. Recall the large limestone basin from Gudea's temple at Lagash. Its decoration and the corresponding texts show the heavenly provision of water to support earthly abundance. The sea may also remind one of the Garden of Eden's water source, which divides into four branches and flows in directions that encompass the world.¹⁰⁸ Like the Garden of Eden's water source, the massive sea points toward the rest of the world. In effect, the sea depicts both centrality—the oxen proceed out from this center—and abundance—through the copious

¹⁰⁴ 1 Kings 7.23-36

¹⁰⁵ Block-Smith, "Solomon's Temple," 84-85.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, "Myth," 2032.

¹⁰⁷ McCormick, *Palace*, 107.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Noth, *Könige: Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament*, Bd. 9, Teilbd 1, (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1964-1968): 161.

amount of water, features highly suggestive of the primordial garden. The connection is even clearer after Solomon's plea that the LORD grant rain in the land when the people pray toward the temple.¹⁰⁹

The LORD's permission to build the temple granted to Solomon also bestows heavenly attributes upon the temple. Similar to other ancient Near Eastern building accounts, the temple project was part of divine plan that only proceeded through divine approval.¹¹⁰ Often, gods were said to have requested that a new temple or cult image be built or renovated. The plan for the building or image was divinely inspired. For example, the desire to rebuild the temple was heaven-sent in Ezra 1-6, where God "stirred up" the spirits of the people. Accounts of *miš p* ceremonies, used in different forms in Mesopotamia and Egypt to quicken a newly built image, avow that the image had not been made by human workers; instead its design and execution were accomplished by the gods. Certainly the craftsmen remembered doing the work, but they firmly believed in the image's divine provenance. That is, every element contributing to the newly fashioned image, including the impetus to build the statue, the materials, the appearance of statue, and the skill of the artisans, had been made possible by the god(s) who commissioned the image. To this effect, the Egyptian ceremony included the ritual removal of footprints in the workshop to show that no work had been done there.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ 1 Kings 8.36-36

¹¹⁰ 1 Kings 5.3-5. Hurowitz, *House*, 135-67.

¹¹¹ Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, "The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian *Miš Pî* Ritual," *State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts*, Volume 1 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001). David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Dick, 123-210 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

Finally, the architectural layout and decoration of the temple and the courtyard clearly communicate a gradual transition from a mundane to a holy setting. The biblical notion of sacred space is a hierarchical progression from the outside world, which has a neutral charge (\pm), to Israel (+), to Jerusalem ($+^2$), to the temple ($+^3$), and finally to the Holy of Holies ($+^4$).¹¹² The account in 1 Kings corresponds to this model. To begin with, there is a progression of materials from costly to extremely costly, marking the transition from ordinary to extraordinary space. The inordinate size and expensive materials of the courtyard decorations are an outward sign that the temple breaks from the ordinary world. The luxurious timber that covers every inch of the stone building functions in a similar way: lumber was a rare and precious commodity and its immodest application signaled the elevated status of the temple.¹¹³ Finally, the innermost room of the temple was plated in gold. The impracticality of this unimaginable treasure of the room completely removes the location from the earthly realm and identifies the setting as divine.¹¹⁴ Ancient Near Eastern temple accounts tend to emphasize the more precious attributes of construction.¹¹⁵ Here the narrator uses the fine materials to clearly express progression to the heaven-like inner room.

Likewise, the exaggerated size of the courtyard structures shows that they belonged to the divine realm. Other examples from the ANE show the prevalent belief in gods of superhuman size. The 'Ain Dara temple features an enormous throne for Baal and meter-long footsteps carved into the precinct floor, probably meant to show that the

¹¹² Seth Kunin, "Judaism," in *Sacred Place*, Themes in Religious Studies Series, ed. Jean Holm with John Bowker, 115-147 (London: Pinter Publishers, 1994).

¹¹³ Hurowitz, "Inside," 31-32.

¹¹⁴ McCormick, *Palace*, 120, 133-34.

¹¹⁵ Hurowitz, *House*, 224.

god had entered his temple.¹¹⁶ A group of statues from the Abu temple at Tel Asmar apparently includes a god (Abu?) much larger than the human supplicants. In addition to his stature, his enormous eyes illustrate his divine status.¹¹⁷ Greek tradition contains many stories that feature superhuman gods. Demeter, who is disguised as a wet nurse in a human home, accidentally bumps her head on a door frame. This humorous detail shows Demeter's awkwardness in the earthly environment and her divine status.¹¹⁸

The boundary markers of the temple signal the transition to the sacred precinct as well. The narrator of 1 Kings takes great care to explain the decoration of these items. Each segment of the description focuses in from outward decoration to the central decoration, noting the boundaries between each. Lions, oxen, and cherubim decorated the borders of the stands, which were surrounded in turn by beveled frames. In fact, each piece of the carts is surrounded by a frame, border, or wreath-work. The narrator is even careful to mention the parts of the wheels (axels, rim, spokes, and hubs).¹¹⁹ With the minute detail given to the borders and frames of the carts, their heavenly themes, and their symmetrical placement outside of the temple, it may be that the basins measured off the approach to the sacred precinct, hinting at the division to come and marking progress toward that division.

The size and symbolism of the sea have already been discussed, and this lastly leaves us to discuss Yachin and Boaz. These pillars are at once part of the courtyard, listed among the works of Hiram of Tyre like the other furnishings, and part of the temple

¹¹⁶ Block-Smith, "Solomon's Temple," 84.

¹¹⁷ Henri Frankfort. *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 5th Edition (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 46-49.

¹¹⁸ Hugh G. Evelyn-White, trans., "Hymn to Demeter," in *Homeric Hymns* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914).

¹¹⁹ 1 Kings 7.27-39

(whether they were freestanding or supported a roof over the *ulam*). Scholars have given these pillars sundry definitions, but many see them as threshold markers, not unlike the original function of the *urigallu* known from Mesopotamian ritual texts.¹²⁰ Others find that they directly mark the divine presence inside the temple.¹²¹ Another interpretation identifies the names of the pillars as the first word in an inscription that dealt with either the promise made to David or divine power in creation. Each interpretation understands the pillars as important symbols marking the transition to sacred space and/or the divine presence within that space.¹²²

Similarly, the doorframes and doors of the temple are transition markers.¹²³ Scholars used to understand the doorframes of the nave and cella as square and pentagonal, respectively. Now it is more widely accepted that the strange descriptors denote a series of interlocking and recessed frames. The quality of craftsmanship speaks on several different levels. In general, the skill level and costly materials show the extraordinary nature of the building to which they provide access. Additionally, the many parts require that the doorway grew smaller with each frame. The ornate borders focus the viewer/reader, while the several layers mark a significant shift. They do not simply mark the change from one room to another; instead, the doorways allow an exceptional passage into the divine realm. This degree of change is marked by the

¹²⁰ Proposed by F. A. M. Wiggerman, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts*, Cuneiform Monographs 1 (Gronigen: Styx & PP Publications, 1992), 70-73.

¹²¹ Th. A. Busink, *Der Tempel von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes: Eine archäologisch-historische Studie unter Berücksichtigung des westsemitischen Tempelbaus*. Band 1. Der Tempel Salomos (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 13-17. See also, Block-Smith, "King of Glory," 19-20.

¹²² McCormick, *Palace*, 123.

¹²³ 1 Kings 6.31-36

increasing layers of the doors: the focus of the four-part doorway leading to the nave was continued and amplified by the five-part doorway to the cella.

The narrator communicates the division between opposite sides of the doorways through the decoration and quality of the doors, which were carved with cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, which are all overlaid with gold. The non-human forms and symbols of abundance recall the Garden of Eden and the opulence and abundance of the divine world.¹²⁴ From without, every detail of the doorways and doors communicated the gravity of the environment to which they allowed access, right down to their golden sockets.¹²⁵

In agreement with ANE paradigms, the temple closes the gap between heaven and earth. The symbolic structural cues listed above were supplemented with other indicators of the divine presence and the supra-earthly space of the temple interior. 1 Kings 6.7 relates how the stone of the temple was finished at the quarry, “so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple while it was being built.”¹²⁶ We know from Atra-Hasis and other ANE literary works that human noise could aggravate the divine presence.¹²⁷ The concern for silence may portray a fear of driving away the deity from the holy ground. The previously mentioned diurnal rituals for the god Amun-Re Egypt show this fear of frightening off the divine presence: “I have certainly not come to

¹²⁴ See below.

¹²⁵ 1 Kings 7.50

¹²⁶ 1 Kings 6.7. 1 Kings 7.46 may also have the same meaning.

¹²⁷ “The land was bellowing like a bull; the god got disturbed with their uproar. Enlil heard their noise and addressed the great gods; ‘The clamor of mankind [has become too burdensome to me] I am losing sleep to their uproar.’” Atra-Hasis, I 347-50. Benjamin R. Foster, “Story of the Flood,” in *From Distant Days: Myths, Tales, and Poetry from Ancient Mesopotamia* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 1995), 62. Biblically speaking, Abel’s unjustly spilled blood cries out (Genesis 4.1-17). The LORD hears the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and the cry of the oppressed slaves in Egypt (Genesis 18.20; Exodus 3.1-15).

drive the god away from his throne; I have come to put the god on his throne.”¹²⁸ The priest reassures the god that he has been sent by the king to care for and not to harm the god. A final parallel can be found in the Mesopotamian *miš p* ceremony that activated the presence of a newly formed deity in the cult image. The texts stress the necessity of doing the work away from the temple in order perhaps to preserve the quiet sanctity of that area.¹²⁹

Another cue comes from the notice that Hiram the bronze-worker possessed special kinds of knowledge other than technical knowledge of metalwork. When *da'at* would have sufficed to explain his professional knowledge, both *hokmâ*, ‘wisdom’, and *t bûnâ*, ‘understanding’ are needed to execute the work, indicating that this was no regular construction job but something greater.¹³⁰

The narrator is careful to explain the symmetry of the temple and its attributes. Every item except for the bronze sea has a counterpart of the same measurement and design. These twin items are placed on either side of the temple or the temple complex. Rather than covering this aspect with a blanket description, the narrator repeats this detail separately to emphasize the “perfection” of the edifice. The holy of holies, is a perfect cube (20x20x20 cubits)¹³¹ with twin cherubim whose wings span the width of the room—the narrator is extremely precise when it comes to these measurements—and their height perfectly divides the room vertically. Moreover, the entire house is covered in gold, a feature added by Solomon so that the building “might be perfect:”

¹²⁸ Pritchard, *ANET*, 325-326.

¹²⁹ See the various examples in Walker and Dick, “Induction,” *passim*.

¹³⁰ Ziony Zevit, “Preamble to a Temple Tour,” in Gittlen, *Sacred Time*, 73-81.

¹³¹ 1 Kings 6.20

Solomon overlaid the inside of the house with pure gold, then he drew chains of gold across, in front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. Next he overlaid the whole house with gold in order that the whole house might be perfect; even the whole altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary he overlaid with gold.¹³²

The description of the gold is juxtaposed to the information about the perfect proportions of the cella, linking the most precious metal with the most precious design. The perfect symmetry of the whole building, especially the cella, and its magnificent gold veneer show that the temple lacked nothing and was without flaw, the ideal receptacle for the divine presence.

1 Kings also describes the cosmological status of the temple. The bipolar shift between affirmation of the LORD's residence in the temple¹³³ and the strange claim in 8.27 that the temple could not possibly contain the divine presence has inspired countless theories and interpretations that often attribute the comment to a disparate scribal or editorial hand: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built."¹³⁴ Levenson, however, has suggested an ingenious explanation that does not require the work of the "brainless redactor:"

The proof that the Temple cannot contain God is that even the uttermost reaches of the heavens cannot contain him. The disclaimer distinguishes Temple from cosmos only by placing the same limitation on both. The Temple is less infinite, so to speak, than the world. Since the latter cannot contain God, *a fortiori* the former cannot. The distinction seems to be speaking in the context of a cosmology in which world and Temple were thought to be comparable.¹³⁵

¹³² 1 Kings 6.21-22

¹³³ For example, 1 Kings 8.12-13

¹³⁴ 1 Kings 8.27. Terrance Freitheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 40-41, 44-45.

¹³⁵ Levenson, "Temple and the World," 289.

This interpretation corresponds with ancient Near Eastern parallels that treat the temple as a microcosm of the world. It also relieves the problematic notion of a redactor so carelessly adding incongruities with the rest of the story.

Solomon's speech verbally expresses what the cues of the temple suggest. For example, the king's prayer repeatedly describes prayers offered at the temple (or even toward it from a distance) will be heard in heaven:

Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. If someone . . . swears before your altar in this house, then hear in heaven . . . When your people Israel pray and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven . . . [When] they pray toward this house, then hear in heaven. . . [When] they stretch out their hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place . . . [When] they pray to the LORD toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer . . .¹³⁶

The repetition clearly illustrates the temple as the link between heaven and earth.

The decoration of the temple and its attributes is highly suggestive of the temple's non-earthly status as well. The composite themes of the description compare the temple grounds to the Garden of Eden. First, gourds, blooming flowers, palm trees, pomegranates, permeate the temple decoration.¹³⁷ Interestingly, pomegranates and gourds are full of seeds, and the flowers, the narrator notes, are in bloom, which emphasizes their reproductive capacity. The vegetation explicitly evokes fertility and abundance not unlike the growing splendor of the sacred garden in Genesis.¹³⁸ The bronze sea, it has already been mentioned, was a large source for water, but also connoted

¹³⁶ 1 Kings 8.27-53

¹³⁷ 1 Kings 6.18, 29, 31-32, 35; 7.19-24, 26, 42

¹³⁸ "Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." Genesis 2.9

the water sources of the garden.¹³⁹ Finally, the cherubim, who guarded the entrance to the garden, make the evocation clear by heralding the divine presence. As Frances Flannery-Dailey has shown that in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere cherubim and other heavenly beings are harbingers of the divine presence. They prepare humans for divine contact and help sustain them in the divine presence, as was the case with the heavenly throne-room vision of Isaiah.¹⁴⁰

The vegetal motif has a second, important message. The abundance of the temple suggests to viewers/readers the potential for similar prosperity. Overall, the temple account describes Solomon's reign as a time of astonishing wealth and prosperity. Before describing the incredibly luxurious temple, the narrator informs his audience of the magnificence of Solomon's rule:

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand by the sea; they ate and drank and were happy. Solomon was sovereign over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.¹⁴¹

The account continues to describe the massive amount of food for the royal house and Solomon's horses provided by the king's minions.¹⁴² Again, the wealth of the kingdom is mentioned in the treaty with King Hiram of Tyre, not only by the purchase of the timbers but also by the currency of surplus wheat.¹⁴³ The bronze for the temple was so copious

¹³⁹ Genesis 1.6, 10-14

¹⁴⁰ Isaiah 6.6. Frances Flannery-Dailey, *Dreamers, Scribes, and Priests: Jewish Dreams in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

¹⁴¹ 1 Kings 4.20. This is also meant as the fulfillment of divine promises of land and progeny that God gave to Israel's ancestors. Gen 12.2; 13.14-17; 15.18-19; 22.17; 32.12; Deut 1.7-8, etc., especially those made during the Exodus, e.g., Exodus 23.22ff. Also see 1 Kings 8.54-61 where Solomon makes clear that the promise to Moses has been fulfilled.

¹⁴² 1 Kings 4.22-28

¹⁴³ 1 Kings 5.13ff.

that it could not be weighed.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, the oxen and sheep were too many to be counted; they had to use an additional altar to accommodate the large number (later given as 22,000 oxen and 20,000 sheep).¹⁴⁵ The account paints the temple as the source for these riches. Should anything ever threaten this quality of life, such as famine or drought, Solomon explains through his prayer that Israel need only turn toward the temple, and the problem will be reversed.

“whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel . . . so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; then hear in heaven your dwelling place, forgive, act . . . so that they may fear you all the days that they live in the land that you gave to our ancestors.”¹⁴⁶

The relationship between God, the temple, and the people is made explicit: this is the place that has been chosen for contact with the LORD. It marks a break with the previously mobile transcendence of the divine presence and makes the temple the ideal point of contact for obtaining blessings.¹⁴⁷

Like Ashurnasirpal II’s stele commemorating a new palace and Sargon’s “Display Inscription” at Khorsabad, the text shows how the divine presence was invited and inaugurated in the temple precinct.¹⁴⁸ The text includes a very visual entrance of the LORD into the Jerusalem Temple: “And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”¹⁴⁹ Not only does

¹⁴⁴ 1 Kings 7.47

¹⁴⁵ 1 Kings 8.5, 62

¹⁴⁶ 1 Kings 8.38-40

¹⁴⁷ 1 Kings 8.16

¹⁴⁸ Barnett, “Bringing God into the Temple,” 14.

¹⁴⁹ 1 Kings 8.10-11

the apparition strongly allude to the presence of God during the Exile, it illustrates that the temple provides a valid, working connection between the people and heavens.

Solomon's place as king is not left out of the formula, but rather, his station as mediator of divine will is inculcated to the viewer/reader at every possible moment. The argument logically develops from the selection of Solomon as king. As discussed in part three, kingship was viewed as a gift from heaven in many ANE cultures. The same holds true for the Hebrew Bible, at least at moments.¹⁵⁰ Solomon's rule was certainly viewed this way by the narrator of the temple account, no matter how he might have spurned that gift. Not only was this king chosen by the LORD, but his ability to rule (i.e. wisdom) was god-given as well.¹⁵¹ With divine support established, the narrator proceeds to Solomon's destiny as a temple builder. He was not simply king at an opportune time, but rather his birth and rise to power were part of a divine plan that stretched back to the beginnings of Israel's history as a people.

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth to my father David, saying, ‘Since the day that I brought my people Israel out of Egypt, I have not chosen a city from any of the tribes of Israel in which to build a house, that my name might be there; but I chose David to be over my people Israel.’ My father David had it in mind to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, ‘You did well to consider building a house for my name; nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for my name.’”

¹⁵⁰ Some passages are critical of the institution of kingship. The classic example is 1 Samuel 8. Nonetheless, kingship is granted by the LORD, albeit begrudgingly, who executively chooses the king of Israel. 1 Samuel 10.1, 17-25; 15.10-16.13; 1 Kings 3.7. Deuteronomy 16.18-17.20 explains how justice and kingship ultimately came from the LORD.

¹⁵¹ 1 Kings 3-4. See Hurowitz, *House*, for an enlightening discussion of divine will and kingship in building projects. Solomon's dream is par for the course in Mesopotamian texts of a similar nature. In fact, Hurowitz finds parallels from Mesopotamian building accounts for nearly every section of the account in 1 Kings 5-9. The largest differences come in passages that obviously descend from an editorial hand and in the relatively excessive detail in the Kings account.

Effectively, Solomon's legitimation reaches as far back as does the new temple. Just as the temple is the final step in divine plan, Solomon's kingship, and in particular his construction of the temple is the culmination of divine plan for Israel as a nation. Solomon invokes the promise made to his father, explains himself as the fulfillment of that promise,¹⁵² and thereby firmly places his rule as the final stage in Israel's formative history.¹⁵³

Not only is Solomon endorsed by the LORD, he finds support from the whole of Israel and beyond.¹⁵⁴ The crowd of "all the heads of tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites," "all the people of Israel," and "all the elders of Israel" assemble in front of Solomon. His prayer establishing the role of the temple and welcoming the LORD into his new resting place has already been discussed. Like the king's language, the royal body movements are also revealing. During the ceremony, he stands between the all-encompassing crowd and the temple, turning back and forth to address the LORD and the people. He begins by addressing the crowd, speaking in their direction of the divine plan the temple evidences and his role in that plan.¹⁵⁵ Next he turns around to "spread his hands out toward heaven." This time he speaks more specifically about his kingship and royal legacy.¹⁵⁶ At 8.27, Solomon continues to address the LORD, but this time it is on behalf of the people. He intercedes to establish a relationship between the

¹⁵² 1 Kings 8.25-26

¹⁵³ 1 Kings 8.65-66

¹⁵⁴ At several points the widespread fame of Solomon is mentioned along with explicit instances of his international relations. He is married to an Egyptian princess (6.8). He controls the mid-section of the ANE and receives tribute from every direction (4.20-22). Of course, his dealings with Tyre—which blanket the account—cannot be forgotten (5; 9.10-14). Finally the fame of Solomon's temple and the connection it affords is predicted to spread through the region (8.41-43, 60, 65).

¹⁵⁵ 1 Kings 8.14-21

¹⁵⁶ 1 Kings 8.22-26

people—notably as a whole—and the LORD, allowing access through the temple he has built.¹⁵⁷ Finally, Solomon passes on divine blessings to the crowd. Furthermore, the narrator embeds the building account of the palace and governmental buildings within the description of the temple, even awkwardly interrupting the flow of the text to this end. The description has the same form (time frame, dimensions, etc.).¹⁵⁸ To further his connection, as each stage of the temple is completed, a summary of the work attributed to Solomon is added.¹⁵⁹ Even Hiram’s role in creating the bronze and gold vessels and temple tools is assumed by Solomon, a claim which is followed with an extra dose of credibility and continuity—Solomon installs the newly built objects and those dedicated by his father David.¹⁶⁰ The narrative illustrates the role of the king as an intercessor between the divine and the people. Again, this is communicated through visual cues and reiterated through speech.

In summary, we have seen how the narrator of the account in 1 Kings 5-9 utilizes the “vocabulary” of ANE temples to explain the status and function of the new temple in Jerusalem. The observer/reader is given cues for understanding this environment that he or she would have understood within the context of ANE culture and history. Like the temples discussed in the first part, the Solomonic temple has a heritage firmly embedded

¹⁵⁷ Argument concerning the validity of the relationship based on prayer is extensive. Menahem Haran, the dean of Jerusalem Temple ritual activity strongly argues this is a later insertion that stands as an anachronistic innovation in the current state of the text. See Haran, “Temple and Community in Ancient Israel,” in Fox, *Temple in Society*, 17-26. As it stands now, the text curiously deemphasizes ritual, which is strange considering the Deuteronomic emphasis on ritual orthodoxy. It is highly probable that this portion has been reworked to allow contact with the LORD that does not require temple ritual, but simply praying in the direction and spirit of the temple. The probability increases in light of the petitions made by Solomon that deal with military defeat and exile, suggesting that the changes might have taken place after the destruction of the temple and the Exile. Again, however, we are concerned with the text as a unified whole, not chopping out fragments that do not agree with the interpretation.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Kings 7.1-12. Hurowitz, *House*, 234-35.

¹⁵⁹ Hurowitz, *House*, 235-243.

¹⁶⁰ 1 Kings 7.48ff.

within Israelite sacred history. This connection certainly stretches back to the formation of national identity, the Exodus, and very probably back to creation itself. Whether or not the temple was to be understood as co-founded with the creation of the earth (though not fully realized until much later) or not, it certainly provides themes and visual prompts highly suggestive of the primordial environment. Comparison of the temple to the created world (cosmos) appears in force as well for the language of the account utilizes creation formulae and metaphorical allusions to the whole of the universe, not to mention elements of the universal model including the earthly vegetation, the heavenly presence, and the cosmic waters.

Co-option of the ANE temple paradigm continues with the explanation of the connection between the divine and earthly realms offered by the temple. The narrator clearly articulates the temple as the chosen venue for contact between the LORD and his people. It illustrates the divine entrance into the temple and emphasizes the temple's "perfection" as a point for divine contact. Moreover, he symbolically and verbally expresses the possibility this connection affords through the heavenly bounty that pervades the story from beginning to end.

Finally, a preeminent feature of the temple and its dedication is Solomon's kingly role both in establishing the connection and in activating the potency of the temple. Solomon has the authority of divine backing. The LORD chooses to communicate through his chosen king, and the temple is an outward sign of that communication as it realizes divine will. The various other societal functions of the temple through the kingly office are also entailed by the bureaucratic and economic information provided by the

description. As Jonathan Z. Smith has shown the account obliquely but surely emphasizes these societal functions of the temple.¹⁶¹

The temple account is not a technical record of a building but a verbal illustration of a specific ideology. Overall, three main themes saturate the narrative: legitimization of the Jerusalem temple as the connection between heaven and earth; the perfection of this connection; and the possibilities for prosperity, not limited to material wealth but also encompassing just rule and security. No element of the text escapes the narrator's ideology. In effect, these themes coalesce into the message that the Jerusalem Temple, in its perfect form created by Solomon, was the pinnacle of Israel's sacred history. Likewise, the relationship enjoyed between the LORD, his devout king, and his chosen people through this perfect temple was the zenith of Israel's relationship with the divine. As Hurowitz has shown, despite all of the possible redactions and editions of the text, the account conforms to the standard form of the ANE building inscription. The narrator has ingeniously adapted this structure to communicate his ideology. In the same way, he has illustrated his larger message with a specific portrayal of the temple: he describes the temple in terms that divulge and endorse his theological and social position. He perfectly constructed a reality that communicates his sense of custom and value much like an actual artifact or surviving temple remains would indicate a cultural prerogative; only, in the case of this written record of the built environment, that prerogative is unmistakably articulated.

¹⁶¹ *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

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