
ISAIAH and the Prophets

Inspired Voices from the Old Testament

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Temple Symbolism in Isaiah

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The main theme of this paper is the centrality of the theme of the temple in the book of Isaiah. From the time that the temple was dedicated by Solomon to the time it was destroyed by the Babylonians, its role in the spiritual life of the Judahite monarchy fluctuated wildly. It was, interestingly enough, within the reigns of the first and the last kings of Isaiah's tenure as prophet, Ahaz and Manasseh, that the temple's role was most abused. Ahaz, who was king of Judah when the Northern Kingdom was defeated by Assyria, introduced a large bronze altar that he had seen and admired in Damascus into the place on the temple platform that was occupied by the altar of burnt offerings (see 2 Kings 16). Manasseh, the king of Judah in whose reign Isaiah was martyred according to the pseudepigraphal *Martyrdom of Isaiah*,¹ introduced cult prostitution and star worship along the lines known to Phoenician religion into the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 21, 23).

It was during the reign of Hezekiah, approximately midway through Isaiah's long period of prophetic service, that the role of the temple in the religious life of Judah approached that which had been intended in the beginning. The king was intended to play a large and central role in the cultic life of Israel, as is made clear by the roles played by David and Solomon. As A. R. Johnson states, "The king is not only found leading his people in worship with the offering of the sacrifice and prayer on important occasions in the

national life, but throughout the four hundred years of the Davidic dynasty, from the time of David's active concern for the ark to that of Josiah's thorough-going reform, himself superintends the organization of the cultus in all its aspects."² During the reign of Hezekiah, not only did the king fulfill his role more fully regarding the temple, but also the intended role between king and prophet was more fully realized than perhaps during any other period. It was at this time that Hezekiah laid the threatening letter from the king of Assyria "before the Lord" in the temple, that is, in the Holy of Holies, and prayerfully sought the Lord's help. In response to his prayer the Lord gave him the message of salvation from the Assyrian menace through the prophet Isaiah (see 2 Kings 19).

The most important illustration of the theme of the temple in the book of Isaiah is the description of Isaiah's extraordinary prophetic call through a glorious vision of the Lord in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem temple (see Isaiah 6).

What are the main themes relating to the temple that stand out in the book of Isaiah? In order to more fully answer this question, it is necessary that I digress momentarily in order to lay a more firm basis for understanding the role of the temple in Isaiah. Over the past year I have been engaged in research in which I have been attempting to identify the main features and symbols of temple worship in the ancient Near East, including Israel. I have concluded from this research that there was a common "temple ideology" in the ancient Near East, a common ritual language and practice that revolved around great temples and that would have been understood across language and cultural boundaries. One scholar has written that "if the temple ideologies of the different nations are able to display certain traits, common throughout the whole ancient world, it may be a special branch of the Chaos-Cosmos ideology."³ Dr. Hugh Nibley has explained the probable reason behind such widespread diffusion of similar rites: the temple rites were revealed by God to the earliest parents of the human race, and from a center of earliest civilization spread to other centers by the dual processes of diffusion and usurpation. "Comparative studies . . . discovered the common pattern in all ancient religions," and "have also demonstrated the processes of *diffusion* by which that pattern was spread throughout the world—and in the process torn to shreds, of which recognizable remnants may be

found in almost any land and time."⁴ What is the "pattern" that can be found "in almost any land and time"? In order for us to understand the role of the temple in Isaiah's writings, we must have some idea of what we are looking for. This is the "temple ideology" that I have mentioned, and it is this ideology that I have tried to delineate during my research of the past year. The following is my tentative attempt to identify this pattern:

The Temple: A Preliminary Typology

1. The temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain.

2. The cosmic mountain represents the primordial hillock, the place which first emerged from the waters that covered the earth during the creative process. In Egypt, for example, all temples are seen as representing the primordial hillock.

3. The temple is often associated with the waters of life which flow from a spring within the building itself—or rather the temple is viewed as incorporating within itself such a spring, or as having been built upon the spring. The reason that such springs exist in temples is that they were perceived as the primeval waters of creation, *Nun* in Egypt, *abzu* in Mesopotamia, *tēhôm* in Israel. The temple is thus founded upon and stands in contact with the waters of creation. These waters carry the dual symbolism of the chaotic waters that were organized during the creation and of the life-giving, saving nature of the waters of life.

4. The temple is built on separate, sacral, set-apart space.

5. The temple is associated with the tree of life.

6. The temple is oriented toward the four world regions or cardinal directions, and to various celestial bodies such as the polar star. As such, it is or can be an astronomical observatory, the main purpose of which is to assist the temple priests in regulating the ritual calendar. The earthly temple is also seen as a copy or counterpart of a heavenly model.

7. Temples, in their architectonic orientation, express the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven. The Mesopotamian ziggurat or staged temple tower is the best example of this architectural principle. It was constructed of three, five, or seven levels or stages. Monumental staircases led to the upper levels, where smaller temples stood. The basic ritual pattern represented in these

structures is that the worshippers ascended the staircase to the top, the deity descended from heaven, and the two met in the small temple which stood at the top of the structure.

8. The plan and measurements of the temple are revealed by word to the king or prophet, and the plan must be carefully carried out. The Babylonian king Nabopolassar stated that he took the measurements of Etemenanki, the temple tower in the main temple precinct at Babylon, under the guidance of the Babylonian gods Shamash, Adad, and Marduk, and that "he kept the measurements in his memory as a treasure."

9. The temple is the central, organizing, unifying institution in ancient Near Eastern society.

a. The temple is associated with abundance and prosperity; indeed, it is perceived as the giver of these.

b. The destruction or loss of the temple is seen as calamitous and fatal to the community in which the temple stood. The destruction is viewed as the result of social and moral decadence and disobedience to God's word.

10. Inside the temple, images of deities as well as living kings, temple priests, and worshippers are washed, anointed, clothed, enthroned, and symbolically initiated into the presence of deity, and thus into eternal life. Further, New Year rites held in the temple include the reading and dramatic portrayal of texts which recite a pre-earthly war in heaven; a victory in that war by the forces of good, led by a chief deity; and the creation and establishment of the cosmos, cities, temples, and the social order. The sacred marriage is carried out at this time.

11. The temple is associated with the realm of the dead, the underworld, the afterlife, the grave. The unifying features here are the rites and worship of ancestors. Tombs can be, and in Egypt and elsewhere are, essentially temples (cf. the cosmic orientation, texts written on tomb walls which guide the deceased into the afterlife, etc.). The unifying principle between temple and tomb is resurrection. Tombs and sarcophagi are "sacred places," sites of resurrection. In Egyptian religion the sky goddess Nut is depicted on the coffin cover, symbolizing the cosmic orientation (cf. "Nut is the coffin."). The temple is the link between this world and the next.

12. Sacral, communal meals are carried out in connection with temple ritual, often at the conclusion of or during a covenant ceremony.

13. The tablets of destiny (or tablets of the decrees) are consulted in the cosmic sense by the gods, and yearly in a special temple chamber, *ubšukinna* in the temple of Eninnu in the time of the Sumerian king Gudea of Lagash. It was by this means that the will of deity was communicated to the people through the king or prophet for a given year.

14. God's word is revealed in the temple, usually in the holy of holies, to priests or prophets attached to the temple or to the religious system that it represents.

15. There is a close interrelationship between the temple and law in the ancient Near East. The building or restoration of a temple is perceived as the moving force behind a restating or "codifying" of basic legal principles, and of the "righting" and organizing of proper social order. The building or refurbishing of temples is central to the covenant process.

16. The temple is a place of sacrifice.

17. The temple and its ritual are enshrouded in secrecy. This secrecy relates to the sacredness of the temple precinct and the strict division in ancient times between sacred and profane space.

18. The temple and its cult are central to the economic structure of ancient Near Eastern society.⁵

The discussion that follows will sample passages in Isaiah that can be related to the temple typology outlined above, and does not claim to be an exhaustive study of the theme of the temple in Isaiah. The discussion will focus particularly on passages in Isaiah 2, 25, 28, and 30 that touch on the themes of cosmic mountain, communal meals in connection with covenant making, the relationship of the temple to the afterlife, the foundation stone of the temple in relation to the cosmic waters, the waters of life, and the centrality of the temple.

It was extremely commonplace among the ancient Near Eastern peoples to view temples as mountains. This comes out clearly in the terms applied to temples in the various traditions. For example, in Mesopotamia we find such temple names as "House

of the Mountain" and "House of the Great Mountain of the Lands." Other temples are referred to as "The great house, it is a mountain great," "The house of Enlil, it is a mountain great," and so forth.⁶ Ancient Sumerian inscriptions refer to a well-known temple as "a temple like a mountain in heaven and earth which raises its head to heaven," and note that "the temple, like a great mountain, is built up to heaven."⁷ When I use the word "cosmic" in the phrase "cosmic mountain," this is simply to point out that the ancients assimilated temples to mountains where the divine presence was thought to have been manifest. As one scholar put it, the cosmic mountain was "a place set apart because of a divine presence or activity which relates to the world of man—ordering or stabilizing the world, acting upon it through natural forces, the point where the earth touches the divine sphere."⁸

This tradition is clearly evident in ancient Israel. In fact, notions of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, or the temple mount, as "the mountain of the Lord's house" that "shall be established in the top of the mountains" (Isaiah 2:2) go back ultimately to the experience at Sinai—the holy, cosmic mountain of scripture. The Temple of Solomon, built on the temple mount in Jerusalem, which was revealed to David by the Lord as the place where the temple should be built (see 2 Samuel 24), would seem to be basically the architectural realization and ritual enlargement of the Sinai experience.

Basic to temple ideology is the act of appearing "before the Lord," in Hebrew *liphnê Adonai*. As Menahem Haran states it: "In general, any cultic activity to which the biblical text applies the formula 'before the Lord' can be considered an indication of a temple at the site, since this expression stems from the basic conception of the temple as a divine dwelling place and actually belongs to the temple's technical terminology."⁹ A more exact expression of the biblical view of the relationship between the phrase "before the Lord" and a cult installation has been given by Jacob Milgrom: "Does the expression 'before the Lord' imply only a temple or can it not apply equally to an open cult area? . . . Or rather should we not infer from the ancient law of Exodus 20:24 that God is present at the site of every theophany regardless of whether it is consecrated by the erection of a temple or an open altar?"¹⁰ In any case, the "temple at the site" of the Sinai theophany is the mountain itself, and the events described in

Exodus 19-24 give us the perfect pattern for understanding what the temple experience was in ancient Israel, and indeed in much of the ancient Near Eastern world for that matter. This pattern involves ritual washings as part of the peoples' preparations to covenant themselves. It also involves the following sequence of events: the prophet ascends the mountain (read "temple") to meet with the Lord, and the Lord descends from his place in the heavens to meet with his prophet at the consecrated site; the prophet, after meeting personally with the Lord, returns to the people with the terms of the covenant as the Lord has expressed it to him; the people listen to the terms of the covenant and then assent to it with the characteristic biblical phrase, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). This is the semantic equivalent of the word "amen," the actual word used in Sumerian covenant ceremonies.¹⁴ Following the delineation by the Lord of the definitions and terms of the covenant, the people have it read to them from a "book" by Moses, the only one who has actually appeared "before the Lord," to which they again assent: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." They are then sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificial animal, symbolic of the Savior, and enjoy a sacramental, covenantal meal together. (See Exodus 24:3-11.)

Thus when we read in Isaiah 2:2-3 (and in Micah 4:1-2) that the mountain of the Lord's house will be established in the tops of the mountains, and that all people will go up to it in order to learn of the God of Jacob and walk in his paths, this means that in the last days the temple of the Lord will be established (in the tops of the mountains), and that many people will have a desire to come into the temple of the Lord in order to learn of this covenant in order that they can covenant themselves to live his law. Thus we can be assured that virtually all scriptures which speak of the Lord's mountain are speaking of his temple. We must also remember here that the basic word for temple in both Sumerian and in Hebrew is "house," Sumerian *é*, which equals Akkadian *bîtu* and Hebrew *bayit*. Thus the temple is, in the poetic parallelism of the Hebrew Bible, the "mountain of the Lord" (Hebrew *har adonai*) and the "house of the God of Jacob" (Hebrew *bêt elôhê Yaqôb*).

Let us now turn to Isaiah 25:6-10. This passage, part of a much larger section commonly known as the "Apocalypse of Isaiah" (Isaiah 24-27), is contained within a chapter which speaks of the

latter-day destruction of the proud and wicked, the rejoicing of the Saints, and the overcoming of death by the Lord. I will give verses 6 through 10 in two translations, the King James Version (KJV) and the New American Bible (NAB).

King James Version	New American Bible
6. And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.	6. On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.
7. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations.	7. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, The web that is woven over all nations;
8. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it.	8. He will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces; The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the Lord has spoken.
9. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.	9. On that day it will be said: "behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"
10. For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill.	10. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain, but Moab will be trodden down as a straw is trodden down in the mire.

The key phrase here, of course, is "in (on) this mountain" in verses 6, 7, and 10. According to my interpretation outlined above, this phrase refers to the temple. To be sure, the sense of a millennial or messianic temple, such as we have in these passages, may be giving us a much wider view of the temple environs than we are used to in the historic Temple of Solomon. It may well be that in this and similar passages in Isaiah we are dealing not merely with the Jerusalem temple, but with Zion conceived as a *temple city*, which is the view of the latter-day temple that we get in Ezekiel (chapters 40-48) and in the Temple Scroll of the Qumran community. As Jacob Milgrom has written of the Qumran Temple Scroll's view of the latter-day temple, "The Temple city, requiring a three-day purification for admission, has the status of Mt. Sinai."¹² But we are still dealing with a view of Mount Zion, the temple, that incorporates and assimilates all the sanctity of Mount Sinai.

It is in the second part of verse 6 in the passage under discussion that we are drawn even more deeply into temple symbolism. In the NAB translation the whole verse reads, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all people a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." We are dealing here with point number 12 of my typology above: "Sacral, communal meals are carried out in connection with temple ritual, often at the conclusion of or during a covenant ceremony." The evidence for such practices in ancient temple ritual is very widespread. The inscriptions of the ancient Sumerian king Gudea of the city of Lagash, who lived about 2100 B.C., record his building a temple to the chief deity of his city. The temple building itself resulted in an extraordinary abundance of the necessities of life, as pointed out in point 9 of the typology. Following the completion of the temple building, a great banquet was held at which the chief deities of the city, represented no doubt by their statues, were present. This banquet, at which the city's residents would no doubt have been present, was accompanied by a series of sacred vows or oaths sworn by the king, and by the determination of the city's destiny for the coming year.¹³ From a much later period in history, the *akītu* or New Year's festival in Babylon—which celebrated the overcoming of evil forces in the premortal existence by Marduk, his creation of the earth, and the building of the temple in Babylon—was concluded "by a great sacrificial meal of which all the gods, the priests, and the people partook."¹⁴

The presence of a communal meal at the conclusion of a covenant ceremony, all within a temple context, is expressed very clearly in the Old Testament. The parade example of this point is the meal which "Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel" partook of with the Lord following the covenant ceremony that was sealed with the blood of the sacrificial animal (see Exodus 24:7-11). We find the same principle in the dedicatory prayer offered by Solomon at the completion of the building of the temple in Jerusalem. This prayer and the building of the temple, both of which clearly serve as symbols of the renewal of the covenant between the Lord and the Israelites which had existed for many centuries, were concluded with an enormous feast to which the entire congregation of Israel was invited. At the conclusion of the feast Solomon "sent the people away: and they blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people." (See 1 Kings 8:62-66.)

The ultimate sacramental meal was the one celebrated in honor of the Savior, who "by his own blood . . . entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Hebrews 9:12). In this setting the temple imagery is very clear. Indeed, there is to be yet another messianic sacramental meal, and this too is spoken of in the scriptures within the context of the temple. We read in Revelation 19:9, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." And earlier in the same book: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. . . . For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Revelation 7:15, 17; emphasis added.) This same conjunction of concepts is found in the Doctrine and Covenants, where we read of "a supper of the house of the Lord, well prepared, unto which all nations shall be invited. . . . And after that cometh the day of my power; then shall the poor, the lame, and the blind, and the deaf, come in unto the marriage of the Lamb, and partake of the supper of the Lord, prepared for the great day to come" (D&C 58:9, 11; emphasis added). It is within this context of a millennial supper, to be enjoyed in the temple ("on this mountain") by all those who

have entered into holy temple covenants with the Lord, that I believe the passage in Isaiah is to be understood.

This leads us to another of the many important themes of the passage in Isaiah 25. The theme in question is that of verse 8, "He will swallow up death in victory," and so on. In the typology outlined above, item number 11 states that "the temple is associated with the realm of the dead, the underworld, the afterlife, the grave." How does the "mountain" (i.e., the temple) overcome death? Or is it possible to see this passage within a temple context? I believe that it is. This is a rather complicated concept and will require a digression here to explain the relationship between temple and death, which I believe will at least partly illuminate this passage. A deeper examination of ancient Near Eastern temple rites will reveal an intimate relationship between the temple and the afterlife. A series of prehistoric temples at the site of Tepe Gawra in northern Iraq "attracted considerable numbers of burials to its precincts," according to the excavator.¹⁵ In ancient Egypt, all temples were thought to have originated with the "primordial hillock," the first spot of ground to emerge after the waters of creation had subsided. According to Henri Frankfort, "Everywhere the site of creation, the first land to emerge from chaos, was thought to have been charged with vital power." And thus "each and every temple was supposed to stand on it."¹⁶ The Egyptian pyramid, which itself carries all the architectural and religious overtones of a temple, also grew up out of the concept of the primordial mound. Frankfort says that "another architectural symbol for the Hill, the pyramid, was introduced in the Third Dynasty and modified in the Fourth. Djoser . . . realized the equation of his resting-place with the fountainhead of emerging life, the Primeval Hill, by giving his tomb the shape of a step pyramid, a three-dimensional form, as it were, of the hieroglyph for the Hill."¹⁷

Why was the connection made between the primordial hill of creation and a tomb? The answer, according to Frankfort, is that "the plot of ground from which creation proceeded was obviously a depository of creative energy powerful enough to carry anyone who might be buried there through the crisis of death to rebirth."¹⁸ The same connection between temple and burial place is found in later Egyptian history, in the Edfu temples of Ptolemaic times. There, according to H. W. Fairman, "these Egyptian harvest festi-

vals were speedily Osirianized and . . . they became funerary festivals. This also is markedly obvious at Edfu. The visit to the Upper Temple was to a sacred necropolis, where were buried the Divine Souls to whom offerings were made during the festival. These Divine Souls were presumably the ancestral gods of Edfu." He tells us further that a series of texts at the temple describe how the visits of Horus and Hathor "brought these dead ancestral gods life and light."¹⁹ Another scholar has written, "It appears that ceremonies for the ancestors were part of many, if not all, of the great annual festivals; even more it seems reasonable also that ceremonies for the (royal) ancestors formed part of the daily ritual in all temples, and that they were celebrated immediately after the conclusion of the daily ritual before the chief god."²⁰

There is a classic text in the aforementioned inscriptions of Gudea, King of ancient Sumerian Lagash, that perhaps better than any other gives expression to the central idea that connects the temple with the afterlife. His inscriptions state that inside the temple he built a chapel to the god Eninnu which was called "the house in which one brings offerings for the dead." This chapel carried the further description "it is something pure, purified by Abzu."²¹ The ancient temple was seen as arising up out of the primordial waters of creation, *abzu* in Mesopotamia, *Nun* in Egypt, *tĕhôm* in Israel. It rose out of these waters and ascended, as it were, to heaven, thus incorporating the mountain symbolism described above. Its foundations were sunk deeply in the abyss, and its top reached into heaven. As such it constituted the central pillar of the world, the place where all the main world regions—the heavens, the earth, and the abyss or underworld—were united. The temple was thought to have a *temen* or foundation serving as its support and standing over the watery abyss, but with pillars sunk deep into the foundations connecting it to the underworld. One Sumerian text states that "its [the temple's] foundation is sunk deep into the Abyss."²² The same basic idea is expressed of the Temple of Solomon, for example in Psalms 74 and 104 and in Proverbs 8. In these passages, the mountains themselves constitute the foundation of the earth.²³ The temple is thus thought of as the "bond of heaven and earth," as the "navel of the earth," and as the "pillar of the earth," that is, the central axis around which the world revolves. The temple represents "the Pole of the heavens,

around which all heavenly motions revolve, the knot that ties earth and heaven together, the seat of universal dominion."²⁴

Since ancient temples were thought to have been founded on the abyss, the primordial waters of creation, they were also thought both to control and to allow access to these same waters. Babylonian traditions indicate that the temple of Marduk in Babylon was founded upon and in the abyss (in Babylonian religion *abzu*, the abyss, is personified as the begetter of the human race, along with Tiamat). There are traditions in ancient texts which identify Babylon as the *bâb Apsî*, the "Gate of the Abyss," and indicate further that the temple at Babylon, the temple of Marduk, was seen as standing in a central position over the abyss, guarding access to these waters and subduing them.²⁵ Other texts indicate that each year, at the Babylonian New Year's festival, a ceremony was carried out in the *akitu* festival house in which either Marduk, the chief Babylonian god, or Bel, his son, was symbolically seated on top of a "sea," a cultic structure which represented Tiamat, the consort of Apsu. This symbolic action portrayed the victory of Marduk over the chaotic waters of creation, as recorded in the Babylonian epic of creation.²⁶

We find the same symbolism applied to the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Late Jewish traditions view Jerusalem as the center of the world, the highest point in the world, and the place where creation first was carried out. A famous Midrashic passage makes these points very clearly:

Just as the navel is found at the center of a human being, so the land of Israel is found at the center of the world . . . and it is the foundation of the world. Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel, the Temple is at the center of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the center of the Temple, the ark is at the center of the Holy of Holies, and the Foundation Stone is in front of the ark, which spot is the foundation of the world.²⁷

Jewish tradition sees the stone of foundation not only as the spot identifying the place where the world was created, but also sees it as marking the entry into the abyss, Hebrew *têhôm*. There is a Jewish tradition that God threw a stone into *têhôm*, thus making it the keystone of the earth and the foundation of the temple.²⁸ This gives us the view that the temple was founded on the first emerging earth after the waters of creation had receded,

which is the same idea that we have in both Mesopotamia and Egypt. Burrows states that this legend "reminds one of the cosmogony of Eridu [the most ancient Sumerian city]—the first land and temple founded on the *abzu*; Palestinian stone takes the place of Mesopotamian reed-mat and earth."²⁹ A late Jewish Targum states that the stone of foundation in the temple "closes the mouth of the *têhôm*," This would make of the rock a kind of *bâb Apsî*, "gate of the abyss," such as was described in relation to Babylon above.³⁰ It is important to note that, in all the ancient traditions I have been discussing, the underground waters of creation bear a dual and ambiguous symbolism. They are the disorderly waters of chaos that were controlled by God during the creative process, and thus are seen as forces hostile to God, but they also bear the overtones of life, the source of life and the source of the sweet waters that make life possible. The theme of the Lord's overcoming the hostile waters is very widely expressed in the Old Testament, as for example in Psalms 29:10; 74:12-15; 93:1-5; and 104:5-9.

Ancient texts give us a vivid impression of the creative, positive forces that were thought to be associated with the underground waters. In ancient Sumer, the god of the ancient temple in Eridu was Enki, the god of the abyss, considered to be a god of wisdom. The inscriptions of Gudea of Lagash state that it was Enki who taught Gudea the plan of the temple that he was to build.³¹ Another passage in these inscriptions states that he built the holy of holies of this temple "like the abyss in a pure place."³² These same inscriptions indicate the belief that the waters of abundance that are brought forth as a result of the building of the temple come forth from deep springs within the earth.³³ In ancient Egypt, but from a much later period than that of Gudea, we find a similar phenomenon. Through the course of Egyptian history, measuring devices (called Nilometers by scholars) were built along the shores of the Nile, with the ostensible purpose of measuring the height of the Nile. But there is much more to their function. A lengthy quotation from a recent work will serve to describe their religious functions:

Although Nilometers were primarily designed to measure the Nile flood, they also served as sources of water. Because virtually all known Nilometers have an evident connection with a sanctuary, H. W. Fairman suggested that they were intended to provide pure Nile water for liturgical rites and were not utilized

for more ordinary needs. Several factors offer support for this viewpoint. First of all, because the entrances to these Nilometers are usually situated inside the precinct, these installations in effect served to bring the Nile within the sacred area. Secondly, at Edfu and apparently also at the Temple of Amun at Karnak, the Nilometer is situated directly to the right of the central adytum, a location perhaps intended to underscore the importance of this facility for the sacred rites. A most significant factor is the relationship of these Nilometers to the Nile flood. While Egyptians considered water drawn from the Nile during any season to be sacred, it enjoyed this character only by extension. The sacred Nile water *par excellence* was the water of the annual inundation [and thus the waters of Nun]. The flood represented a "renewal" or even a "rebirth" of the river; as early as the Old Kingdom its waters were called "the new water."³⁴

Here we see that the Nile waters, thought by the ancient Egyptians to represent the primordial waters of Nun, were thought to be so important that they were channeled into the holy of holies of the temple in order to be more directly available for ritual purposes. We can also document the importance of the deep underground waters as sources of life in the Old Testament. In the well-known passage in Jeremiah 2:13, the Lord is referred to as "the fountain of living waters," which the Israelites have rejected in favor of "broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Verse 18 of the same chapter contains taunting references to the futility of drinking the waters of the Nile or of the Euphrates River, and is probably a sarcastic reference by the prophet to the very views held by the Mesopotamians and Egyptians about the *abzu* and the *Nun*, outlined above. He is saying, in other words, that the waters of the *abzu* and the *Nun* have no saving value, in spite of the elaborate mythologies that have been developed around them and their saving qualities. Only the waters that come from the deep source of life itself, the Lord, have saving value. The Hebrew word used here for "fountain" is *māqôr*, which is a deep well or spring, arising from the subterranean water sources. A passage similar to the one in Jeremiah 2:13 is found in Psalm 36:8-9 (vss. 9-10 in the Hebrew). Verse 9 reads: "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light." The Hebrew word for "fountain" here is the same as in Jeremiah. The "fountain of life" in Psalm 36:9 comes from the Hebrew *mēqôr hayyim*. The same idea is

found in Numbers 19:17, *mayîm ḥayyîm*, "living waters," translated as "running water" in the KJV. It is this idea that underlies the Savior's statement to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:10. The "living waters" are the sweet, flowing waters that come to the surface as springs that originated deep underground. This is the only water that was allowed for many ritual observances under the Mosaic law, such as the ritual of the red heifer of Numbers 19.³⁶

To return, then, to the question that occasioned this long digression: how is death overcome "on this mountain"? What symbolism underlies the ancient view that death is overcome in the temple? Dr. Nibley has written that "many studies have demonstrated the identity of tomb, temple, and palace as the place where the powers of the other world are exercised for the benefit of the human race."³⁶ The temple controls access to the three world regions, the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. As such it serves as the gate to the underworld, the place that represents both life and death. And the Lord is the master of these powers. We read in the NAB text of Psalm 29:9-10:

9. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests, and in his temple all say, "Glory!"

10. The Lord is enthroned above the flood; the Lord is enthroned as king forever.

Perhaps the clearest biblical expression of the relationship between the temple, the Lord, and the overcoming of death is found in a passage in Revelation where Isaiah 25:8 is quoted. The most interesting thing about this passage is its reference to the "living fountains of waters," which as we have seen above are everywhere connected with the life-giving powers of the temple. The passage is Revelation 7:15-17, which reads in the KJV:

15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Emphasis added.)

To give a general summary of our discussion of the passage in Isaiah 25:6-8, a quotation from Frank Moore Cross seems relevant: "At the feast on the mountain, Death (Mot) was to be 'swallowed up' forever."³⁷

The next passage in Isaiah that I would like to discuss is found in chapter 28, verses 14 to 18. In the NAB these verses read:

14. Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, you arrogant, who rule this people in Jerusalem:

15. Because you say, "We have made a covenant with death, and with the nether world we have made a pact; When the overwhelming scourge passes, it will not reach us; For we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have found a hiding place,"

16. Therefore, thus says the Lord God: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, A precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; he who puts his faith in it shall not be shaken.

17. I will make of right a measuring line, of justice a level. Hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters shall flood the hiding place.

18. Your covenant with death shall be cancelled and your pact with the nether world shall not stand. When the overwhelming scourge passes, you shall be trampled down by it.

These verses contain important themes from the symbolism of the ancient temple that have been discussed above: the rock of foundation in Zion—that is, the temple Holy of Holies in Jerusalem, from where creation was thought to have been begun—and the chaotic, destructive waters of the abyss. We are introduced in verse 15 to two subdivisions of the biblical abyss, *těhôm*, namely "death" (Hebrew *māvet*) and the "nether world" (Hebrew *shěôl*). As explained above, the temple brings these underworld regions into contact with the heavenly spheres. According to A. J. Wensinck, "The sanctuary is not only the center of the earth, it possesses also another characteristic of the navel, namely that of being the place of communication with the upper and with the nether world, or, on the one hand with heaven in general and with Paradise and the divine throne in particular—on the other hand with Tehom in general and with the realm of the dead and Hell in particular; in other words: in the sanctuary the three parts of the Universe, earth, upper and nether world meet."³⁸ Verse 16 of this pas-

sage depicts the stone of foundation as the "usual Oriental theme of the sacred foundation upon the gate of the *apsu* or mouth of the *těhôm* or entrance to the underworld."³⁹ A group of evil people is depicted as having made a covenant with "death" and the "nether world," thinking that they can avoid being swept away by the destructive waters of the abyss. But it is only in the "stone in Zion," the "precious cornerstone as a sure foundation," that there is to be true salvation from the onrushing waters of the abyss. It is the Stone of Foundation that controls access to the abyss, and only through this stone that the destructive waters can be controlled. Any kind of pact or covenant made with the abyss that seeks to avoid entering in at the only true "gate of the abyss" will end in destruction. The temple is the place of salvation, and the Savior is the Lord of the temple, and the only gate which will "cancel the covenant with death and with the nether world" and help those who "put faith in it" (that is, the cornerstone) to avoid the "overwhelming scourge." He also is the "stone in Zion" (see Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

This passage also has great significance in the interpretation of Matthew 16:13-19. According to Eric Burrows, "That there is allusion to the rock of the temple (in Matt. 16:18) is made practically certain by the evident parallelism between the passage in the gospel and an oracle of Isaiah (28:16)." In Matthew 16:18, the Savior declares that his church is built on "this rock," and that the "gates of hell," literally "gates of Hades," where Hades is equivalent to Hebrew *shěôl*, shall not prevail against it. Burrows further states that "all is explained if the allusion is to the Stone of Foundation firmly established over *shěôl* and the *těhôm*."⁴⁰ He also speculates on the evidence given in Matthew and Mark that may enable us to date the occasion of the Savior's words to Peter concerning the rock. The evidence makes it possible to conclude that these words were spoken on the Day of Atonement, that day in Israelite life when the sanctity of the temple was brought most to the forefront. It would indeed have been appropriate for the Savior to make a speech on that day that was so profoundly rooted in the symbolism of the temple.⁴¹

I would next like to discuss an isolated passage from a larger oracle that deals with the latter-day prosperity and abundance of Zion. The passage in question relates to point number 3 of the

typology above, where it is stated that "the temple is often associated with the waters of life which flow from a spring within the building itself." This verse, Isaiah 30:25, will help to extend our understanding of how the temple was viewed by the ancient peoples of the Middle East. This verse reads in the NAB: "Upon every high mountain and lofty hill there will be streams of running water." The temple is a symbol of abundance and prosperity, as pointed out above, and this abundance is symbolized by a stream of water that issues forth from under the temple itself. As Dr. Nibley has written: "At every hierocentric shrine stood a mountain or artificial mound and a lake or spring from which four streams flowed out to bring the life-giving waters to the four regions of the earth. The place was a green paradise, a carefully kept garden, a refuge from drought and heat. Elaborate waterworks figure conspicuously in the appointments and the rites of the holy place."⁴² This is actually a good description of the larger oracle from which I have extracted the single verse. Verses 23 to 26 describe a millennial paradise, well watered and well fed with luxuriant vegetation abounding. In the middle of this paradise will stand temples, each with a stream of water flowing from underneath the foundations. According to Wensinck, "Springs generally rise on the mountains; and a spring, with or without a mountain, is, generally speaking, a necessary requisite in a sanctuary." Wensinck gives evidence from Jewish and Muslim traditions to show that Jerusalem was thought of as "being the origin of all sweet water on the earth." An early Muslim writer, Abu Huraira, speaking on the authority of the prophet Muhammad, said that "all rivers and clouds and vapours and winds come from under the holy rock in Jerusalem."⁴³

These waters represent the positive aspects of the abyss, the clear, deep, fast-moving and pure waters that represent the source of life. In the Ugaritic myths from Ras Shamra, one section of the so-called Baal Cycle speaks of the location of the dwelling place of El, the father of Baal. In the translation of Richard Clifford this passage reads:

Then they set face
Toward El at the sources of the Two Rivers,
In the midst of the pools of the Double Deep.
They entered the tent of El and went into
The tent shrine of the king, the father of years.⁴⁴

We have already seen above what role the Nile waters played in the ritual of Egyptian temples. H. W. Fairman reports that the libation water used in the daily service in Edfu temples was taken from a well dug underneath the east side of the temple, just outside the holy of holies. This meant that the waters in a sacred lake situated nearby, but not in direct access to the holy of holies, were not sufficiently pure for the ritual usages. The water had to be located in or near the holy of holies itself, and to flow from underneath the temple.⁴⁶

There are a number of passages in the Old and New Testaments that speak of springs of water issuing from underneath the temple of the Lord. The passages are Joel 3:18; Ezekiel 47:1; Zechariah 14:8 ("living waters shall go out from Jerusalem"); and Revelation 22:1 ("a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb"). All of these passages are millennial in time reference, with the exception of the passage in Revelation, which seems to be celestial in reference. The Prophet Joseph Smith spoke in a similar vein, stating that "Jerusalem must be rebuilt.—& Judah return, must return & the temple water come out from under the temple—the waters of the dead sea be healed . . . & all this must be done before Son of Man will make his appearance [sic]."⁴⁶ The theme of "messianic water" is very strongly emphasized within the context of a covenantal meal in Isaiah 55:1-3.

Thus I have attempted to demonstrate how profoundly the book of Isaiah, and indeed the Bible in general, is permeated with temple symbolism. The few passages that I have discussed represent a mere fragment of such symbolism in Isaiah. A full study of this subject would require a large volume. Great benefits can come from such study, showing us as it does how central the temple was in all the cultures of the ancient Near East. Jonathan Z. Smith, quoting a commentary from *Mishnah Abot* on the well-known dictum "on three things the world stands: on the law, on the temple service, and on piety," adds the comment: "The temple and its ritual serve as the cosmic pillars or the 'sacred pole' supporting the world. If its service is interrupted or broken, if an error is made, then the world, the blessing, the fertility, indeed all of creation which flows from the Center, will likewise be disrupted."⁴⁷ Perhaps an appropriate closing quotation could come

from another temple-centered passage in the NAB text of Isaiah 56:7:

Them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; Their holocausts and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Notes

1. Martyrdom of Isaiah 3-5, in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 of *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 161-62.
2. A. R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), pp. 13-14.
3. Folker Willesen, "The Cultic Situation of Psalm LXXIV," *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952):290.
4. Hugh W. Nibley, *What Is a Temple? The Idea of the Temple in History* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1963), pp. 8-9.
5. The preceding typology is a revision of the list included in John M. Lundquist, "What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology," in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1982).
6. For references see *ibid.*
7. F. Thureau-Dangin, *Die Sumerischen und Akkadischen Königsinschriften* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1907), pp. 23, 13.
8. Richard Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 7-8.
9. Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 26.
10. Jacob Milgrom, "Review of Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 101 (1981):262.
11. The Sumerian term is *heam*, "let it be." See Thorkild Jacobsen, *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 138.
12. Jacob Milgrom, "The Temple Scroll," *Biblical Archeologist* 41 (1978):114.
13. Adam Falkenstein, *Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagash*, vol. 30 of *Analecta Orientalia* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1966), p. 120.

14. Svend Aage Pallis, *The Babylonian Akitu Festival* (Copenhagen: Bianco Lunos Bogtrykkeri, 1926), p. 173.
15. Arthur J. Tobler, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra*, Museum Monographs (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 2:98-101.
16. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 151-52.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. H. W. Fairman, "Worship and Festivals in an Egyptian Temple," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 37 (1954-55):200.
20. Mohiy elDin Ibrahim, "The God of the Great Temple of Edfu," in *Glimpses of Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of H. W. Fairman*, ed. John Ruffle et al., *Orbis Aegyptiorum Speculum* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1979), p. 171.
21. Falkenstein, *Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagash*, p. 131.
22. A. Falkenstein, "Sumerische Bauausdrücke," *Orientalia* 35 (1966):236.
23. A. J. Wensinck, *The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth* (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1916), pp. 2-4.
24. A. Jeremias, quoted in Nibley, *What Is a Temple?* p. 3.
25. Eric Burrows, "Some Cosmological Patterns in Babylonian Religion," in *The Labyrinth*, ed. S. H. Hooke (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935), p. 50.
26. W. G. Lambert, "The Great Battle of the Mesopotamian Religious Year: The Conflict in the Akitu House," *Iraq* 25 (1963):189-90.
27. Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10, quoted in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, vol. 23 of *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), p. 112.
28. Burrows, "Some Cosmological Patterns," p. 55.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Thureau-Dangin, *Die Sumerischen und Akkadischen Königsinschriften*, pp. 108-9.
32. Ibid., pp. 116-17.
33. Ibid., pp. 104-5.
34. Robert A. Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis*, vol. 87 of *Etudes Prelim. aux Religions Orient. dans l'Empire Romain* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 27-28.
35. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas und Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte*, vol. 2 of *Kommentar zum*

Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924), p. 436.

36. Nibley, *What Is a Temple?* p. 5.

37. Frank Moore Cross, Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 144.

38. A. J. Wensinck, *The Navel of the Earth* (Amsterdam: Johannes Muller, 1916), p. 23.

39. Burrows, "Some Cosmological Patterns," p. 58.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Hierocentric State," *Western Political Quarterly* 4 (1951):235.

43. Wensinck, *The Navel of the Earth*, pp. 30, 33-34.

44. Richard Clifford, "The Temple in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal," in *Symposia*, ed. Frank M. Cross (Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979), p. 145.

45. Fairman, "Worship and Festivals in an Egyptian Temple," pp. 177-78.

46. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), p. 180.

47. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, p. 118.