

Biblical Worship Environments Which Recapitulate Edenic Symbols

Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D.¹

Synopsis: This paper will consider the recapitulation of significant symbolic aspects of Genesis 1-3/Garden of Eden in later biblical worship environments. Features which are architectural, topographical, and atmospheric, such as the elevation or mountain-garden environment, the trees, the rivers, and the firmament recur in symbolic and stylized forms in the unfolding revelation of Scripture. These Edenic symbols are represented in the worship environments of the patriarchs, the tabernacles of Moses and David, Solomon's temple, Ezekiel's cherubim visions (Ezekiel chs. 1 & 10) and the visionary new covenant temple (Ez. 40ff), as well as in St. John's Revelation. The conclusion will address the relevant and analogous aspects of worship in the new covenant era.

Prelude

“Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed,” said the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus. The subject of worship commands the attention of many today just because of the endless changes. If there were ever days when the Church worshiped with one voice in a unison cadence, those days are gone, for now. After the Protestant Reformation the lock-step liturgy of Christian worship in the West disbanded. The 16th and 17th centuries, though rich with such gospel-recovering, creedal masterpieces like the Augsburg Confession, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession led to even more liturgical diversity. Then, riding the waves of revival and revivalism, eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelicals followed many different streams of gospel direction. The culmination of evangelical “free worship” brought a quite sermon-centered, evangelism-centered service. Songs and a few necessary items, like offerings are to give way to the pastor’s “message.” In the twentieth century, the “high churches” have seen a renewed emphasis on liturgical worship, while the “low churches” have been further empowered by “praise and worship” music which captures pop music style and individual devotion. Now we have traditional, liturgical, charismatic, blended, emerging, emergent, and post-all of Said approaches.

In the midst of this Heraclitian flux, it was particularly encouraging to interact at a newly formed Biblical Worship Consultation at ETS last year (2007). The speakers, coming from different evangelical communions seemed united against “happy-clappy” worship, even looking to the Old Testament for types, patterns, and principles of worship. My sense was that all speakers and respondents, even the audience, said “away with Disney worship” and “to the law and testaments!” In effect, the refrain was for a more serious approach to worship that leads to awe in the presence of God than is often seen in the evangelical church-scape. My paper this year is basically in response to this and with a commitment to continue this conversation.

¹ Gregg Strawbridge is the pastor of All Saints Presbyterian (CREC, Lancaster PA) and the director, WordMp3.com and may be contacted at wgs@wordmp3.com.

SYNAXIS

Call to Worship

C.S. Lewis in *Screwtape Letters*, writing as an elder devil to a younger devil captures in a few words, a brilliant illustration of the realities of the Church and the worship of the Triune God.

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with a rather oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like "the body of Christ" and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy's side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. . . . Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords.²

One means of granting such a vision to the saints is to recapture the icons of Eden, the motifs that recur, the thematic aspects of the various biblical worship environments.³ Most Christians can appreciate some biblical themes and imagery, but not others. Once, I was speaking to Chinese students learning English at their very first exposure to Christianity in America. We were inside a church fellowship hall with vivid banners displayed: "Joy to the World" and "Hosanna!" "Lamb of God." In broken English, which I can still hear, a Chinese woman asked me, looking up at the banners, "Wu lam? Wu lam?" It took me a moment to understand that she was actually saying, "Why Lamb?" Then she said, "Why not pig of God, Why not cow of God? Why Lamb of God?" (By the grace of God she had a much better answer to that than I could give when a few months later she came to believe in the *Agnus Dei*).⁴

Christians can answer the question, "Why Lamb?" precisely because they *can* connect the sacrificial imagery of spotless lambs as victims with the work of Christ. That Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is not so much a doctrinal truth as a symbolic one. It is an image no



From the Duomo of the Cathedral in Florence, Italy which features Filippo Brunelleschi's dome.

² *Screwtape Letters*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 12-13.

³ In using words like "image" I do not mean that we need actual pictures or icons as such.

⁴ All photos were taken by the author.

less. Numerous (actual) images in Church make this point very plain. We can directly translate the imagery of “lamb-hood” to Jesus, and that informs the sympathy and “harmony” of our doctrine of soteriology. I would suggest that the image and our receptive imagination colors in our “bare propositions” about vicarious atonement in what would take chapters of systematic theology simply to articulate. Indeed, we need more coloring books to provide the brightness, hues, and some outside lines to our black-lined propositional bones.

Confession & Absolution

While we may connect the dots of lamb to Lamb of God, we cannot do this kind of *imagining* for a whole host of other symbols in Scripture. Why tabernacle? Why laver? Why ark? Why this color? Why cherubim? Why pillars? Why pomegranates? Why altar? This point is particularly relevant because, “Sacred architecture is one of the Bible’s chief idioms for revealing the character of the church. Long passages of the Torah, the historical texts, and prophetic literature describe, in sometimes numbing detail, the features of the various sanctuaries of Israel (Exod. 25-40; 1Kgs. 6-8; 2 Chr. 1-7; Ezek. 40-48).”⁵



Lamb of flowers from the processional in Castella in Chianti, Italy.

What I will be seeking to show is that all such matters find their type-source in the Garden of Eden. By missing the Edenic connection and the way Eden’s primitive symbols recur, we are impoverished in our awe for the structural and symbolic unfolding biblical story. We also neglect to have all that Scripture says about worship inform our current practices. I believe this is an indication of a broad hermeneutical issue which I have addressed elsewhere.⁶ We must remove our Enlightenment blinders and read Scripture in all its fullness. “Biblical symbolism, like poetry, is evocative language, used when discursive, specific language is insufficient. The Bible uses evocative imagery to call up to our minds various associations which have been established by the Bible’s own literary art.”⁷

Issues of our hermeneutics of worship were addressed squarely by Michael Farley in his paper at the Biblical Worship Consultation (ETS 2007), later published in JETS.⁸ Namely, the interpretive principle we use to inform us of what is proper for Christian worship should not be a New Testament-only approach (which he calls a “praxis-oriented regulative principle”). Neither should it be a patristic-ecumenical model (e.g., the Road to Rome [Catholicism], the Canterbury Trail [High Anglicanism] or the Boat to Byzantium [Orthodoxy]).⁹ He urges a biblical-typological approach which incorporates fully OT and NT material. Farley’s article addresses the way the sacrificial actions of

⁵ Peter Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, a Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos/Baker, 2006), 54

⁶ For example, my 2005 paper <http://www.allsaintspresbyterian.com/ETSTearingDownHouse.htm>

⁷ David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 33.

⁸ “What Is ‘Biblical’ Worship? Biblical Hermeneutics and Evangelical Theologies of Worship” (ETS Vol. 51, No. 3: Sep., 2008), 591-613. There is an online version available here at this time (11/17/2008) http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_200809/ai_n30992991/pg_1?tag=artBody;col1

⁹ He cites Robert Webber as an evangelical who has been prominent to draw attention to patristic-ecumenical sources for liturgical renewal within evangelicalism. “Boat to Byzantium” - Ok, I made this last one up, but you get the point.

the OT relate to the NT and Christian worship, advocating that “a biblical-typological approach, has the greatest merit and potential for developing an evangelical biblical theology of worship.”¹⁰

It is difficult to assess how Garden motifs are generally understood in evangelical quarters. As I have researched this paper, I have been delightfully surprised that there are many more scholarly attestations to this line of thought than I had expected. On the other hand, scholars “who should know better” seem oblivious. As I have asked professors, pastors and parishioners, there seems to be a widespread lack of understanding about these matters in general. And there is certainly a lack of import to worship/liturgy in evangelical contexts.

As an indication of this, the *Christianity Today* 1999 “Book of the Year” - The IVP *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, in the article on the tabernacle first dismisses the idea that the colors red and blue have to do with Christ’s blood and heaven. Rather, “To really understand the background of the tabernacle, one must examine what the symbols meant to ancient Israelites.” The article goes on to explain the tabernacle is comparable to many other ancient temples, if not a tad bit small. Like most of the archaeological literature on the subject, one is left with the implication that most of the elements are derivative of pagan traditions from the ancient near east. There is no reference in the article to Eden at all. In the article on the “Garden of God,” there is no reference to the tabernacle or temple. In the article on “temple” there is only one rather tangential explicit connection relating Solomon’s temple to Eden. “As a symbol of pristine creation the temple evokes the Garden of Eden, or paradise.”¹¹ It is not that the temple is an expression of Eden, but that in its own right it is a symbol of pristine creation.

There is a reticence on the part of some interpreters to connect the imagery of Scripture with Eden.¹² Ronald B. Allen noted that, “In some circles these days, it has fallen out of style to speak of biblical types. The abuse of typology in former generations, where every spiritual lesson one might derive from a text was declared to be a ‘type,’ has led to a gradual but sure reaction against typology of any kind.”¹³ There has been an all too quick Christological interpretation of only a vague devotional import, but lacks any exegetical conviction. For example, venerable Matthew Henry comments on the tabernacle (Ex. 26), saying, “The whole represents the person and doctrine of Christ, and the church of true Christians, and all heavenly things, which outwardly are mean, but inwardly, and in the sight of God, are glorious and precious.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Farley, 612. Farley cites representatives of this biblical-typological view: Meyers and Leithart. E.g., Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003); Peter Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000) and Leithart, "Sacrifice and Worship," <http://www.leithart.com/archives/000960.php> - However, Meyers and Leithart privately and publicly acknowledge their dependence on one James B. Jordan, more *anon*.

¹¹ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), electronic edition, Oaktree Softare [Accordance].

¹² As an example, Timothy R. Ashley notes, “The symbolic meaning that the menorah carried for Israel is nowhere specified in the Bible, so that any suggestion must be made with caution.” (165) Observing that it is a stylized tree, and we are told as much in Exodus (Ex. 25:35), he goes on to interpret it as “God’s perfect presence and life illuminating his sanctuary and, through Moses, his people,” *The Book of Numbers* in NICOT series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 166.

¹³ Numbers 21:9 (bronze serpent), *Numbers* in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

¹⁴ *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, in loc (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

On the other hand, critical scholarship has made much of the derivate nature of Israel's symbolism, taking shape primarily from various other nations and their worship forms. This is so much the case that Elizabeth Bloch-Smith writes, "The symbolism of the aggregate structure and its uniquely Israelite aspects are rarely emphasized in either archaeological or biblical discussions."¹⁵ In the visionary manifestations of the temple and ark in Ezekiel,¹⁶ we have similar charges of syncretism in which the Israelite tradition is "supplemented by neighboring iconography . . . "¹⁷ and innovations arise from extra-Israelite influence.¹⁸

That Eden provides the symbolic foundation of Scripture is being argued by many, though it does not seem like a consensus at this point. Some examples include Gregory K. Beale in his *Revelation* commentary who frequently makes use of the Garden's prototypical foundation for the meaning of the language in Revelation.¹⁹ Allen P. Ross develops the theme well in *Recalling the Hope of Glory*.²⁰ He writes that "it is no surprise that the instructions [for the temple] included many motifs and ideas from creation, notable Paradise. This was true not only of the tabernacle in the wilderness, but also of the Solomonic temple; and it is true also of the prophetic visions of the new creation to come." Gordon J. Wenham sees this clearly in commenting on Genesis. "Indeed, there are many other features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples."²¹ On the other hand, in the very same commentary series (Word Biblical Commentary) on Exodus, John I. Durham does not even mention the connection to Eden generally



Menorah from the Second Temple pictured in the Arch of Titus (Rome, Italy).

¹⁵ "Solomon's Temple and Its Symbolism" in *Scripture and Other Artifacts*, Philip J. King, Michael David Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, Lawrence E. Stage (Louisville: WJK, 1994), 10.

¹⁶ See also my "Ezekiel's Vision of the Cherubim and Worship Structures Old and New," presented at the ETS Regional paper (2008 Eastern Region) available at www.wordmp3.com/gs.

¹⁷ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel* in The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 58.

¹⁸ Katheryn Darr, *Ezekiel* in the New Interpreter's Bible, VI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 1120. One would think that Ezekiel would be the last prophet on earth to express a vision of YHWH with pagan iconography! After all the burden of the prophet is to express to the exiles that God has been driven out of the holy place because of some 400 years of state-sponsored idolatry - ". . . the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here . . . will drive me far from my sanctuary" (Ez. 8:11).

¹⁹ *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

²⁰ *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 83.

²¹ Commenting on Gen. 2:8 27 in in *Genesis 1–15* in the Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987) (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

at all in the tabernacle!²² The IVP *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* does make the connection, “The tabernacle resembles the sanctuary of Eden, with its ark of the presence and guardian cherubim (Exod. 25:18–22; 26:31; Gen. 3:24; Ezek. 28:13–14), bread symbolizing bountiful provision (Lev. 24:5–9; Gen. 2:9a), stylized candelabra symbolizing the tree of life and the law that gives knowledge (Exod. 25:31–36; Deut. 10:1–5; 4:6; Gen. 2:9b), priests who are to guard and keep the sanctuary (Num. 3:7–8; 8:22; 18:5–6; cf. Gen. 2:15), and precious materials (Gen. 2:12).”²³

Peter Leithart in his commentary, *First and Second Kings*, writes, “Sanctuaries are all architectural recapitulations of the garden of Eden.”²⁴ He cites James B. Jordan in this connection, especially seminal is his, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World*. His particular insight is that the Bible sets out “symbolic world models.” “Each of these worlds has its own symbolic structure, its own mode of existence, its own peculiar laws, and so forth. Moreover, each world takes up the preceding world and transforms it, so that each new world builds on the one that comes before it.”²⁵ These include fundamentally the Garden, then Noah’s Ark, the Tabernacle, the Temple, Jerusalem, etc. “To a great extent, the Bible is written in the pregnant language of imagery. Genesis 1 describes the creation of the world in the language of appearance, and this sets up for us a visual, worldview grid.”

Scripture Lessons

In this paper, only a short survey pointing out the pervasive thematic elements from the Garden onward is timely. While I am primarily focused on worship environments, these deeply foundational symbols extend to very basic aspects of our world. “Blue sky, green fields, brown earth, blue water — does this set of images mean anything at all, or is it ‘just the way things are?’ How do we view the world?”²⁶ Ultimately, all of creation forms revelation about God. As John Frame says, “Everything in creation bears some analogy to God. All the world has been made with God’s stamp on it, revealing Him. Creation is His temple, heaven His throne, earth His footstool. Thus Scripture finds analogies to God in every area of creation: inanimate objects (God the ‘rock of Israel,’ Christ the ‘door



The dome of the Pantheon in Rome, Italy.

²² Even though he notes that some see a connection to the tree of life for the Lampstand, he writes, “the original significance of this Lampstand is obscure” and he concludes, “The OT gives no direct clue as to the symbolism of the Lampstand, though the description of it given by P and the location of that description with the descriptions [vol. 03, p. 365] of the Ark and the Table make plain the connection of the Lampstand with Yahweh’s Presence.” Of course his observations on the symbolism may be affected by his embrace of the “documentary hypothesis” as well as his disbelief that the tabernacle actually existed. “The historicity of the Tabernacle that P describes, or the design of the tent of Moses’ day, if there was one, or the permanence of the structure at Shiloh, or the decoration of David’s tent for the Ark, or even an exact reconstruction of the P Tabernacle and how it worked are not the central issue of the OT presentation of the Tabernacle.” Commenting on Ex. 25:31, then 26 in *Exodus* in the Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1987)(electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

²³ “Tabernacle” (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

²⁴ *1 & 2 Kings*, a Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos/Baker, 2006), 56.

²⁵ *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, [1988], 2000), 5

²⁶ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 9.

of the sheep,” the Spirit as “wind,” “breath,” “fire”), plant life (God’s strength like the “cedars of Lebanon,” Christ the “bread of life”), animals (Christ the “Lion of Judah,” the “lamb of God”), human beings (God as king, landowner, lover; Christ as prophet, priest, king, servant, son, friend), abstract ideas (God as spirit, love, light; Christ as way, word, truth, life, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption). Even wicked people reveal their likeness to God, with, of course, much irony — see Luke 18:1-8.”²⁷ This rather basic insight into reality prepares one for the realization that Scriptural language, images, symbols, motifs, themes, etc. are much more thematic than post-Enlightenment interpreters imagine.

Worship in the Bible replays Eden. Eden was the meeting place of God and Man. Eden is a model of heaven’s sanctuary. As noted above, later worship environments were designed after the model of heaven into which man could ascend to the presence of God, such as the Tabernacle and Temple. These architectural-stylized “Edens” have the same themes (high elevation/mountain shaped altars, firmament, trees, waters, etc.). Ross says, “Like the Garden of Eden, the sanctuary was the place where heaven and earth converged -- the Lord was in heaven, and he was also in his holy temple” (85). Then the visions of new covenant worship picture a more glorified form of the Tabernacle-Temple, e.g., Ezekiel’s vision and references to the heavenly Jerusalem in Hebrews and Revelation.

This becomes clear in the visionary representations of Ezekiel: “This place where God was enthroned was called ‘the chariot’ (1 Chron. 28:18). Since the earthly tabernacle and temple were a copy of the heavenly reality (Heb. 8:5), Ezekiel’s vision was of the actual throne-chariot of God, borne by cherubim.”²⁸ Hebrews 9:24 likewise says the “man-made sanctuary was only a copy of the true one,” (ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν). Thus, these old covenant environments of worship in the Bible “pattern,” “model” or copy the heavenly sanctuary wherein God the judge of all is seated.

Eden was a high place, apparently on a mountain (Ez. 28:13). “In Ezekiel 28 Eden, the garden of God, is located on the holy mountain of God (28:14, 16)...”²⁹ A river flowed from it (Gen. 2:10). Jerusalem, likewise, was the holy mountain (Is. 66:20). Mountains (high places) are “places” of worship where the Patriarchs, Moses, Elijah (prophets), and Jesus experienced the unique presence of YHWH. Biblical worship is illustrated on a high place, conducted via altars erected by Abraham (Gen 12:7, 13:4, 22:9), Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (Gen 33:20, 35:1,3), and Moses (Exo 17:15).

Historically, we might observe the immensity of the mountain-like altars: “In the Mosque of Omar, immediately underneath the great dome, which occupies the site of the old temple, there is a rough projection of the natural rock, of about 60 feet in its extreme length, and 50 in its greatest breadth, and in its highest part about 4 feet above the general pavement. This rock seems to have been left

²⁷ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1987), 230, cited in Jordan, 23.

²⁸ Charles Dyer, *Ezekiel in the Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Victor Books: Wheaton), 1228.

²⁹ Article “1568 Ἔδη (‘ēden) II, Eden” in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).



Eden in the (“Golden”) doors of the Battistero di San Giovanni (of St. John) (Cathedral in Florence, Italy).

intact when Solomon's temple was built. It was in all probability the site of the altar of burnt offering.”³⁰

Eden was heaven on earth. In heaven, and in the sky-heaven immediately over the primitive creation, the Bible pictures glorious heavenly beings giving worship to the true God. “This firmament He called heaven. We now have two heavens, the one the dwelling place of God and the angels, made on the first day, and the second created within the original earth as a reminder of the original heaven.”³¹ Eden has as its covering the heavens. It is set under the blue firmament above (Gen 1:6-8). Vern Poythress says, “When we look at the tabernacle again, we see unmistakable signs of the symbolism of heaven. The two cherubim by the ark are replicas of angelic beings guarding the throne of God (cf., Ezekiel 1; Genesis 3:24).”³² Similarly, Abraham looked to the starry sky as the symbol of God’s covenant to him. Later, the same symbol appears in the tabernacle’s sky-like ceiling, the temple’s architecture, and the new Jerusalem. Biblical worship looks to the throne room of heaven which is symbolized by the sky. In worship, heaven and earth, as it were are joined. Hence, the New Jerusalem comes down out of the highest heavens (Heb 12:22, Rev 3:12, 21:2).

Cherubim guard Eden’s east gate (Gen 3:24). God is symbolized in the ark of the covenant as being between them and speaking from there (Num 7:89). “Two cherubim of solid gold upon the slab of gold of the **כֶּבֶשֶׂת** facing each other with wings outstretched above, so as to constitute a basis or throne on which the glory of Yahweh appeared, and from whence He spake.”³³ Cherubim adorn the symbolic heavens of the tabernacle ceiling (Exo 26:31). “The inner walls of the temple as carved with alternating palm trees and cherubim, each with two faces, the lion looking on one side, the man on the other. It is evident that the number and the form of the cherubim vary in the representations.” Ezekiel sees the cherub faces of an ox, a man, a lion, and an eagle. Peter is probably referring to the Cherubim on the ark when he says, “Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Pet. 1:21, NIV). Angels of various types (cherubim and seraphim, notably) give praise to God and fill the heavens (Isa 6:2; Rev 5:11). In fact, worship is and has always been in the “innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22).



The four faces of the Cherubim (Lion, Ox, Eagle, Man) in the doors of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine (Anglican) in New York City.

³⁰ “Altar” in *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

³¹ Jordan, *Through New Eyes*, 45. “We have here the language of visible appearance, not of scientific investigation. Thus, we need to see the language as pointing to a symbolic structure. The blue sky (firmament) is a symbolic boundary between waters above and waters below” (Jordan, 46).

³² *Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Vern S. Poythress (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995), 14-15.

³³ “Cherubim” in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (abridged) [BDB] (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

Eden has the lights of the sun, moon, and stars. Genesis 1:14-15 shows that some seasonal calendar was even hard-wired into creation. “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.”

The Hebrew word *mo'ed* translated “seasons” [מָעֵד] is used over 200 times in Scripture to mean “religious festival.”³⁴ Gordon J. Wenham observes that “What is clear is the importance attached to the heavenly bodies’ role in determining the seasons, in particular in fixing the days of cultic celebration.”³⁵ After the Exodus, the Lord gave his people a festival calendar synchronized with the seasons of the year (Lev. 23). The patriarch’s covenant was confirmed by appeal to the number of the stars. There is an interesting correlation between these heavenly lights, seasons and festivals. The tabernacle and temple have the lampstand and the new Jerusalem has its extraordinary light. Biblical worship is illumined by God’s revelatory lights and ultimately the Lamb Himself.

Eden’s notable entities are its trees, namely, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. The “tree” symbol is explicit throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Trees project the image of reaching up to heaven. The Patriarch’s worship is often correlated with trees: “Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD” (Gen 13:18) — just as the tabernacle, temple, and the heavenly city include tree symbols. Biblical worship recognizes the blessing of God (the benefits and fruits of trees) in respite from the elements (e.g., Patriarch’s shade in the Land). The Temple has tree symbolism in a gigantic way. “He erected the pillars in the front of the temple, one to the south and one to the north. The one to the south he named Jachin and the one to the north Boaz” (2 Chr. 3:17).³⁶

The water God provides for refreshment and cleansing is a theme throughout all of the Bible. The foundational teaching in Genesis 1:6-7 is a separation of waters above from waters below. Visually, this theme arises throughout Scripture distinguishing the blue waters above from the blue waters below. When Ezekiel sees the throne of God he sees “crystal, spread out” and the “sound of abundant waters” (Ez. 1:22-24). Ezekiel sees waters above the firmament which reflect the rainbow of God’s peace. “Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal” (Rev. 4:6), described also “sea of glass mixed with fire” (Rev. 15:2).

The waters below flow out from the sanctuary to the world. From Eden flowed rivers. “A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters” (Gen. 2:10). There are springs in the patriarch narratives, the laver in the synagogue, the ocean and basins on chariots in the temple, and finally the rivers of water in the new covenant (Zec. 14:8). It is important to note that the water from the firmament above (the glassy sea) is intertwined in many images (such



The Zodiac in the floor of the Church of San Minato showing signs/stars (outside Florence, Italy).

³⁴ For example, Exod. 13:10; 23:15; 27:21; 28:43; Lev 14:11, 23; 15:14, 29; 16:7, 16-17, 20, 23, 33; 17:4-6, 9; 19:21; 23:2, 4, 37, 44; 24:3.

³⁵ *in loc.*, *Genesis 1-15* in the Word Biblical Commentary (1987) (electronic edition - OakTree Software: Accordance 8.1.1, 2008).

³⁶ The freestanding pillars Jachin and Boaz are considered *phaloi* to some critical commentators. See “Solomon’s Temple and Its Symbolism” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts* (Louisville: WJK, 1994).

the cloud and the sea in 1 Cor. 10:1ff). The fact that both the tabernacle and temple have water upon pedestals rather than pools in the ground may allude to this. “The Laver of Cleansing thus signified the heavenly sea of Genesis 1:7 (and not, N. B., the cosmic or Gentile sea of the waters below).

Following the Fall, the pure waters of rivers flowing out, become rivers of purification which one must cross in order to come back to Eden. In the temple the chariots of water were used for rinsing the holocaust [whole burnt] offering (2 Chr. 4:6).³⁷ So it was that at every stylized garden of Eden in the symbols of the tabernacle or temple, the water cleanses those who enter, just as in Great Commission baptism (Matt. 28:19-20).

Christ said of the Spirit’s reality: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (Jn. 7:38, cf. Is. 58:11, Zec. 13:11). This is surely the image of the new covenant spiritual reality pictured by Ezekiel’s temple from which “water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar” and gets deeper and deeper (Ez.47:1-3). This is a prophecy of the baptism of the nations (Mt. 28:19-20). “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing” (Ez. 47:12). This same image is used in the well known passage in Revelation 22:2.

After sin and death entered the world (Rom 5:25), immediately after the Fall, God initiates the prototypical sacrifices of the animals for a covering of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). It seems apparent that at this sacrificial inception, the slaying of animals is a covering for the transgressions. Sacrificial worship is evident in this first occasion because later we read of the offerings of both Cain and Abel (Gen 4:3-4). Job models the spiritual care of the father over the clan. He offers sacrifices even for his children (1:5-6). Reading through the book of beginnings, Genesis, one sees that sacrifices and offerings in distinct places mark the significant spiritual events in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Often these worship events are filled with typological significance for later Biblical revelation (e.g., Abraham “worshiping” by offering Isaac, Gen 22:5). These great saints model worship in their walk of faith and the specific acts of homage to the covenant making God.

Sermon

How can we make connections to our current worship and liturgical practices?

Our Liturgical Environments One exhortation is in order from James B. Jordan:

In the New Covenant, men have immediate and full access to God in heaven. There are no longer any symbolic restrictions (Hebrews 7-10). Nonetheless, in the way of cultural movement, we find that when Christians first penetrate a pagan culture, they have to meet in homes and even catacombs. When the culture has been permeated by Christian influence,



Baptismal Font in the Cathedral in Milan, Italy - Duomo di Milano.

³⁷ This is the LXX term (ἀλοκαύτωμα) for “whole burnt offering” or what Jordan/Leithart call the “ascension” offering.

and becomes a Christian homeland, then the great and beautiful Garden-Churches (cathedrals) can be built. So it was with Rome. So it was with Europe. So it must be in our day. Our cathedrals have been defiled, and our homes are under assault as officials of the secular humanist government seek to close down Christian schools and invade Christian homes. Thus, ours is not a day of cathedral-building, but a day of cultural permeation. Faithfulness must come first, and only then will glory come.³⁸

New covenant worshipers need no “model” temple of metal, stone and wood and are under no obligation to create an architectural replacement for Solomon’s temple, etc. This was made historically and theologically demonstrable by the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D. Now Jesus has entered the real sanctuary as a Man and we through Him. We, His body, are the temple (Eph. 2:21, 2 Cor. 6:16). Such has always been the case in some sense (in the OT), but now that is definitively shown.³⁹

Yet, Christians do build cultural artifacts. We build buildings or lease or rent them for liturgical purposes. As much as some Christian theologies represent that all that matters is our inner spirit, *alas we must sit somewhere*. Shall it be on a folding metal chair, a theater seat, a bean bag, a pew or something else? Our worship environments “teach” and speak volumes of our actual theology. I am not qualified to fully explicate how such thematic and symbolic themes should be instanced in church architecture, but I feel certain that it is quite relevant to it. My best guess is that we could represent the fulfillment of these symbolic elements in Christ in a way that does not duplicate medievalism, but is no less glorious and more functional. To do this we will need an antidote to Rapture fever and will need to forsake building “Rapture Ready” “facilities” that are mainly designed to last up to 1988.

The Meaning of Our Liturgy The thematic elements of Eden which show up in the furniture of worship (a laver, for instance) are the background to the new covenant actions and thought. For example, baptism is not just an initiation that the Jews made up from whole cloth and John the Baptist began to conveniently employ which is why so many explanations of baptism are completely oblivious to anything in the OT. Inasmuch as this is true, then our instruction and actions in baptism should be informed to the fullest degree with the meaning drawn from the entire line of thought in Scripture. This will not only affect our thinking, but our liturgical actions, such as prayer. It seems to me here that we could learn lessons from our elders. Consider the richness of this baptismal prayer, originally penned by Martin Luther:



Duomo of Siena, Italy, under renovation (2006).

³⁸ *Through New Eyes*, 155.

³⁹ This point could have its own paper and more to fully explain. But in brief I am just thinking of how the OT redemption is an unfolding of the promised restoration of the Edenic glories, including the full restoration of the Imago Dei which would be God dwelling with man. So, the tabernacle and temple are described in human terms as a body and how God “dwells” with His people, etc.

Almighty and eternal God, according to Your strict judgment You condemned the unbelieving world through the flood, yet according to Your great mercy You preserved believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all. You drowned hard-hearted Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, yet led Your people Israel through the water on dry ground, foreshadowing this washing of Your Holy Baptism. Through the Baptism in the Jordan of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You sanctified and instituted all waters to be a blessed flood and a lavish washing away of sin. We pray that You would behold this child according to Your boundless mercy and bless him with true faith by the Holy Spirit, that through this saving flood all sin in him, which has been inherited from Adam and which he himself has committed since, would be drowned and die. Grant that he be kept safe and secure in the holy ark of the Christian Church, being separated from the multitude of unbelievers and serving Your name at all times with a fervent spirit and a joyful hope, so that, with all believers in Your promise, he would be declared worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.⁴⁰

Our Liturgical Order The worship structures of tabernacle and temple including the “order” of sacrifices and rites helped the believer “draw near to worship” (Heb. 10:1). This glorious truth should not justify ignorance of the meaning of such thematic elements of biblical worship, but should prompt us to a more glorious vision of our Triune communion in worship. While the *scaffolding* (the old covenant structures of worship) of the true house of God has been torn down, the writer of Hebrews characterizes our worship in terms of these rites of approach. Thus, we are encouraged as living sacrifices to “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). The writer goes on to characterize the new covenant approach to God as the heavenly reality of Zion. “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . .” (Heb. 12:22-24).

The term to describe this approach to God is *leitourgia* (“liturgy”) - literally “work of the people” (laos + ergon). It is used of the temple service and order of sacrifices (Heb. 10:11) in the tabernacle (Ex. 28:35) and the temple (2 Chr. 31:2). The NT makes an explicit connection between the *leitourgia* of the temple with the worship service of the new covenant assembly (λειτουργέω, Heb. 10:11). It was during their “service” to the Lord (Λειτουργούντων δὲ αὐτῶν τῷ κυρίῳ) that Saul and Barnabbas were called to missionary activity (Acts 13:2).

Such a reading of these themes of biblical revelation must inform the new covenant worship service. NT era worshipers did not come to the assembly *tabula rasa*. Biblical worship must be cognizant of the “approach” to God that was patterned in the previous era. Our services should reflect this pattern, the rite of passage to the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, I concur with Michael Farley that our hermeneutic of worship must be a “whole-Bible” interpretive principle, not a New Testament-only (with Psalms and Proverbs) approach.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia), 268-269.

⁴¹ See his article referenced earlier.