

The Garden of Eden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind

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Abstract

This journal article considers ways in which the Garden of Eden functioned as a primordial temple for humankind. An examination of the creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space. Because it is a prototype and archetype of future temples, Eden provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. Moreover, an analysis of the biblical data indicates that God intended Adam and Eve to serve as His sacerdotal vice-regents in the garden. Indeed, Eden is regarded as the starting point for fellowship between God and redeemed humanity.

1. Introduction

Meredith Kline, in his discussion of Eden, refers to it as a ‘temple-garden’ (2006:48) and the archetypal ‘holy mountain of God’ (49; cf.

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The essay is adapted from the author’s recently-published book, *Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture* (Peter Lang, 2010), and is used here by permission of the publisher.

Gen 2:8–3:24). This implies that the primordial sanctuary is representative of all future shrines and provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. Kline also speaks of Eden as the 'vertical cosmic axis of the kingdom' and the metaphysical link 'extending from earth to heaven'. Later, in recounting the 'dream episode' Jacob experienced at Bethel (cf. 28:10–22), Kline pointed to the 'stair-structure' that the patriarch saw as representing the 'cosmic-axis, the holy mountain focus, the Presence-place of the Lord of glory' (375).

Succinctly put, a variety of terrestrial shrines in Scripture are regarded as sacred points of contact between the God of glory and His creation. Expressed in a different way, each of these sanctums is a physical localization of the axis mundi (or global nexus) that establishes a link 'between heaven and earth' (Waltke 2007:255; cf. Cohen 1981:54; McCurley 1983:126–127). This 'world axis' extends 'invisibly beyond what [can] be seen' of it 'into the heights and into the depths' (Talmon 1997:439). The preceding observations broach one important aspect of the temple motif as a conceptual and linguistic framework for understanding the 'drama of brokenness and restoration' detailed in Scripture (Brueggemann 2005:558).

2. Clarifying the Concept of the Temple

There is extensive scholarly discourse about the concept of the 'temple' within numerous ancient corpora. The latter include the following texts: the Old Testament (or Tanakh), the New Testament, and the Jewish writings penned during the intertestamental period (approximately 432–5 B.C.) and the era of Second Temple Judaism (approximately 515 B.C.–A.D. 70.; cf. Koester 1989:ix; Stevens 2006:3). Admittedly, there is some overlap between the intertestamental period and the era of Second

Temple Judaism. (Unless otherwise noted, the dates used throughout this essay are based on the timeline appearing in the Zondervan TNIV Study Bible, 2006:1656–1658).

The current discussion raises the important question, 'What is the temple?' In brief, it may be defined as a 'sacred, demarcated place' (Lundquist 2008:xi) in which the deity resides and 'cultic rituals' (Walton 2006:113) are performed (cf. Haran 1995:13; Lundquist 1994a:273; Marshall 1989:207). (The word 'cult' here refers to a group's 'social experience of the deity' through the 'performance' of rituals; McKenzie 1974:37). It was from 'very obscure beginnings' that the notion of the 'heavenly dwelling of God' became firmly entrenched in the 'mind of Judaism' and expanded to include the 'traditional hope of the eschatological or new temple' (McKelvey 1969:40). Like other religious symbols from the ancient Near East, the shrine concept is a 'multivalent ... iconic vehicle' and thus cannot be 'reduced to simply one meaning' (Ollenburger 1987:19).

The predominant 'sources of information' about the temple cultus include 'material artifacts and literary texts, both biblical and extrabiblical' (Stevens 2006:7). On the one hand, archaeologists have mainly focused on the 'constituent elements and minutiae', with the goal of surfacing 'ancient Near Eastern parallels for architectural features, furnishings, and decorative motifs'. On the other hand, specialists in biblical and theological studies have pondered the 'general religious significance of the structure' (Bloch-Smith 1994:18; cf. Baltzer 1965:263). The latter aim is most in line with the general intent of this essay.

3. Eden as a Primordial Temple

The literary backdrop for this paper is Eden with its idyllic garden (Gen 2:8). The focus of the narrative is not limited to the origin of the human race, but also includes the 'beginnings of life' (Fretheim 1994:336). The account of the latter starts in 1:1, the first words of which identify God as the originator of all creation. In fact, He is at the center of this narrative. Concededly, atheists insist that the notion of God is a fabrication (cf. Lioy 2008:18), and that each person is the 'center, the springboard, and the only frame of reference for moral guidelines' (Hamilton 1990:166). Be that as it may, the opening chapters of Genesis proclaim that 'creation is not a careless, casual, or accidental matter' (Brueggemann 1982:17). As the source of 'ultimate Reality', God alone gives 'meaning and significance to everything else'. Indeed, apart from Him there cannot be any 'meaning at all' (Gese 1981:222). Even individual human existence finds its selfhood and purpose in the Creator-King (cf. Johnson 2006:45; Lioy 2005:33).

With respect to Eden, the Hebrew noun rendered 'garden' (*gan*; 2:8) denotes a 'fenced-off enclosure', especially one that is 'protected by a wall or a hedge' (Dumbrell 2002:56; cf. 2 Kings 25:4; Neh 3:15; Jer 39:4; 52:7). It would be comparable to a 'park of trees' (von Rad 1972:77; cf. Hamilton 1990:161; Leupold 1981:1:117; Renckens 1964:199–200; Walton 2003b:202; Wallace 1992a:281). In Genesis 2:8, 'Eden' is more than a symbol. It refers to a 'geographical designation' (Speiser 1964:16). A number of conceptual and linguistic parallels in Scripture indicate that this lush, bucolic spot was a primordial temple or sacred space for humankind (cf. Stordalen 2000:294; Wenham 1994:399, 401). The Creator did not bring Eden into existence 'strictly for the habitation of humans'; instead, they were stewards whom He 'invited to enjoy and cultivate' His garden (Wallace 1992b:907).

The underlying premise is that ever since the dawn of time, the entire world has been God's sanctuary (cf. Levenson 1994:86; Lioy 2005:27). The preceding truth is affirmed in Isaiah 66:1, in which the Almighty declared that the heavens are His 'throne', and the earth is His 'footstool'. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from Today's New International Version, hereafter abbreviated, TNIV). The exalted King is depicted as reposing on His glorious royal seat and stooping down from His celestial temple to gaze at the heavens and the earth (cf. Isa 40:22, 26; Ps 113:4–6). According to 102:25, the Creator 'laid the foundations of the earth'. As well, the vast stretches of the universe are the 'work of [His] hands'. He is so powerful that, metaphorically speaking, He dresses Himself in a robe made out of light and stretches out the heavens like a tent curtain (104:2). He also uses the clouds as His chariot, and He rides upon the wings of the wind (v. 3). Moreover, the Lord of all creation placed the earth firmly on its foundations, ensuring that it will never be upended (v. 5; cf. 93:1–2).

From these sorts of passages one discerns that the entire universe is a 'sacramental place' as well as a window into 'transcendent reality' that points people beyond themselves and their material world to the 'beauty, truth and power' of the Creator (Vander Zee 2004:41). At one end of the axis of glory are the 'heavens' (Amos 9:6), where God built the upper rooms of His 'palace'. At the other end is the 'earth', the spot where the Lord placed the foundation supports of the entire cosmos. In this depiction of reality, the 'primary axis is vertical'. It signifies the 'relation between heaven and earth' as well as the 'cosmic order in relation to the social order' (Anderson 1999:204).

4. Eden as a Prototype and Archetype of Future Sacred Spaces

The original pristine universe that God brought into existence served as a prototype and archetype that looked ahead to future venues in which the Lord and the covenant community would enjoy fellowship together (cf. Hasel 1972:20; Starke 1996). These include the garden in Eden, the Israelite tabernacle in the wilderness, the temple in Jerusalem, and the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Brown 1986:787; Hyers 1984:54; Lundquist 2008:xii). Excluding the last-named item, perhaps the rest could be understood as smaller representations of what the universe in its unfallen state signified and prefigured (cf. Currid 1997:28; Palmer 2004:15). Based on the premise that these sanctuaries were 'in some way a replica of the divine heavenly abode', the veneration people offered in them were attempts to 'reenact creation' (Wenham 1994:400).

Admittedly, unlike the later-appearing shrines in early Israel, Eden had 'no architectural structure' (Beale 2005:7). In point of fact, 'it is not necessary for a sanctuary to be an edifice or structure' (Parry 1990:482). Furthermore, the cumulative evidence (to be discussed below) indicates that Eden functioned as a primordial temple-garden (cf. Poythress 1991:31). For that matter, throughout the ancient Near East, the 'first sacred spaces' existed apart from 'buildings' and were 'defined by some natural form that had come to possess some religious significance' (Turner 1979:15; for example, a hill, one or more trees, a stone, or a cave). Moreover, Eden, as a 'sacred center', was the 'earthly reproduction of the heavenly reality' (Kline 1996).

Because Adam communed with God in Eden, the latter was the temporal analog for the celestial archetype (cf. Wenham 1994:400–

401). According to Genesis 3:8, the first man and woman 'heard the sound' of their Creator as He was 'walking in the garden' at the breezy time of the day. The reader senses that 'God could make his presence known throughout the garden' (Longman 2001:6). Later, in reference to the tabernacle, the Lord declared to the Israelites that He would put His 'dwelling place' (Lev 26:11) among them. He also pledged to 'walk among' (v. 12) them to signify that He was their God and they were His chosen people. Centuries after that, the Lord told King David that during the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, God moved from 'place to place with a tent' as His 'dwelling' (2 Sam 7:6; cf. v. 7). Similarly, Moses clarified to a new generation of Israelites who were about to enter the promised land that their camp had to be kept 'holy' (Deut. 23:14) because the Lord moved about in their midst (cf. Beale 2004:197; Palmer 2004:15; Parry 1994:144).

5. Adam and Eve as God's Sacerdotal Vice-Regents in Eden

God's decision to bring humankind into existence was no afterthought; rather, it was His final and climactic act, making the human race the 'apogee of creation' (Helm 2000:204; cf. Ciampa 2007:257 Cohen 1989:12; Curtis 1992:390; Lioy 2005:49). This truth notwithstanding, people remain creatures who are utterly dependent on God for their existence and are accountable to Him for their actions (cf. Paul 1997:360). Genesis 1:26 begins with God decreeing, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness'. The deliberative Hebrew plural pronoun rendered 'us' marks the 'significance and sublimity of the Creator's action' (Bonhoeffer 1997:61). Most likely, God and His heavenly court of angelic beings are in view (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6; 38:7; Isa 6:8), though it is God who alone brings humankind into existence (Isa 40:14; 44:24; cf. Miller 2006:68;

Newsom 1992:249; von Rad 1962:145; Scullion 1992:943; Stager 2000:39; Walton 2001:129; Walton 2006:94). On the one hand, Adam and Eve are depicted as being 'real people'; on the other hand, they symbolize 'every man and every woman' who has ever lived (Walton 2007:250).

The Hebrew noun translated 'image' (*šēlem*; Gen 1:26) is typically used in reference to such replicas as models and statues (cf. Eichrodt 1967:122; Fletcher-Louis 2004:83; Jacob 1958:166–167; Scroggs 1966:12). In contrast, the noun rendered 'likeness' (*demût*) is an abstract term derived from a verbal root that means 'to resemble' (cf. Dyrness 1977:83; Kaiser 2008:40; Levenson 1994:111; Renckens 1964:121). These observations notwithstanding, in this verse the two words are virtually synonymous (cf. Curtis 1992:389; Hafemann 2001:222; Kidner 1967:50; Leupold 1981:1:89; von Rad 1962:144–145; von Rad 1972:58) and collectively mean 'according to a similar but not identical representation' (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:23).

From a literary standpoint, 'poetic repetition' (Hess 2003:18) is used, in which 'likeness' provides an 'amplification and specification' of what 'image' means (Clines 1968:90). From a theological perspective, humans are the 'visible corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God' (101). More generally, because every person is a 'psychosomatic unity' (85–86), the image of God in them is reflected in both the material and immaterial aspects of their existence (cf. von Rad 1972:58; Van Leeuwen 1997:644). Furthermore, the divine likeness encompasses the moral character of individuals and the roles/tasks they undertake during their earthly sojourn (cf. Brown 1999:44; Helm 2000:210–211; Roop 1987:322; Walton 2006:212). For believers, the image of God not only includes temporal (physical) life, but also eternal life (cf. Gage 2001:23; Dahl 1964:434–435; Kreitzer 1993a:14; Kreitzer 1993b:810; Scroggs 1966:68–69).

Down through the centuries, the scholarly discussion about the divine likeness in humanity has often been an 'atomizing and reductionist approach' (Bird 1994:33). Despite this, the opinions of specialists have coalesced around three main areas of concern—on the ability of people to reason, make ethical decisions, and exercise dominion (cf. Clines 1968:61; Dumbrell 1985:175–176; Longman 2001:4–5). Possessing high mental abilities and behaving morally concern the nature of human life, while governing the rest of creation deals with the function of human life (cf. Bonhoeffer 1997:66–67; Kline 2006:43–44; Scullion 1992:944). From a New Testament perspective, the spiritual character of the redeemed needs to be considered. In brief, becoming increasingly more like the Messiah is closely connected with bearing the image of God (cf. Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Eph 4:22–24; Col 1:15; 3:9–10; Heb 1:3; Hamilton 1990:145–146; Smith 1993:245; Wright 2006:424). Even though within fallen humanity the image of God has been defaced through sin, people still bear the divine likeness to some degree (cf. Gen 5:1; 9:6; Jas 3:9), and this sets them apart from the rest of earth's creatures (cf. Birch 2005:37, 43; Childs 1993:569; Merrill 1991:19; Van Leeuwen 1997:645).

The more immediate context of Genesis 1:26–28 encompasses both the male and female genders (cf. Branch 2003:240) and focuses on rulership; in other words, the mandate for men and women to govern the world as benevolent vice-regents of the true and living God, is a reflection of His image in them (cf. Gen 9:2; Ps 8:5–8; Heb 2:5–9; Bird 1994:338–339; Levenson 1994:112–113; McCartney 1994:2; Paul 1997:360). By ruling over the rest of creation in a responsible fashion, people bear witness to the divine likeness placed within humanity (cf. Eichrodt 1967:127; Renckens 1964:126–127; Scroggs 1966:13). Also, as His sacerdotal agents mediate His presence, they actualize His will

on earth (cf. Matt 6:10; Brown 1999:44–45; Cohen 1989:22–23; Hafemann 2001:25).

6. Details from the Creation Narrative Pointing to Eden as a Primordial Temple

There are a number of details in the creation narrative that point to Eden as a primordial temple. For instance, according to Genesis 2:8, the Creator planted an 'orchard of various fruit trees' in Eden (Brown 1999:138). Deliberate representations of these were found in the 'wood carvings' placed within the temple of Solomon and which gave it a 'garden-like atmosphere' (Beale 2005:8; cf. Stager 2000:39, 41). The intent of the 'temple design' was to 'recreate the primordial landscape of creation' (Carroll 2005) and draw attention to its 'luxurious, pristine, and life giving' character (Lundquist 2008:xiv). First Kings 6:18 notes that the stone walls throughout the shrine were entirely covered with cedar paneling. In turn, the latter were overlaid with carvings of 'gourds and open flowers'. Verse 29 adds that the walls of the inner and outer rooms of the sanctuary had carvings of cherubs, palm trees, and flowers in bloom (cf. vv. 32, 35). A similar pattern could be found on the latticework that decorated the capitals of the two bronze pillars placed at the entrance to the holy place of the temple. Artisans encircled the latticework of both capitals with two rows of 200 pomegranate-shaped ornaments (7:17–18, 20). Also, the tops of the two pillars inside the portico were shaped like 'lilies' (v. 19; cf. Gage 2001:57).

Genesis 2:9 discloses that the Creator placed in the middle of the antediluvian sanctuary two distinctive trees: the first bore life-giving fruit; the second produced fruit that, when people consumed it, gave them a heightened awareness of right and wrong (cf. Childs 1962:696; Dyrness 1977:100; Gow 2003:286; Piper 1962:43; Walker

1997b:1259–1260). This ethical insight turned on the 'issue of moral autonomy' (Dunn 1998:83), especially the 'capacity to make the correct decision when confronted with alternatives' (Hamilton 1990:166; cf. Deut. 1:39; 1 Kgs 3:9). The ability to select the best possible option had 'sexual, intellectual, and social implications' (Wallace 1992c:658). The 'tree of ... knowledge', which symbolized the 'freedom of choice over good and evil' (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:26), foreshadows the deposit of the two stone tablets within the ark of the covenant (cf. Brown 1999:388–389; Dalman 2002:40–41; Ross 1988:95; Stordalen 2000:465; Waltke 2007:150; Wenham 1994:402–403). On the tablet were inscribed the Ten Commandments (Exod. 25:16, 21; Heb. 9:4), which many consider to be the moral law, or the basic list of God's universal ethical norms for proper human conduct (cf. Lioy 2004:6).

Moreover, in the shrine-garden was the 'tree of life', whose fruit enabled the first humans to enjoy unending existence in all its beauty and fullness with God (cf. Seebass 1986:84–85; Smick 1988:901–902; Starke 1996; Wallace 1992c:658). This tree was the prototype of the arboreal-looking lampstand that was placed within the holy place of the tabernacle and temple (cf. Barker 1991:90; Levenson 1994:94; Longman and Reid 1995:50; Parry 1994:128–129). Its various accessories (i.e. cups, flower buds, and almond blossoms) were attached on six branches and formed one solid piece with its stem and base. An ideal number of seven lamps (representing fullness and flawlessness) were mounted on the six branches and the central supporting shaft in order to provide continual light (cf. Exod. 25:31–37; Averbeck 2003:816–817; Birch 1986:559; Friberg 1992:1145; Pope 1962:564; White 1976:460). This light was intended to be a visible representation of the Lord's glorious presence and redemptive power among His people (cf. Exod. 29:43; Zech. 4; Rev. 1:13, 20; 2:1, 5; 11:4; Fletcher-Louis 2004:89–90, 93–94; Walton 2001:148, 182; Walton 2006:125).

In John's vision of the eternal state, he observed that a 'tree of life' (Rev 22:2) grew on each side of the 'river of the water of life'. One possibility is that the Greek noun rendered 'tree' (*xulon*) should be taken in a collective sense to refer to an orchard lining both sides of the riverbank. In any case, the apostle noted that the tree bore 12 different kinds of fruit, with a new crop appearing each month of the year. The fruit gave life, and the leaves were used as medicine to heal the nations. The presence of healing leaves does not mean there will be illness in heaven. Rather, the leaves symbolize the health and vigor that believers will enjoy in eternity (cf. Ezek. 47:12). As noted earlier, a tree of life first existed in the Garden of Eden, and it must have been lush. After Adam and Eve had sinned, God did not allow them to eat the fruit of the tree. In eternity, however, the all-powerful Lord will allow the redeemed to partake fully of eternal life, which is symbolized by the tree and its fresh, abundant fruit (cf. Gen. 2:9; 3:22; Bauckham 1993:316; Brighton 1999:627–628; Ford 1975:339; Mounce 1998:399; Osborne 2002:771–772; Slater 1999:199; Stefanovic 2002:592–593; Wall 1991:256).

Genesis 2:10 discloses that a river flowed in Eden and watered the temple-garden. Then, beyond this sacred locale, the river divided into four headstreams to distribute water throughout the remainder of the planet (cf. Clifford 1972:101–102; Dalman 2009:131; Giese 1997:1151; Stordalen 2000:276). The Solomonic shrine was portrayed as being a lush, fertile place (cf. Parry 1994:129–130; Walton 2001:148; Wenham 1994:402). For instance, Psalm 36 describes God's sacred house as a spot where the redeemed could 'feast' (v. 8) on His 'abundance'. Also, there His people could 'drink from [his] river of delights'. The poet explained that in the Lord's presence was 'the fountain of life' (v. 9), whose 'light' gave sustaining life to worshipers. Jeremiah, in his appeal to God for vindication, referred to the temple as the Lord's 'glorious

throne' (Jer. 17:12), which was 'exalted from the beginning' and the 'place of [His people's] sanctuary'. Verse 13 points to God as the 'spring of living water'. Those who put their 'confidence' (v. 7) in Him were comparable to a tree planted by a riverbank and whose roots extended deep into the water (v. 8). Despite the presence of excessive heat or prolonged drought, its leaves remained green and its branches continued to bear fruit (cf. Ps. 1:3).

The imagery is even more evocative in apocalyptic portions of Scripture (cf. Taylor 2004:70). For example, one of the most impressive descriptions in the entire book of Ezekiel is that of the river that flowed from the eschatological temple (47:1–12; cf. Joel 3:18; Zech. 14:8; Barrois 1980:63–64; Joyce 2007:147). Wherever the river went, it gave life (cf. Caird 1999:280; Strong 1997:4:1319). Similarly, in John's vision of the eternal state, he saw a river that was crystal clear and whose waters gave life. It flowed from God's throne down the middle of the new Jerusalem's main thoroughfare (Rev 22:1). The river and its water are a symbol of the fullness of eternal life that proceeds from the presence of God (cf. Giese 1997:1151–1152; Roloff 1993:246; Stefanovic 2002:592; Walton 2003b:205). In this vision of the future, the Father and the Son are joint owners of the heavenly throne (cf. Bauckham 1993:139; Johnson 2001:322; Morris 1992:99; Moyise 1995:81; Slater 1999:167, 198; Thompson 1990:64).

Priestly terminology, which was later used in reference to the Israelite tabernacle and temple, first appears in Genesis 2:15 (cf. Stordalen 2000:458; Walton 2001:149, 185). The verse states that the Creator placed Adam in the shrine-garden 'to work it and take care of it'. The underlying Hebrew verbs—'*ābad* and *šāmar*, respectively—can also be rendered 'serving / worshiping' and 'guarding / protecting' (cf. Dumbrell 2002:59–60; Hafemann 2001:228; Parry 1994:143–144; Walton 2003a:165). Corresponding passages of Scripture focus on

priests performing their duties in the sanctuary and keeping it undefiled from profane objects (cf. Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chron 23:32; Ezek 44:14; Kline 2006:85–86; von Rad 1962:241–242; Walton 2003b:205–206). The logical inference is that the Creator originally wanted Adam and Eve to perform sacerdotal responsibilities in the Garden of Eden, including the cultivation and upkeep of the sacred space (cf. Averbeck 2003:817; Sailhamer 1990:45).

Genesis 3 reveals that the couple failed in their priestly role when they succumbed to the beguiling influence of the serpent (cf. Gow 2003:286; Sarna 1966:24; Waltke 2007:259). Tragically, even though Adam and Eve had all their earthly needs met, they still transgressed the 'one injunction given to them' (Wenham 2008:35). In turn, the introduction of sin and death to the human race led God to banish His sacerdotal agents from the hallowed orchard (Gen 3:23; cf. Rom 5:12). The Lord also stationed angelic sentinels (literally, 'cherubim') to police the garden and stand guard over the path to the 'tree of life' (Gen 3:24; cf. Baldwin 1986:280; Kline 2006:47–48; Miller 2006:66; Steinmann 2003:112; Walker 1997a:1260). This episode is later commemorated in ancient Israel by the placing of two 'cherubim of the Glory' (Heb. 9:5) on both ends of the lid of the ark of the covenant (cf. Bloch-Smith 1994:24; Poythress 1991:19, 31; Lundquist 2008:xv). The pair were 'hybrid creatures composed of the body of a lion with eagles' wings' (Hiebert 1992:510). The cherubim were symbolic guardians and protectors of God's kingly presence in the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple (cf. Exod. 25:18–20; 1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps. 99:1; Averbeck 2003:817; Harrison 1979:643; Parry 1994:132–133, 139; Wenham 1994:401).

According to Genesis 3:24, the entrance to the orchard in Eden faced 'east' (cf. Lundquist 2008:24; Parry 1994:131–132). Both the Solomonic shrine and the future temple envisioned by Ezekiel were to

face east and be located on a hallowed mountain (cf. Ezek.. 40:2, 6; 43:12; Dalman 2002:49–50; Turner 1979:48–49). Ezekiel 28 adds that Eden was called the 'garden of God' (vs. 13) and the 'holy mount of God' (v. 14; cf. v. 16; Clifford 1972:172; Dumbrell 2002:58–59; von Rad 1962:141). It was the 'primordial hillock', that is, the 'place that first emerged from the waters covering the earth during the creative process' (Carroll 2005; cf. Stager 2000:37; Turner 1979:25). In this biblical paradigm, God's cosmic mountain bore 'witness to the order and permanence of the created world' (Cohen 1981:31).

Similar characterizations are found in Scripture in connection with the Jerusalem temple as the 'architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain' (Lundquist 1994b:84; cf. Parry 1994:137; Talmon 1997:437). For instance, the Lord's 'holy mountain' (Isa 11:9) is Zion (Pss. 2:6; 87:1–2; 99:1–3, 9), which is also known as the 'mountain of [His] inheritance' (Exod. 15:17), the consecrated spot reserved for His own 'dwelling', and the 'city of God' (Ps 87:3; cf. Barker 1991:69; McKelvey 1969:11; Roberts 1982:100). Moreover, 'within the cult tradition of Jerusalem', Zion was a 'symbol of security and refuge', that is, the place where the ever-present Creator-King defended the righteous by vanquishing their foes (Ollenburger 1987:65–66; cf. Pss. 9:1–20; 10:1–18; 20:1–9; 24:1–10; 46:1–11; 48:1–14; 76:1–12; 89:1–18; 93:1–5). Zion is first mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:7 as a Jebusite fortress on a hill. After being captured by David, this fortress was called the City of David. Here Israel's king brought the ark of the covenant, thereby making the hill a sacred site (6:10–12; cf. Batey 2000:559; Clifford 1972:131; Eliav 2005:2–3; Groves 2005:1022; Klouda 2008:936; Strong 1997:4:1314).

Israel's sacred mountain conceptions and traditions draw upon mythological imagery, symbols, and archetypes found in nearby cultures, namely, 'Mesopotamian, Canaanite, Babylonian, Persian,

[and] Hellenistic' (Donaldson 1985:25; cf. Renz 1999:83; VanGemeren 2008:481). (For a systematic and detailed study of the meaning and function of the cosmic mountain theme in the Canaanite and Israelite religious traditions, cf. Clifford 1972; Donaldson 1985; Eliav 2005; and Niehaus 1995.) In general, religious mountain symbolism denotes 'more than a mere geographical location' (Clifford 1972:7). The ancient Near Eastern idea refers to a 'place set apart because of a divine presence or activity' among a group of people. According to this understanding of reality, the earth is the 'base of the mountain' (i.e. at one end of the axis of glory) and the 'top of the heavens' is its summit (i.e. at the other end of the axis of glory; 190). Moreover, the action of 'natural forces' at the 'point where the earth touches the divine sphere' gives the planet order, stability, and fertility (7–8).

The people of the ancient Near East regarded the 'universe ... as a gigantic world-mountain' that extended from the 'entrance of the subterranean abyss to the highest point of heaven' (Clements 1965:2). Furthermore, in the temple ideology of the era, such a mountain-shrine functioned as a 'powerful earthly center and point of contact with the heavens' (Lundquist 2008:xiv; cf. Walton 2006:278). For these reasons, the cosmic mountain was the de facto reference point for 'everything else' (Levenson 1984:283). By way of implication, the ancient Israelites viewed their shrine as the axis mundi, or 'peripheral pivot' and 'beginning point' (Cohen 1981:57), for the entire cosmos. In this schema, the temple was the 'navel of the world' (De Lacey 1991:396), having its 'roots in the underworld and its peak in the heavens' (Donaldson 1985:26). Moreover, because the sanctum and all of the creation stood 'in an intimate and intrinsic connection' (288), the temple became the 'moral center of the universe, the source from which

holiness and a terrifying justice radiated' (298; cf. Cohen 1981:32–33; McCurley 1983:127; Turner 1979:10–11, 21).

Concerning the garden within Eden (or possibly adjoining it; cf. Cornelius 1997:555; Stordalen 2000:284–286; Walton 2003b:202), the archetypal sanctuary was analogous to the holy place of 'Israel's later temple' (Beale 2005:10). Here the Lord's 'priestly servant' worshiped Him by living in obedience to His covenant stipulations. Similarly, Eden proper was akin to the most holy place of the Jerusalem shrine. This is where God—who is the 'source of both physical and spiritual life'—manifested His ineffable presence. In keeping with this comparison, the remainder of the earth beyond the confines of the antediluvian sanctuary was 'roughly equivalent to the outer court of Israel's subsequent temple'. According to the 'gradation in holiness' reflected in this depiction, the rest of the planet's continents and oceans would be comparably less sacrosanct than Eden proper and its orchard (cf. Abrahams and Rothkoff 2007:423; Lundquist 2008:25, 36; Walton 2001:168, 173–174, 181–183, 193–194; Walton 2004:144–145; Walton 2006:125).

It would be incorrect to conclude that the majority of earth is inconsequential (cf. Kline 1996). After all, Genesis 1:28 says that God 'blessed' humans, which means He endowed men and women with the ability to flourish and be successful in serving as His vice-regents across the entire planet (cf. Carroll 2000:24; Patrick 1992:436; Lioy 2005:52; Sailhamer 1990:38; Smith 1993:171–172). For Adam and Eve before the Fall, the creation mandate included expanding the 'contours of the garden' (Dumbrell 2002:62) until it encompassed all of the earth. Humanity's populating the world and bringing it under their control in a responsible fashion would be a testimony to God's abiding presence in and blessing on their lives. In the time period of Moses, the focus would have been primarily agricultural. Such endeavors as domesticating

animals, using trees to build homes, cultivating fields, and extracting mineral resources from the land would all be involved. Even today, as people use the resources of the environment in a sensible and responsible manner (e.g. in such vocations as agriculture, art, business, science, government, journalism, entertainment, scholarship, etc.), they are fulfilling God's original command to subdue the earth (cf. Ps 8:5–8; Walton 2009:149; Westermann 1982:98–99).

Genesis 1:31 declares that everything the Creator brought into existence was 'very good' or 'completely perfect' (von Rad 1972:61). From a theological standpoint, it is clear that 'God, by his powerful Word, transforms the chaos into a holy and blessed creation' (Ross 1988:114). Here God is depicted neither as a 'mighty warrior' nor as a 'cunning conqueror', but as an 'omnipotent artisan' and an 'omniscient architect' (Kline 2006:26) who is also 'serenely and supremely in charge' (Brueggemann 2005:153). Expressed differently, He is the quintessential virtuoso, who 'having completed his masterpiece, steps back a little and surveys his handiwork with delight, for both in detail and in its entirety it had emerged from his hand' (Cassuto 1978:59; cf. vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The Creator is also like a 'master chef' who brings a 'multicourse banquet before admiring guests'. In a manner of speaking, 'God kisses his fingers with each new delicacy that he brings from his creative workshop' (Wright 2006:398).

Walton (2006:197) advances the discussion by noting that the first chapter of Genesis is 'framed in terms of the creation of the cosmos as a temple in which Yahweh takes up his repose'. In turn, God resting on the seventh day (cf. 2:1–3) is the functional equivalent of Him 'being enthroned' and assuming His 'role as sovereign ruler of the cosmos' (cf. Hafemann 2001:29–30; Walton 2003a:165; Walton 2009:162; Wenham 1994:403). In this portrayal, God operates as the 'transcendent referent' whose 'purpose and ... will for creation' is the basis for its 'ultimate

meaning' (Brueggemann 1982:12–13). Moreover, God commissioned the human race to be His 'vice-regents' and 'reflect his glory throughout his creation', especially as they manage responsibly the planet on which they live (Ciampa 2007:257). The latter includes 'care-giving, even nurturing' the global ecosystem over which God has given them authority (Fretheim 1994:346).

7. Conclusion

This journal article has considered ways in which the Garden of Eden functioned as a primordial temple for humankind. The essay began by noting that Eden, in its function as a sacred space, is representative of all future shrines and provides a conceptual framework for understanding and appreciating their purpose. These later-appearing temples are regarded as hallowed spots where the Lord manifests His presence and worshipers perform a series of rites and rituals. The remainder of the paper delineates ways in which Eden operated as a backdrop for and antecedent of these sanctums, especially the tabernacle in the wilderness and temple in Jerusalem.

In summary, an examination of the creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space, as well as a prototype and archetype of future temples. Moreover, a theological analysis of the biblical data indicates that God intended Adam and Eve to serve as His sacerdotal vice-regents in the garden. Indeed, Eden is regarded as the starting point for fellowship between God and redeemed humanity. As discussed at length in *Axis of Glory* (Lioy 2010:135), the Lord's ongoing encounter with the covenant community is discernible in the priestly activity of His people in sacred locales during the early biblical period and in the sacerdotal practices connected with the wilderness tabernacle and various subsequent Jerusalem shrines. The prominence of the temple in

later biblical literature can be seen in the depictions of God's heavenly sanctuary recorded in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Furthermore, each of these sanctums function as sacred points of contact between the God of glory and His creation.

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