

TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE: A HOLY HOUSE FOR GOD'S NAME

1. Entering God's house/palace

- House/palace structure: The Tabernacle/Temple has the form of a home/palace.
 - The Tabernacle is a tent like the tents of Israel in the wilderness. The Temple is a magnificent building located next to the king's palace in Jerusalem with strong structural parallels to it (cf. 1 Kgs 5–7).
 - House-like furnishings:
 - Throne-room: The Holy of Holies is God's throne-room and the ark of the covenant is his throne from which he reigns over his people and his kingdom (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps 80:1, 99:1; Isa 6:1, 37:16).
 - Holy Place has other home furnishings: Lampstand for light and table for bread.
 - Bronze altar is a table where food is cooked and meals shared between Yahweh and his people. Sacrifices are often described as "Yahweh's food offerings" (Lev 2:3, 10; 4:35; 5:12; 6:17; 7:30, 35; 10:12, 15; 21:6, 21; 23:36; 24:9; Num 28:2; Deut 18:1).
- Special presence: While God is present everywhere in creation at all times, the Tabernacle and Temple are places where God reveals himself more clearly and powerfully and makes himself more directly and personally accessible than anywhere else.
 - Visible glory-cloud descends into sanctuary (Exod 29:43; 40:34; Lev 9:4–6, 23; 1 Kgs 8:10–11/2 Chron 7:1–3; cf. Exod 13:21; 14:19, 24; Sinai: 24:17ff; 33:9ff).
 - The Tabernacle is the "tent of meeting" (e.g., Lev 1:1).
 - Tabernacle/Temple are places for receiving special revelation (Exod 25:22; 29:42–43; 30:6, 36; Lev 1; Num 7:89; 12:1–9; Deut 31:14–21; 2 Chron 1:6–13).
 - To go to the Tabernacle/Temple is to go "before the LORD" (e.g., Lev 1:3).
 - The bread placed in the Tabernacle/Temple is the "bread of the presence."

To worship at the Tabernacle and Temple is to come to the house/palace of God to draw near to the special presence of God and to know the communion with God that is the purpose and fulfillment of God's covenant.

2. Ascension to an exalted place for a special audience with God

The Tabernacle/Temple complex is not merely a house but also a symbolic model of heaven and earth, of the garden of Eden, and of Mt. Sinai. Each of these three layers of symbolism makes the Tabernacle/Temple a symbolic representation of various elevated places where God dwells and meets with his people in history. Thus, drawing near to God in worship at his house in the Tabernacle/Temple involves a kind of spiritual "ascension" in worship.

2.1 A new garden of Eden

- Garden literary pattern
 - Just like the creation account in Genesis 1, the text describing the plans for the Tabernacle (Exod 25–31) is structured with seven statements beginning with "And God said..." and ending with the Sabbath command (31:12–18) and inspection and blessing (39:43).
 - The same "Spirit of God" who creates the world (Gen 1:2) also inspires the artisans who created the Tabernacle (Exod 31:3; 25:31).
 - The conclusion to the construction of the Tabernacle closely parallels the conclusion to the creation account ("were finished": Gen 2:1/Exod 39:32; "God/Moses finished": Gen 2:2/Exod 40:33b–34; "God/Moses blessed": Gen 2:3/Exod 39:43).

- Garden structure
 - Entrance on the east (Gen 3:24; Exod 27:13; 38:13; Lev 16:14). One enters the Tabernacle/Temple moving east to west, which reverses the direction of banishment in Genesis 3-4.
 - Mountain: Ezekiel identifies the garden in Eden as a “holy mountain” containing “sanctuaries” guarded by a “cherub” (Ezek 28:13–18). It is also implied by the fact that rivers flow downhill. If the rivers originate in Eden and flows through the garden toward the rest of the world, then Eden must be an elevated place. The Tabernacle is a symbolic mountain (see section 2.2 below) and the Temple was also on Mt. Zion (e.g., Exod 15:17). Cf. the end-time temple-mountain (Ezek 40:2; 43:12; Rev 21:10).
 - Tree in the middle: The lampstand is a tree (Exod 25:31–36).
 - Temple has garden imagery: Trees, flowers, and fruit on walls, doors, and pillars (1 Kgs 6–7).
 - Gold and onyx mentioned (Gen 2:12).
 - Rivers flow from Eden through garden and from later visions of Temple (Gen 2:10; Ezek 47:1–12; Rev. 21:1–2). Cf. fountain imagery applied to Temple in Ps 26:8–9; Jer 17:7–12). This feature is symbolically anticipated in the bronze laver of the Tabernacle, which expands to become the bronze “sea” in Solomon’s Temple courtyard.
 - Guarded by cherubim with fiery sword (Gen 3:24; Exod 26:1, 31; 1 Kgs 6:32–35). Cf. the altar where access to the garden/sanctuary is only obtained through knife and fire applied to sacrifices.
 - Three zones: In the garden of Eden, the waters flow down from the land of Eden (the land Adam and Eve would eventually have ruled) to the garden and on to the rest of the world. Thus, there are three zones: garden (sanctuary) in Eden (land) in the midst of the rest of the lands (earth). The Tabernacle/Temple aligns with this tripartite division of the world in creation: The Tabernacle sanctuary reproduces this world model in a broader way in relation to the rest of the Israelite camp:
 1. Garden/Tabernacle sanctuary complex
 2. Eden/Camp (place of rule/dominion)
 3. World/Lands beyond Israelites
- Mt. Zion in Jerusalem reproduces this world model structure in a couple of ways, both narrow and broad:
 1. Garden/Temple in Jerusalem on Mt. Zion
 2. Eden/Land of Israel (place of rule/dominion)
 3. World/Lands outside Israel
- Garden’s function
 - The Lord walks there (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14; 2 Sam 7:6).
 - The combination of the verbs “to work it” and “to keep it” found in God’s command to Adam concerning his duties in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15) is only found elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe duties of priests in the Tabernacle sanctuary (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). Thus, Adam is a priest.

To worship at the Tabernacle/Temple is to enter a new garden sanctuary and a new creation and to return (partially) to the communion with God that Adam and Eve experienced in the garden of Eden.

2.2 A symbolic Mt. Sinai

- Psalm 68:16–17: “Sinai is now in the [temple] sanctuary,” which is Mt. Zion (v. 16).
- Sinai’s structure
 - The Tabernacle/Temple is divided into three zones of increasingly restricted access that replicate the structure of Mt. Sinai:

1. Bottom/Court: Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain, but the people of Israel could not touch the mountain. In the Tabernacle/Temple, an altar stands at the entrance in court, and Israelites could not touch the sanctuary itself beyond the altar.
2. Middle/Holy Place: Only Moses, Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel ascend half-way up Mt. Sinai to eat a meal before God, and only the priests have access to the Holy Place where they eat before God.
3. Top/Holy of Holies:
 - Only Moses could go to the top of the mountain, and only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies.
 - The Ten Commandments given at the top of the mountain are stored in the ark in the Holy of Holies.
 - The visible manifestation of God's presence and glory on Mt. Sinai also descends visibly into the Tabernacle and later the Temple (Exod 19:16–25; 24:15–17; 33:18–34:8; 40:34–38; 1 Kgs 8/2 Chron 7).

- Sinai's function

Both Sinai and the Tabernacle/Temple are places where:

- God's glory is visibly manifest;
- Heaven is revealed concretely on earth;
- God commands and rules over his people/kingdom;
- God reveals himself to guide/instruct his people;
- God eats with his people.

Thus, like Mt. Sinai, the Tabernacle/Temple is a place where God makes and renews his covenant.

To worship at the Tabernacle/Temple is to approach and share communion with the same God who reveals himself to Israel at Mt. Sinai and to renew the covenant that was established at that event.

2.3 Heaven on earth

- God's dwelling

Heaven is God's true dwelling place, and thus the Tabernacle/Temple sanctuary is valuable only insofar as it is a manifestation of and point of tangible access to God's heavenly presence on earth (expressed as his "name" dwelling there). Solomon recognizes these things when he prays at the Temple's dedication (1 Kgs 8:29–30; 43–44).

- Heavenly pattern

- The Tabernacle is constructed according to the pattern revealed directly to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai (Exod 25:8–9, 40).
- According to the book of Hebrews, this signifies that the Tabernacle was a "copy and shadow" of heavenly things (Heb 8:5; 9:24), and it describes heaven and Christ's ministry in heaven before the Father with Tabernacle imagery (Heb 8:1–2; 9:11, 23–28; 10:19–22).

- Heavenly structure/symbolism

- Clouds: God's heavenly glory is made visible in the "cloud" that enters visibly into the Tabernacle/Temple (Exod 19:16–25; 24:15–17; 33:18–34:8; 40:34–38; 1 Kgs 8:10–13/2 Chron 5:13). His continued presence in the Tabernacle/Temple is symbolized with clouds of incense, which emphasizes the invisibility and inaccessibility of heaven and of God himself (Lev 16:13). Note the sky/heaven symbolism for God's heavenly glory in Ezek 1:4, 28; 10:3–4.
- "Lofty/exalted" dwelling: Solomon refers to the Temple as an "exalted" house (1 Kgs 8:13/2 Chron 6:2), which is a term only used elsewhere to refer to the exalted place of sun and moon in the sky (Hab 3:11) and to God's exalted place ("habitation" in some translations) in heaven from which he observes the earth (Isa 63:15).

- Throne and footstool: The sanctuary and/or the ark in the Holy of Holies are alternatively identified as God's heavenly throne or as the footstool of his heavenly throne (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chron 28:2; Ps 11:4; 80:1; 99:1; 132:7–8; Isa 6:1; 37:16).
- Cherubim: Gold statues of cherubim are located on the ark cover and in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. Images of cherubim are sewn on the inner curtain of the Tabernacle and the veil before the Holy of Holies and later carved into the walls and doors of the Temple (Exod 25–26; 37–38; 1 Kgs 6). Cherubim are also present in heaven around God's heavenly throne (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chron 13:6; Ps 11:4; 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16; Ezek 10:1–20; 11:22; cf. the angels in Rev 4:1–11).
- Heavenly glory is symbolized in the precious metals and jewels that separate it from what is common and associate it with visions of heaven (e.g., Rev 1; 21–22).

To worship at the Tabernacle or temple is to encounter the tangible revelation of heaven on earth and to join the worship of heaven before God's heavenly throne.

3. God's nearness and God's distance

- God's nearness

The Tabernacle/Temple sanctuary communicates the nearness of God. The Tabernacle is at the center of the Israelite wilderness camp, and the Temple is at the center of the capital city of Jerusalem. God builds his dwelling in the midst of his people to be the revelation and presence of heaven, a return to the garden sanctuary of Eden, and a symbolic Mt. Sinai. All of these symbolisms correlate with settings where God manifests his special presence.

- God's distance

The Tabernacle/Temple also communicates a certain distance by the way it excludes people from coming too close to God's revealed presence/glory. Only priests could approach and minister at the bronze altar and enter the sanctuary itself. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and even he could only enter once per year and only after he creates a cloud of incense that conceals God's ark/throne (Lev 16:13). According to Hebrews, this exclusion from God's revealed presence/glory in the Tabernacle/Temple is an indication that full liturgical and personal access to the true holy places in heaven had not yet been achieved in history prior to the ascension of Christ (Heb 9:8–9).