

Chapter 12

God's Home Address

Reconstituting the nation of Israel marked Yahweh's movement toward re-establishing his kingdom rule on earth. We're quite used to thinking of the founding of Israel in such terms, but the formation of the nation had more cosmic implications. Not only was a nation reborn, but Yahweh had successfully reclaimed a human family—children who would, as intended at the beginning, image Him and, progressively, transform the earth into a new Eden. You may be wondering how I get this grandiose notion from just the exodus event, especially since the story of Israel just doesn't seem to read that spectacularly. Depends on what grabs your attention.

Eden Revisited

In Chapter 3 we discovered that Eden was the dwelling place and headquarters of the divine council. We were reminded of the description of Eden in Genesis as a lush *garden* with four rivers (Gen. 2:10-14). Eden was also a *mountain* (Ezek. 28:13-14), the administrative “seat of the gods” (Ezek. 28:2) situated in “the midst of the seas” (Ezek. 28:2), a description that reiterated well-watered imagery of the council headquarters. We also learned that the idea that Yahweh lived a garden and on a mountain is completely consistent with the ancient mindset of Israel's neighbors. They also spoke of the gods living on high mountains, which were close to the heavens, and luxuriant gardens, place of paradise. The Old Testament actually uses both kinds of imagery to describe *any* place where Yahweh lived. Yahweh, of course, is also portrayed as omnipresent,¹ but when he met with humankind he did so in specific locales.

This is familiar by now, but I didn't address something about Eden earlier that has relevance here. The time wasn't right. We've come a long way since that chapter. We've covered a lot of ground about the Old Testament having two Yahwehs, one invisible, the other visible and, at times, even embodied in human form. We've talked about the absolute necessity for Yahweh to come to humans in a way that humans can process, and for their own protection—as the second, visible Yahweh. The presence of the second Yahweh has divine council implications, for the second Yahweh is the chief agent of the will of Yahweh and his council. That shouldn't be a surprise, since we've seen repeatedly that where Yahweh is, his council is never far behind.

These ideas are present in the imagery of the Genesis garden scenes. For instance, the account of the creation of humankind in Genesis 2 contains vocabulary that suggests a physicalized Yahweh in the garden. Yahweh “forms” the animals and Adam “out of the ground” (Gen. 2:7, 19), verbiage that feels like it would require the use of hands. Gen 3:8

says that Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the LORD God *walking...*” Walking is another word that speaks of embodiment. The LORD God is walking around in the garden, and Adam and Eve hear his movement. Spirits don’t walk and make sounds with their footsteps or as they brush by foliage.

I bring this issue up because what starts with only a suggestive hint in the cosmic garden becomes progressively more apparent as we move on in the Old Testament. It seems that we have an embodied Yahweh right from the beginning in the garden, but we’re not quite sure. As time goes on, we see the visible Yahweh make himself known in dramatic ways, and even how both the visible and the invisible Yahweh can be simultaneously present. What I want to draw your attention to here is that *the writers of Scripture want readers to see the links to Eden*. The fact is, they are always dropping hints that the presence and kingdom of Yahweh on earth began at Eden, and will end there once again. We’ll see in what follows that while the visible Yahweh *changed* earthly addresses, where he could be found was described in the *same* ways.

Sinai, the Mountain of God

The fact that Eden is referred to as both a garden and a mountain in Ezekiel 28:13-14 is significant, for it provides a conceptual link between Eden and the holy mountain of God that features so prominently in Israel’s early history: Mount Sinai.

We’ve already looked at a number of passages that have Yahweh as residing on Mount Sinai, such as Exodus 3:1-3, the burning bush incident, and Exodus 24:9-11, where Moses and some companions “saw the God of Israel” and enjoyed a meal in his presence. Interestingly, in the Exodus 24 episode we are given some details of Yahweh’s appearance. The text notes the apparently seated visible Yahweh’s feet, under which was “a pavement of sapphire stone (Hebrew, *sappir*), like the very heaven for clearness” (Exod. 24:10). We know we’re dealing with the visible second Yahweh since invisible spirits don’t have feet. This is the Yahweh that can be processed with the human senses. Other throne scenes are consistent with these features.

Yahweh’s presence on Sinai—a place that actually goes by other names in the Old Testamentⁱⁱ—is elsewhere accompanied by fire, smoke, flashing light, lightning, and loud noises.ⁱⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 33:1-2 is representative:

¹ This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death. ² He said: Yahweh came from Sinai, and He shone upon them from Seir. He appeared in radiance from Mount Paran, and approached from Ribebboth-Kodesh, from his right lightning flashed at them.

All of these elements are found in descriptions of Yahweh’s throne or throne room, creating an immediate association between the place of sovereign council and the holy mountain. The most famous is Isaiah 6.

Isaiah 6

¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

Perhaps the second-most familiar throne room description is the bizarre vision of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 1

²² Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads. ²³ And under the expanse their wings were stretched out straight, one toward another. And each creature had two wings covering its body. ²⁴ And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still, they let down their wings. ²⁵ And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads. When they stood still, they let down their wings. ²⁶ And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire (Hebrew, sappir); and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. ²⁷ And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. ²⁸ Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

This famous, odd description of the wheeled throne of Yahweh is echoed in the book of Daniel:

Daniel 7

⁹ As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. ¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

It is important to point out that these passages place Yahweh's throne room on both the earth (Sinai) and in heaven. It is actually fairly common for the Old Testament to

simultaneously have Yahweh on earth and in heaven, and then describe his throne-abode in identical ways. In Psalm 18 we see all the features of the throne imagery, and the passage has Yahweh in the temple and in the heavens:

- 6 In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.
- 7 Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations also of the mountains trembled
and quaked, because he was angry.
- 8 Smoke went up from his nostrils,
and devouring fire from his mouth;
glowing coals flamed forth from him.
- 9 He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
- 10 He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.
- 11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him,
thick clouds dark with water.
- 12 Out of the brightness before him
hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.
- 13 The LORD also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice,
hailstones and coals of fire.
- 14 And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.

I won't belabor the point by listing more passages, since it should be clear that Sinai and the throne room of Yahweh are described in identical ways. But what about the divine council? We need to establish the presence of the council in these descriptions for there to be any analogy with Eden.

Sinai, Council Headquarters

You may have noticed the council already in one of the passages you just read. Here it is again, though I've underlined different phrases this time.

Daniel 7

- 9 As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.¹⁰ A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten

thousand stood before him; the court (or, council) sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

This is one of the more explicit divine council texts in the Old Testament. There are *multiple thrones* in this heavenly scene, along with the single throne occupied by the Ancient of Days, the God of Israel.^{iv} There is a clear reference to the council—the word translated “court” here refers to a judicial body. It is used again in verse 26 where we read “But the court/council shall sit in judgment . . .” Besides those council members seated, a multitude of others are also present. Yahweh has a packed meeting room!

There is another passage among those we’ve read in this chapter that also has the council at Sinai, though you would never guess that because of the translation. I speak of Deut. 33:1-2. I’ve added verses 3-4 here for the sake of our discussion:

¹ This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death. ² He said: Yahweh came from Sinai, and He shone upon them from Seir. He appeared in radiance from Mount Paran, and approached from Ribboth-Kodesh, from his right lightning flashed at them. ³ Indeed, he loved the people, all his holy ones at your hand. And they followed at your feet; he bears your words, ⁴ the law which Moses commanded us, an inheritance for the assembly of Jacob.

If you’re wondering where the council is in this passage, you wouldn’t be alone. The problem is the translation and, more fundamentally, the Hebrew text used for the translation. Many modern translations are quite similar to the above, which is my own literal translation of the traditional Hebrew (Masoretic) text of the Old Testament. Others are closer to what follows below, Deuteronomy 33:1-4 *according to the Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, whose text differs slightly from the traditional Hebrew text used for most English translations:

¹ This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death. ² He said: The LORD came from Sinai, and He shone to us from Seir; He made haste from Mount Paran with ten thousands of Kadesh, his angels with him. ³ And He had pity on his people, and all the holy ones were under your hands; and they were under you; and he received his words, ⁴ the law which Moses charged us, an inheritance to the assemblies of Jacob.

So what are we looking at? As the traditional Hebrew text goes, the Hebrew phrase in verse 2 underlying “Ribboth-Kodesh” is the same (except for an alternative spelling) as what occurs at Deut. 32:51 (“Meribath Kadesh”). This is why most scholars today consider the phrase to be a geographical place name, and I’d agree, with respect to what they’re reading in the traditional Hebrew text. The Septuagint, however, obviously has something else going on! While it is possible to get “ten thousands of Kadesh” from the Hebrew consonants of the traditional Masoretic text, the very common Hebrew word for angels (*mal’akim*) does not appear in the traditional Masoretic text. The Septuagint translation (*aggeloi* = *angels*) came from a different Hebrew text. According to the

Septuagint, the Old Testament quoted most often by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament, angels were at Sinai.

The heavenly host of the divine council is also placed specifically at Sinai in Psalm 68:^v

- 15 O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan;
O many-peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan!
- 16 Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain,
at the mount that God desired for his abode,
yes, where the LORD will dwell forever?
- 17 The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
thousands upon thousands;
the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.
- 18 You ascended on high,
leading a host of captives in your train
and receiving gifts among men,
even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.^{vi}

The conclusion that follows is that, like Eden, the divine council was present at Yahweh's subsequent dwelling place, Mount Sinai.

The Tent Sanctuaries

If I asked you where God "lived" after Sinai you'd probably be able to come up with the answer pretty quickly. Some would likely say the Temple; others might say the Tabernacle. The answer is pretty much on target. There's actually one other structure to consider before we get to those that will help us process the descriptions of the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Before the Tabernacle was constructed (Exodus 35-40), Moses would meet with Yahweh in a small tent called "the Tent of Meeting." Though many take the Tent of Meeting and the tabernacle as the same, some passages appear to clearly have the Tent of Meeting in existence before the tabernacle.^{vii}

The Tent of Meeting is important because it's a tent. I know that hardly sounds profound, but it's true. The reason is that elsewhere in the biblical world, the divine beings of the divine council were considered to live in tents—atop their cosmic mountains, of course, which were also gardens! The tent of the god or gods was, as with mountains or lush gardens, the place where heaven and earth intersected and the god or gods did their business of issuing decrees and decisions. Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit are among the cultures that portrayed their gods in tent shrines. It was a common cultural idea, perhaps akin to how many people think of church—church is a place you'd expect to meet God, or where God hangs around, so to speak.

For Israel, the Tent of Meeting was the place God met with Moses and dispensed oracles for his people (Exod 33:7-11; Num 11:16-30). It was a structure of convenience, though. Once the Tabernacle was built.

The word “tabernacle” (*mishkan*) literally means “dwelling,” an appropriate term since Yahweh would take it as his dwelling place with the Israelites. It was a portable tent structure that served as the location for Israelite worship during the wilderness wanderings under Moses, and then Joshua. It constructed during the Israelites’ stay at the foot of Sinai (Exodus 25-40). *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* elaborates:

[The tabernacle] consisted of a rectangular enclosure, hung with curtains supported on poles, some 145 feet (44 m.) long, 72 feet (22 m.) wide, and 7 feet (2.2 m.) high (Exod. 27:18). Within this, there was another building, also curtained, divided in two by a veil, behind which was the Holy of Holies containing the Ark; before the veil stood the altar of incense, the seven-branched lampstand, and the table for the bread of the Presence (Exod. 25:30). In the courtyard outside this building stood the altar of burnt offering and the laver (Exod. 30:18). When the Israelites moved about during their wilderness wanderings, the whole tabernacle was dismantled by the Levites and re-erected by them wherever the tribes pitched camp (Num. 1:51). While it was stationary, the twelve tribes camped around it in a defined order (Num. 2:1-31), with the Levites in its immediate vicinity (Num. 1:52-53). The furnishings of the tabernacle were made of the finest and costliest materials (Exod. 25:3-7).^{viii}

Moses was told to construct the Tabernacle and its equipment according to the pattern shown to him by Yahweh on the holy mountain (Exod. 26:30; cf. 25:9, 40). The Tabernacle on earth was to be a copy of the heavenly tent in accord with the religious principle of “as in heaven, so on earth.” The heavenly tent prototype was the heavens themselves, as Isaiah 40:22 tells us (“It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in”). This kind of language is also why the earth is referred to as God’s footstool—Yahweh sits above the circle of the earth, in his heavenly tent, on his throne above the waters which are above “the firmament,” and rests his feet on the earth (Isa. 66:1 – “Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”).^{ix} Understanding this imagery is critical for understanding the descriptions of where God chooses to dwell on earth, since those descriptions match. The locale where Yahweh dwells on earth *is* heaven on earth.

To summarize, like the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle was considered the home of Yahweh, the place where his presence resided. It was also the throne room of Yahweh, since the ark of the covenant was there, and Yahweh was thought to reside above the cherubim.^x The Tabernacle became the focal point for the presence of Yahweh—or, more accurately, it was the dwelling place of the Name. Recall that in Chapter 10 we looked at passages like Deuteronomy 12, where the tabernacle, the place of sacrifice, was the place Yahweh “caused his Name to dwell” (Deut. 12:10). We see the same idea in Jeremiah 7:12, after the tabernacle was stationed at Shiloh (see below) – “Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell ...” Already there are divine council implications. We know two things about the Name from earlier chapters: (1) the Name is another term for Yahweh—Yahweh is at times called the Name, and vice versa;

(2) the Name was within the Angel (Exod. 23:20-23), who therefore was the physically embodied second Yahweh.

The Tabernacle traveled with Israel during the entire journey to the Promised Land. Once Israel penetrated the Land, the ark of the covenant (and hence the Tabernacle structure) was situated at Bethel (Josh. 20:27), a name that means “house of God.” This then became the place where one inquired of God. Bethel is a place that has come up many times in our discussion. You know Bethel by now. It was the place where Jacob had his encounter with Yahweh and the angels of his council atop the “ladder” (i.e., a ziggurat; Gen. 28:10-22). It was the place where the “angels of God” appeared to him again when fleeing from Esau, his brother (Gen. 32:1-5). It was the place Jacob built an altar and a pillar to commemorate the appearances of Yahweh and the *elohim* to him (Gen 35:1-7). It was the place Deborah the prophetess who sat under the terebinth tree lived (Judges 4:5).

Sometime later the Tabernacle moved from Bethel to Shiloh. Once that move occurred, it was said that the “house of God” was Shiloh (Judges 18:31; 1 Sam 1:24; Jer. 7:12)). The Old Testament indicates that Shiloh naturally became the place of sacrifice (Judges 21:19; 1 Sam 1:3). At Shiloh we see the boy Samuel encounter the physicalized Yahweh, the Word (1 Sam 3). It remained there even after Eli the priest foolishly sent the ark of the covenant out to battle and it fell into the hands of the Philistines. The ark traveled to several locations after Yahweh judged the Philistines, but the priests and the ephod, which held the means of inquiring of God, the Urim and the Thummim, remained at Shiloh (1 Sam. 14:3).

Eventually the ark was brought to Jerusalem. At first, David placed it in a temporary tent he had made for it (2 Sam. 6:17; 2 Chron. 1:3-4), under the assumption that he was going to build a temple for it. He removed it during the time of civil unrest caused by his son, Absalom (2 Sam 15:24-25). In the meantime, the place of sacrifice had become Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4) where, we are told, an ancient “Tent of Meeting” of Moses had been moved (2 Chron. 1:3). In Solomon’s day, Gibeon was the high place of worship. The “Tent of Meeting” at Gibeon was actually the Mosaic Tabernacle, since sacrifices were offered there (something that was not true of *the* Tent of Meeting in Moses’ day). This separation of the ark at Jerusalem and the Tabernacle tent at Gibeon was the situation during the time of Solomon as well, prior to Solomon’s construction of the Temple.

The important point in all of this is that, not only was the abode and throne room of Yahweh considered to be the lush garden of Eden and a holy mountain, they were also considered to be found within a tent structure. All of these images—tent, mountain, garden—come together in the Temple, the fixed place where Yahweh was considered to dwell and order the earth and the heavens with his council. Let’s take them in that order.

The Tent in the Temple

We sort of assume that once the Temple was built and the ark of the covenant was placed inside it that the Tabernacle tent structure was discarded or perhaps destroyed. This isn’t the case. In reality, *the Tabernacle tent was moved into the Temple with the ark*. Recall

Joash ordered repairs for the Temple, he angrily asked, “Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax levied by Moses, the servant of the LORD, and the congregation of Israel for the tent of testimony?” When Hezekiah wanted the temple repaired and true worship reinstated at the temple his words also suggest the tabernacle tent structure was in the temple:

³ In the first year of his reign, in the first month, [Hezekiah] opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. ⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east ⁵ [A]nd said to them, “Hear me, Levites! Now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the LORD, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the Holy Place. ⁶ For our fathers have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the LORD our God. They have forsaken him and have turned away their faces from the tabernacle (*mishkan*) of the LORD and turned their backs. ⁷ They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the Holy Place to the God of Israel (2 Chronicles 29:3-7).

Other passages are more direct. Psalm 26:8 (of David) says, “O Yahweh, I love the habitation of your house; and the place of the tabernacle (*mishkan*) of your glory.” Psalm 61:5 sounds remarkably like the overhead cherubim wing covering in its parallel wording:

“Let me dwell in your tent forever!
Let me seek refuge under the covering of your wings!”

Finally, Josephus reports that the tabernacle tent was brought to the temple (*Ant* 8.101; see also 106), and he notes that the outspread wings of the cherubs had the effect of looking like a tent (8.103).

The point here is to solidify the Old Testament’s “temple as tabernacle” thinking. Now we need to do the same for its “temple as mountain” and “temple as garden” mindset.

The Temple as Cosmic Mountain and Cosmic Garden

The Temple of Yahweh in Israel was naturally associated with a cosmic mountain dwelling like Sinai because it was situated in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, the new Sinai. Psalm 48:1-2 makes this quite clear:

¹ Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God!
His holy mountain, ² beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the heights of the north,
the city of the great King.

Zechariah 8:3 echoes the same notion: “Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion and will dwell [literally, “will tabernacle”; *shakan*] in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.”

As anyone who has been to Israel knows, while Mount Zion is a mountain of sorts, it isn't very high. And it is certainly not the highest peak in the region. The language is curious. And what is meant by “the heights of the north”?

This description would be a familiar one to Israel's pagan neighbors, for it is taken out of their literature. The “heights of the north”—literally, “the recesses of Zaphon”—is the place where Baal lived and, supposedly, ran the cosmos at the behest of the high god El. The psalmist is stealing glory from Baal as it were and restoring it to the One to whom it rightfully belongs—Yahweh. It's a theological and literary slap in the face. The Old Testament writers do this with some frequency, but that isn't something we'd notice unless we were working in Hebrew and were well read in the literature of Israel's neighbors.

This explains why the description sounds odd in terms of Jerusalem's actual geography—it's designed to make a theological point, not a geographical one. Zion is the center of the cosmos, and Yahweh and his council are its King and administrators, not Baal. This is why Isaiah and Micah used phrases like “the mountain of the house of Yahweh” (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1). Zion / Jerusalem is the mountain of the LORD *of hosts*. The Jerusalem temple is where the high God lives, and it is situated on the cosmic mountain, the mountain of Yahweh and his council.

The temple is also the Edenic garden, full of lush vegetation and animals. The description of the temple's construction in 1 Kings 6-7 is explicit in this regard.

“The cedar within the house was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers.” (6:18)

“Around all the walls of the house he carved engraved figures of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, in the inner and outer rooms.” (6:29)

“He covered the two doors of olivewood with carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. He overlaid them with gold and spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.” (6:32)

“[A]nd two doors of cypress wood. The two leaves of the one door were folding, and the two leaves of the other door were folding. On them he carved cherubim and palm trees and open flowers, and he overlaid them with gold evenly applied on the carved work.” (6:34-35)

¹⁸ Likewise he made pomegranates in two rows around the one latticework to cover the capital that was on the top of the pillar, and he did the same with the other capital. ¹⁹ Now the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars in the vestibule were of lily-work, four cubits. ²⁰ The capitals were on the two pillars and also above the rounded projection which was beside the latticework. There were two hundred pomegranates in two rows all around, and so with the other capital. ²¹ He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple. He set up the pillar on the south and called its name Jachin, and he set up the pillar on the north and called its name Boaz. ²² And on the tops of the pillars was lily-work. Thus the work of the pillars was finished. ²³ Then he made the sea of cast metal. It was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high, and a line of thirty cubits measured its circumference. ²⁴ Under its brim were gourds, for ten cubits, compassing the sea all around. The gourds were in two rows, cast with it when it was cast. ²⁵ It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east. The sea was set on them, and all their rear parts were inward. ²⁶ Its thickness was a handbreadth, and its brim was made like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily. It held two thousand baths. ²⁷ He also made the ten stands of bronze. Each stand was four cubits long, four cubits wide, and three cubits high. ²⁸ This was the construction of the stands: they had panels, and the panels were set in the frames, ²⁹ and on the panels that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. On the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of beveled work . . . ³⁵ And on the top of the stand there was a round band half a cubit high; and on the top of the stand its stays and its panels were of one piece with it. ³⁶ And on the surfaces of its stays and on its panels, he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, according to the space of each, with wreaths all around . . . So Hiram finished all the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of the LORD: ⁴¹ the two pillars, the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars, and the two latticeworks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars; ⁴² and the four hundred pomegranates for the two latticeworks, two rows of pomegranates for each latticework, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars.” (7:18-42)

In Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple (Ezekiel 40-48), he saw a temple built on a high mountain (40:2), whose courts were decorated with palm trees (40:31-34). The interior was decorated with more palm trees and cherubim (41:17ff.). Ezekiel’s temple-garden was well-watered, like Eden, since a river flowed from it that supernaturally gave life to everything else (47:1-12).

In Israel’s theology, Eden, the tabernacle, Sinai, and the temple were equally the abode of Yahweh and his council. The Israelites who had the tabernacle and the temple were constantly reminded of the fact that they had the God of the cosmic mountain and the cosmic garden living in their midst, and if they obeyed him, Zion would become the kingdom domain of Yahweh, which would serve as the place to which he would re-gather the disinherited nations cast aside at Babel to Himself. Micah puts it rather well:

¹ It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and it shall be lifted up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,
² and many nations shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Eden-Tabernacle-Temple and the Babel Incident

You may recall from Chapter 8 that one of the most important events of the Old Testament was the rebellion at the Tower of Babel. This event is central to the idea that Yahweh’s rule through his divine council is of fundamental importance for understanding the Bible’s cosmic story. What we’ve learned in this chapter helps us process what was going on in that event—what made it important enough for Yahweh to intervene and disinherit the nations.

Since gods were thought to live in temples, across the ancient world temples were viewed as places where heaven and earth occupied mutual space. The temple was the point of intersection between the heavenly realm and the terrestrial realm, just like the cosmic mountains of the gods. This in turn is why many temples were built in the form of mountains and at locations where it was believed the first mound of earth appeared after creation (e.g., ziggurats or pyramids). There was a conceptual-visual connection between temples and the mountains where the gods lived.

We know that the Babel story is set in Babylon, since Babylon is the “land of Shinar” (Gen 10:2).^{xiii} The Shinar-Babylon connection is more explicit in Daniel 1:2, where Shinar is the land of Nebuchadnezzar, the place where he took the vessels of the Jewish temple after destroying Jerusalem. Babylon is situated in Mesopotamia, a region known for its ziggurat temples, such as the partially destroyed one below from Ur (Iraq)



It is for this reason that all scholars agree that the Tower of Babel in Shinar of the Old Testament was a ziggurat, a physical “stairway to the heavens” in the ancient mind. For our purposes, the building project of Babel in Genesis 10 was an effort to build, in physical form, a cosmic mountain. It was an effort, unsanctioned by Yahweh, *to rebuild Eden*—to construct a place where Yahweh and the divine council would live and meet.

You might wonder why this was a bad idea to Yahweh, especially since it was his original intention to have human beings with him in his divine council on earth along with his heavenly family members. The effort was offensive for several reasons. First, it is up to Yahweh—not human beings—to decide where he will meet with humanity and where his abode will be. Humans do not control Yahweh or his will. Yahweh had not commanded the tower to be built. Second, the last time human beings tampered with the earthly council arrangement in Eden was Genesis 3, the Fall. Rather than let Yahweh decide how the divine council on earth arrangement worked, particularly at what point human beings would have access to divine knowledge and be “as elohim,” Adam and Eve were seduced into taking matters into their own hands. Babel involved the same sort of hubris. Third, the motivation wasn’t entirely the illegitimate idea of putting Yahweh on notice as to where he and his council would live. The scheme also involved gaining fame for having built the place where God lived. In short, the incident at Babel showed Yahweh his earthly children were still rebellious and wanted access to him and his council on their own terms, not his. Yahweh disinherited the nations called Abraham to start a new family.

The children of Abraham, the nation of Israel, had direct access to Yahweh through both the visible Yahweh and Yahweh’s human servant, Moses. Unlike Babel, Yahweh chose the time and place to meet with humanity and to allow humanity glimpses of his council. At first this was Sinai, but the final intended location was Zion. But before Yahweh had his people leave Sinai there was one more thing for him and his council to do. Yahweh’s new family was to have a unique relationship with him. They had to be taught how to relate to him, how to worship him, and how to avoid mingling with the people of the disinherited nations who had their own corrupt *elohim* masters. They had to know that where they lived Yahweh was, and it was holy ground. The outer realm, divided among

the disinherited nations, was the realm of darkness, forsaken by Yahweh and thus the domain of other gods and rebellion against Yahweh. It was time to lay down the Law.

ⁱ For example, see Jer. 23:23-24; Psa. 139:7-10.

ⁱⁱ Mount Sinai is also called Mount Horeb in the Old Testament. For example, see Exod. 3:1-3; Deut. 4:15; 5:2; 1 Kings 8:9.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, see Exo. 19:16, 18; 20:18; Deut. 5:4-5, 22-26.

^{iv} Some Jewish interpreters say the plural “thrones” refers to only two thrones—that of the God of Israel and the other for King David, whom they identify with the Son of Man in this passage. There are several problems with that view, namely the passages clear parallels to divine council scenes from the Ugaritic Baal Cycle (see Chapter 20) and the fact that the Son of Man neither takes a seat, nor is one offered to him when he approaches the Ancient of Days. It also cannot be argued that the plural seats are for human Jewish elders (see Chapter 1 for how that idea is used against a heavenly council of *elohim*), since the court/council in Daniel 7 is clearly in heaven and is making a decision *for* the human holy people at the time when the kingdom of the son of Man is established; cf. Dan 7:22).

^v The references to Bashan are striking, especially when read against the backdrop of the demonic geography outlined in Chapter 14. **NOTE:** I’m not sure at this point whether I’ll return to Bashan after chapter 14 to explain Psalm 68, or whether I’ll add something to Ch. 14 that does that.

^{vi} Readers may recognize that this is the passage quoted in the New Testament by Paul (Eph. 4:8). See Chapter 23 for comments on this quotation.

^{vii} The issue is actually pretty confusing. On one hand, we have passages like Exod. 33:7-11 which have Moses using the Tent of Meeting before the construction of the Tabernacle. This passage and a general survey of the material indicate several facts that distinguish the Tent of Meeting from the Tabernacle: (1) one man could pitch, unlike the much larger Tabernacle, which took scores of workers to tear down, erect, and transport; (2) the Tent of Meeting was outside the camp, unlike the tabernacle, which was in the middle of the camp; (3) the Tent of Meeting was guarded and maintained by a single person; (4) There is no indication that the Tent of Meeting was a place of sacrifice, or that the ark of the covenant was kept in it.

^{viii} Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row, P., & Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). *Harper's Bible dictionary*. Includes index. (1st ed.) (1013). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

^{ix} For example, see Job 9:8; Ps. 104:2.

^x This is controversial. Many scholars do not think the ark is rightly understood as a throne since it is elsewhere called God’s footstool. However, while “footstool” is entirely appropriate when speaking of the Temple cherubim and ark (see the discussion), there were no such giant cherubim in the Tabernacle, which would suggest the ark was a throne. English translations often have “mercy seat” for the lid of the ark, on which were the cherubim, but the Hebrew term actually means “covering” or “place of covering” / “place of atonement.”

^{xi} See R. E. Friedman, “Tabernacle,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6:292-300); idem, “The Tabernacle in the Temple,” BA 43 (1980): 241-248. The graphic is from Martin Metzger, *Königsthron und Gottesthron: Thronformen und Throndarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament* (Butzon and Becker Kevelaer, 1985).

^{xii} David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 5:1220.