

In Heaven or on Earth: A Misplaced Temple Question about Ezekiel's Visions

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In 2007, as I was preparing the first draft of this paper for a conference,¹ I was re-reading a refreshing study by Rachel Elijor, *The Three Temples*.² Needless to say, I learned a lot from that study, as I did from all of Elijor's scholarship. It is only fitting that in this more expanded form the paper is dedicated to her.

The primary methodology of this paper is a historical investigation of Ezekiel's imagery of the temple in the context of ancient Near Eastern ideologies about the divine world and its location. Within the scholarship of the last few decades it has become a common endeavor to search for heavenly temples as opposed to earthly temples, and for accounts of ascent to liturgical locations that seem to be completely other-worldly.³ At least since the seminal work of Gershom Scholem, the visions of Ezekiel (particularly Ezekiel 1) have been identified as a primary literary source for many of the accounts of heavenly visions and ascents from late antiquity. The most general glance into late-antique visions of the heavenly temple will show this point to be undoubtedly true; Ezekiel 1 is by far the most important literary source for this type of speculations in late ancient Judaism. However, in contrast to this literary connection, current scholarship

¹ A first version of this paper has been presented at the 2007 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, within the Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism group. First, I wish to thank the conveners of the group at the time, Kevin Sullivan and April DeConick, for having me, and for their suggestions. Second, I would like to express my gratitude to Paul Joyce, who most kindly sent me a copy of his article that was still to appear at that time (Joyce 2007: 17-41).

² Elijor 2004b.

³ The literature on the heavenly temple is vast. To mention just a few titles: Elijor 1997: 217-267; Segal 1980: 1333-94; Morray-Jones 1998: 400-431; Morray-Jones 1992: 1-31; Collins 1995: 43-57; Himmelfarb 1995: 123-137; Himmelfarb 1993; Himmelfarb 1986: 145-165; Himmelfarb 1987: 210-217; Barker 1991; Koester 1989; Halperin 1988; Halperin 1987: 218-231; Nickelsburg 1991: 51-64; McNicol 1987: 66-94; Levenson 1988: 32-59; Levenson 1984: 275-298; Rowland 1982; Rowland 1979: 137-154; Gruenwald 1980; Hamerton-Kelly 1970: 1-15; Patai 1967.

consistently assumes that Ezekiel 1 is not a vision of a heavenly reality, much less of a heavenly temple, since the throne-*kabod* structure is not identified in the text as a temple. Much of this attitude may also be traced back to Scholem, who, in his attempt to trace the roots of the later Merkabah mysticism back into the Second Temple period, stopped short of the Book of Ezekiel itself and instead pointed to *1 Enoch* 14 as the earliest reference to the heavenly temple.⁴ Indebted to Scholem, the common wisdom of current scholarship on the topic assumes, as Paul Joyce summarizes perceptively, that “not until *1 Enoch* 14 (commonly dated to the third century B. C. E.) do we encounter the first account of a visionary ascent to the heavenly Temple.”⁵ Contrary to this common wisdom (and to Scholem), Elijor has placed Ezekiel 1 on the map of Jewish heavenly temple speculations as the first stage of this type of mysticism,⁶ and has asserted repeatedly that Ezekiel’s vision “could not be subsumed under any category clearly distinguishable as either earthly or heavenly.”⁷ In a seminal article, Joyce makes the intriguing argument that Ezekiel 40-42 is a heavenly ascent narrative, and that the temple described in these chapters is the heavenly temple,⁸ although he stops short of making a similar argument about Ezekiel 1 (or Ezekiel 8-11).

This article criticizes the common trend of current scholarship on a more fundamental basis. The first contention of this paper is that the entire dialectic of heavenly versus earthly is misplaced when it comes to the Book of Ezekiel, simply because this distinction seems to be unknown to the author(s) of this biblical text. Several concepts from Ezekiel 1 in particular, and from the whole book in general, suggest that the writing adheres to a certain ancient Near Eastern understanding of the divine world that does not differentiate between the divine presence in heaven and the divine presence on earth. Moreover, several elements in Ezekiel 1 suggest that the opening chapter of the book describes the divine presence itself as heaven. Common elements in the depictions of heaven and temples in ancient Near Eastern sources are incorporated in Ezekiel 1 into the portrait of the divine chariot. It appears that for Ezekiel the earthly temple *is* the heavenly temple; it is not merely a *juxtaposition* of heaven and earth, or a place where heaven and earth meet. Rather the temple *is* heaven.

⁴ E. g., Scholem 1995: 43-46.

⁵ Joyce, “Ezekiel 40-42,” 17. See such remarks in Himmelfarb 1988: 130; Himmelfarb 1986: 150; Himmelfarb 1993.

⁶ Elijor 2004b: 31.

⁷ Elijor 2004b: 34. See also her comments in Elijor 2004b: 15, 31.

⁸ Joyce 2007.

The second argument of this article is that a complex parallelism between, on the one hand, the vision in chapters 1-3 and, on the other hand, the visions of chapters 8-11 and chapters 40-48 redefines the temple and focuses it into the divine *kabod*. Moreover, Ezekiel 1:13 defines the ritual of the Jerusalem temple as an integral part of the throne-*kabod* structure. Therefore, the ritual leaves the physical temple with the divine presence within it. As part of his intention to safeguard the divine presence in front of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, Ezekiel makes the divine presence a temple, or rather *the* temple. The Jerusalem temple (both the lost and the renewed) simply embodies the heavenly temple in the fragile realm of human history.⁹ The physical temple in Jerusalem only encompasses the real temple, the divine presence.

To adhere (in part) to Joyce's line of criticism, no attempt, to the best of my knowledge, has been made to identify Ezekiel 1 itself as a vision of heaven and an ascent to heaven, beyond Elior's reintegration of Ezekiel 1 into the world of Merkabah-type speculations. Admittedly, the location of the vision cannot be more mundane: it takes place by the Chebar canal. Yet, as I would argue here, in Ezekiel's terms this is as much a heavenly experience as the direct vision of the divine presence in the Jerusalem temple. No relocation to celestial realms is necessary for such a heavenly encounter to occur; the Chebar canal is as good a place as any. Moreover, the vision of Ezekiel 1 has not been commonly understood as a temple experience. I will argue here that for Ezekiel the divine presence contains the essence and ritual of the temple. Therefore, it would appear that Ezekiel 1 lies at the source of heavenly temple speculations in more ways than one. Ezekiel 1 does not only provide the imagery for subsequent depictions of the heavenly sanctuary. The assumed ideological disconnection between Ezekiel 1 and its subsequent uses may be grossly overplayed; most probably, ancient readers sensed perceptively that the prophetic vision is a temple vision and an ascent to heaven.

It is necessary to offer here several cautionary remarks. First, I do not wish to suggest in this paper that the ancient Near East shared one common homogenous culture and knew of one model of heaven. Second, I do not wish to suggest that Ezekiel 1 shows a direct literal dependence on the Near Eastern sources mentioned here, or to imply that the author of Ezekiel 1 knew these varied conceptual worlds directly, outside of their incorporation into the larger Juda-

⁹ I deliberately use the word "embodies" because I wish to make the point that the temple is heaven.

hite culture. Third, I will not, for two reasons, address the issue of the authenticity of the Ezekielian passages that I discuss. On the one hand, the authenticity of most passages analyzed in this paper has not been disputed (in general).¹⁰ On the other hand, it is not essential to my argument that the prophet himself stands behind these passages. I am rather interested in the book as a whole, as it was received and used by later mystics. Fourth, I do not wish to overlook the gap between Ezekiel 1 and late ancient Jewish mysticism. As will be evident in this paper, I do not assume that Ezekiel shares the same, identical type of mysticism with later readings of the book, at Qumran, in apocalyptic literature, and in Hekhalot sources. Indeed, the differences between these various texts, the origins of which spread out over more than a millennium, caution against their placement in one category. Rather, my argument is that later uses of Ezekiel may have sensed the text's transcendence of any sharp distinctions between heaven and earth, and that it is this ideology that made the text readily available for full-scale heavenly temple speculations at a time when such sharp distinctions were quite often in place.

Heaven on Earth in the Ancient Near East

In the Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian world, the preponderant view is that the celestial locales in which the gods live are not completely removed from earth, but simply located at the top of the human realm. In other words, the world of the gods is the world of the humans and not an entirely different world; the gods are just positioned more prominently and enjoy a more commanding view of the world. With many variations, of course, the celestial world is either connected with the human realm by pillars or is simply situated at the top of a mountain.¹¹ Fundamentally, sky and earth share the same structure or essence. In literary terms, both Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources depict the sky and the earth as being made out of the same original matter or being originally united.¹² Of course, the ancients would find this perspective fundamentally

¹⁰ For issues concerning the unity and coherence of the book and of the passages discussed here, see especially Zimmerli 1965: 515-527; Greenberg 1986: 123-135; Greenberg 1983, 1997; Block 1997, 1998, 1: 17-23; Kutsko 2000: 5-9.

¹¹ For Mesopotamian sources, see Wright 2000: 27. For Egyptian sources on this idea, see Wright 2000: 13-16; Keel 1985: 27.

¹² Thus, in the *Enuma Elish* Marduk makes sky and earth out of the body of the goddess Tiamat (Dalley 2000: 254-257). In *Gilgamesh*, the cosmos is one mountain,

faulty and would reverse it to convey the idea that it is the heaven that ultimately supports or extends to the earth, and not the other way around.¹³ Heaven and earth are realms of the same world, and there is nothing to separate them in a geographical way. It is only the nature or the quality of life of those who inhabit the two realms that differentiates between heaven and earth. Not only are heaven and earth parts of the same space, but they are never beyond reach to each other. Gods and other heavenly creatures dwell on earth or visit it regularly, while humans get glimpses into heaven or simply visit it (legitimately or illegitimately/intrusively).¹⁴

Most of the cosmology discernible in the Hebrew Bible moves in the same conceptual world. It is telling that according to Gen 1:6-8 heaven and earth are separated out of the same original matter. Isaiah 14 is particularly significant because it employs several major concepts related to the divine realm. When one “who rules over nations” (חולש על גוים) boasts that he will achieve divine status in a divine location, ascend to heaven (שממים) upon cloudy heights (על במתי עב), sit enthroned on high, in the divine council, above the stars of El, and become like Elyon, he envisions this extraordinary destination to be on Mount Zaphon.¹⁵

The same conception of the (very mundane) divine world seems to survive in two of the earliest “heavenly” ascents, namely, *1 Enoch* 14 and the Aramaic *Testament of Levi* from Qumran.¹⁶ Considering that Mount Hermon is the place on which the Watchers descend in *1 Enoch* 6:6; that Enoch begins his journey to heaven at the foot of Hermon (13:7); and that the throne of God is depicted in 18:8 as reaching up to heaven like a mountain; it is probable that the intriguing temple and heaven of *1 Enoch* 14 are located at the top of Mount Hermon, or at least at the top of a mountain reminiscent of Zaphon.¹⁷

The Aramaic *Testament of Levi* from Qumran has also been traditionally presented as one of the earliest accounts of heavenly ascent.¹⁸

made “of heaven and earth,” which are two united siblings, the sky-god An and the earth-goddess Ki.

¹³ See Egyptian sources to this end in Wright 2000: 15.

¹⁴ Ascents of humans to the celestial locations of the gods are mentioned already in the earliest Egyptian texts, such as the *Pyramid Texts* of the Old Kingdom (see Wright 2000: 5).

¹⁵ See also the similar meaning of Jacob’s ladder in Wright 2000: 62 and Clifford 1972: 103-107.

¹⁶ See Himmelfarb, “The Practice of Ascent,” 130.

¹⁷ For Hermon as the cosmic mountain in *1 Enoch*, see Clifford 1972: 187-188; Coblenz Bautch 2003: 59-66.

¹⁸ Collins, “A Throne in the Heavens,” 46: “Apart from Enoch, the only account of an ascent in a Semitic language is that of Levi in the Aramaic Levi apocryphon from

However, the text seems to describe a heavenly experience on top of a high mountain:

I lay down and settled up[on...] ... Then I saw visions [...] in the appearance of this vision, I saw [the] heav[en opened ...] underneath me, high, reaching up to heaven [...] to me the gates of heaven... (4Q213a 1.II.14-18)¹⁹

The heaven that Levi enters is most probably situated on the top of a mountain. According to the Greek *Testament of Levi*, the mountain is Sirion, a probable designation for Hermon. Even in these two earliest occurrences of the heavenly temple and an ascent to heaven, *1 Enoch* 14 and the Aramaic *Testament of Levi* from Qumran, heaven may not be other-worldly, but it may rather be located on top of a mountain.

The intriguing possibility that the temple of *1 Enoch* 14 is located on top of a mountain points us in another direction: no distinction is commonly made in the ancient Near East between the heavenly dwellings of the gods and earthly sanctuaries. The presence of the gods in heaven and their presence in their earthly temples are not two distinct yet related or mutually mirrored presences, but one and the same reality. When one enters a temple on earth, one reaches the top of the sacred mountain and is described as “entering heaven.”

The identification of the earthly sanctuary with heaven is attested in Iron Age II Egypt and Mesopotamia, and in the Late Bronze religion of Ugarit.²⁰ Othmar Keel provides several expressions of this common ideology. Thus, in Ugaritic literature a temple is commonly called “high heaven.”²¹ In Egypt a formula uttered regularly at the opening of the gates to the inner chamber of the temple is: “The gates of heaven are opened.”²² The priest then proclaims: “I enter into heaven to behold (the name of the god).”²³ Regarding the Mesopotamian world, J. Edward Wright notes that a scene on a ninth-century tablet from the temple of the sun god Shamash depicts Shamash sitting in heaven on a throne, supported by two zoomorphic creatures, and being worshipped by king Nabuapaliddina, a goddess, and a priest. Thus Wright concludes that

Qumran, of which a later form is found in the Greek Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.”

¹⁹ Translation from García Martínez – Tigchelaar 1997-1998: 451.

²⁰ Mettinger 1982: 29-30, n. 40 and 41; Keel 1985: 172-173.

²¹ Keel 1985: 172.

²² Keel 1985: 172.

²³ Keel 1985: 172.

...this scene depicts the notion that when a human stands before the god's altar, symbol, or image on earth, that person is simultaneously appearing before the god in heaven itself. King Nabuapaliddina did not ascend to heaven, but while worshipping Shamash in his earthly temple, the king, or any worshipper for that matter, mythically appears before the god in heaven.²⁴

I would further suggest that there is no distinction in this scene between the heavenly and earthly realms. They are rather one and the same. Tzvi Abusch notes that in the Babylonian magical series *Maqlû* there is no clear distinction between the terrestrial city of Zabban, in which the visionary seeks an encounter with the gods of both heaven and the underworld, and the heavenly place in which he expects this meeting to take place.²⁵ In Abusch's words, "while the speaker is on earth, he is also in the heavens."²⁶ I would nuance this remark and propose that the speaker is in heaven by being in a certain location on earth. This location on earth *is* heaven.

Similarly, in Iron Age II Judah, God's throne and abode – that is, "heaven" – are located in the temple. As Herbert Niehr points out,

...from the times of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (ca. 950-586 B. C. E.) onward, there are no traces of the idea of YHWH living in heaven [as distinct from the earthly temple – my clarification]. What we do have from the 8th century B. C. E. onwards, however, are traces of YHWH's solarization, his conjunction with a host of heaven, his commanding of meteorological phenomena and his riding in heaven. Not once, however, is heaven presented as YHWH's habitat. Heaven becomes YHWH's dwelling place only after the exile. This seems to be both a reaction against the destruction of YHWH's earthly abode, viz. the Temple of Jerusalem, in 586 B. C. E., and a logical continuation of YHWH's cosmic powers, a concept which developed from the 8th century onwards.²⁷

The Iron Age II location of God in the temple is evident even in texts revised or authored in the exilic and postexilic period. God is described as king in Zion, enthroned upon the enormous cherubim throne in the temple (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:2; 2 Kgs 19:15), or dwelling in the temple (1 Kgs 8:12-13; Exod 15:17; 2 Sam 7:1-6). The psalms dedicated to Zion and the temple, the so-called "songs of Zion," which are most likely rooted in ideologies of the monarchic period, emphasize the same idea: the temple (Zion or Jerusalem) is

²⁴ Wright 2000: 37.

²⁵ Abusch 1995: 20-21.

²⁶ Abusch 1995: 21.

²⁷ Niehr 1997: 75.

literally the house of God (Pss 43:3; 46:5; 48:9; 50:2; 76:3; 132:13-14). The parallelism of Psalm 11:4 (יהוה בהיכל קדשו יהוה בשמים) suggests that the heaven is not simply a place correlative to the temple, but identical to it. The fact that the temple is God's abode is also apparent in Isaiah 6.²⁸ Keel astutely notes that, if one is to work with 1 Kgs 22:19b-22 within pre-exilic parameters, "it is out of place to inquire whether the scene is set in the temple or in heaven. The temple is on earth, but because Yahweh dwells in it, it is one and the same with heaven."²⁹ In pre-exilic times, inasmuch as they can be reconstructed from extant sources, the temple is heaven on earth.³⁰ The relation heaven – Temple is not simply a union, but rather an identity. With God dwelling literally *in* the temple, the temple constitutes heaven on earth (cf. Pss 14:2, 7; 20:3, 7; 76:3, 9).

An ideology that places God's abode in a heaven increasingly secluded from earth emerges with the end of the monarchic period.³¹ The belief according to which the temple serves as a union between earth and heaven – as composed of both realms, which are ultimately distinct from each other – seems to be at the earliest postexilic. It is in postexilic times that, as Martha Himmelfarb has emphasized, the temple is often portrayed as a sacred meeting place between heaven and earth, as distinct from each other.³²

The *Kabod* as Heaven in Ezekiel's Visions

The Book of Ezekiel seems to represent a common ancient Near Eastern ideology. Ezekiel 28:1-19 is a perfect example of the identification of heaven as an earthly location. The text (as well as the other oracles

²⁸ The divine council mentioned in the text (see also v. 8) takes place in the liturgical setting of the temple: God is surrounded by both members of the council and worshipping attendants. God is seated in the temple on a "high and lofty" (רם ונשא) throne, which is arguably the ten cubit high cherubim throne in the holy of holies (1 Kgs 6:23-28; 8:6-7; 2 Chr 3:10-13). The anthropomorphic God literally dwells and is enthroned in the temple (see also Isa 8:18; 31:9). The enormity of the throne entails that the god (most probably present in a cultic statue) is of gigantic proportions; the hem of the robe of the enormous god suffices to fill the temple.

²⁹ Keel 1985: 174.

³⁰ See also the remarks in Mettinger 1999: 920-924, esp. 923; Mettinger 1982: 29-32; Metzger 1970: 139-158; Keel 1977: 51-53; Keel 1985: 172-173; Maier 1964: 101-105.

³¹ For the separation of heaven from the temple and the subsequent seclusion of heaven from regular human access, see Hurowitz 1992: 313-321; and also Niehr 1999a: 370-372; Niehr 1999b: 428-430.

³² E. g. Himmelfarb 1986: 150-151.

of 28:20-32:32) addresses a humanity that claims divinity,³³ according to a dominant monarchical ideology in the ancient Near East.³⁴ The king of Tyre purports that he is a “god,” אל אלהים/θεός (vv. 2, 9). The swift divine correction reminds the king that he is a human being, אדם/ἄνθρωπος (vv. 2, 9). Scholars have previously noted that “the holy mountain of God” (בהר קדש אלהים) and the site of “Eden, the garden of God” (Ezek 28:13-14), the primordial location of this king, parallels Isa 14:13.³⁵ Moreover, scholars have repeatedly pointed out that this heavenly location reflects the sanctuary of Jerusalem.³⁶ On several occasions Himmelfarb has also noted that the reconstructed temple of Ezek 40-48, which she labels as “eschatological,” carries features of the Garden of Eden.³⁷ Both Himmelfarb and Joyce seem to be right; the temple of Ezek 40-48 is both eschatological and heavenly. Moreover, I would add, the temple of Ezek 40-48 is also the earthly temple of Jerusalem, simply because no such temporal or spatial distinctions seem to exist in Ezekiel.

Several elements in the depiction of the divine presence in Ezekiel 1 recall features of heaven in the common ancient Near Eastern cosmology that identifies heaven as an earthly location. First, several features of the היות recall ancient Near Eastern depictions of the supports of heaven. The main function of the היות in Ezek 1 is to bear the divine presence (cf. vv. 22-23). The היות support the firmament on which the divine throne is placed:

Above the heads of the creatures was a form: an expanse (רקיע), with an awe-inspiring gleam as of crystal (קרח), was spread out above their heads. Under the expanse (רקיע) each had one pair of wings extended toward those of the others; and each had another pair covering its body.

³³ It is possible that Ezek 28:1-19 contains two units originally distinct and conjoined editorially, namely 1-10 and 11-19. It has been contended that form and topic differentiate the two units (see discussion in Wilson 1987: 211-212). Nevertheless in their final form the two units coalesce in a unitary composition. The whole of vv. 1-19 has the same addressee (the king of Tyre), general theme, and vocabulary.

³⁴ Most likely the direct reference of Ezekiel’s oracles is the Egyptian monarchical ideology (cf. Launderville 2004: 170). Ezekiel 28 has received extensive attention from modern scholarship. To cite only a few studies: Bunta 2007: 212-232; Launderville 2004: 165-183; Miller 1994: 497-501; Wilson 1987: 211-218; Habel 1967: 516-524; Yaron 1964: 28-57; May 1962: 166-176; Williams 1976: 49-61; Jeppesen 1991: 83-94; Loretz 1976: 455-458; Barr 1992: 213-223. For the coherence of chapter 28, see especially Block 1998: 87-90; Greenberg 1983: 577, 589, 593; Wilson 1987: 217-218.

³⁵ Block 1998: 114.

³⁶ Callender 2000: 41; Yaron 1964: 40-41; Launderville 2004: 175; Wilson 1987: 215; Bunta 2007: 225-229.

³⁷ Himmelfarb 1991: 63-78; Himmelfarb 1993: 73-74.

The image of creatures supporting a platform has antecedents in Mesopotamian iconography.³⁸ However, רָקִיעַ is not a mere platform; it is always used in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the floor of heaven.³⁹ There is no reason to believe that in this Ezekielian passage רָקִיעַ is used with another meaning. The Septuagint translates רָקִיעַ in this passage with the word it uses for all other occurrences of the Hebrew concept, namely στερέωμα. Nevertheless, the use of רָקִיעַ in Ezek 1 has puzzled the scholarship. Some scholars have argued that רָקִיעַ should be read here, quite exceptionally, as a mere platform; while others, such as Walther Zimmerli, have noted the obvious reference to heaven, but have not attempted to explain it.⁴⁰ After all, how can creatures carry the firmament? I would say that this is exactly the point in Ezek 1:22-23: the four creatures bear the heavens; they act quite like the four pillars of heaven. If this reading is correct, heaven is simply the divine presence. From this perspective, the phrase "the heavens opened" (נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם) in Ezek 1:1 may refer not to a phenomenon that leads to or makes possible the vision of the *kabod*, but to the actual vision of the divine *kabod*. This reading of Ezek 1 is further supported by the use of קָרָה, which refers to a meteorological, celestial phenomenon. It is used in the same way in *1 Enoch* 14, a vision that is clearly indebted to the prophetic text. In *1 Enoch* 14:10 the floor of the temple is made out of ice (χιών), which is what קָרָה should be taken to mean in Job 6:16 and 37:10. Furthermore, the very throne of God is crystal-like in *1 Enoch* 14:18 (κρυστάλλινον), the way קָרָה is commonly translated in the Septuagint.

The identification of the חַיִּוֹת with the pillars or supports of heaven is further supported by their portrayal. Scholars have previously identified their main features in Mesopotamian and Syro-Palestinian iconography.⁴¹ Creatures of composite character, human and animal, are common occurrences in ancient Near Eastern iconography. Particularly prominent are features of bulls and lions, although eagles appear, too. However, the pillars, columns, or mountains supporting heaven are also depicted with mixed zoomorphic and anthropomorphic characteristics in Israelite and non-Israelite sources. The nature of the support of the firmament varies considerably in Judahite sources of the Persian and Hellenistic period, from pillars (Job 26:11), to mountains, to winds (*1 Enoch* 18:2-3). These supports are often depicted in zoomorphic or even anthropomorphic terms. Thus in

³⁸ Keel 1977: fig. 115, 118, 130.

³⁹ Already noted in Zimmerli 1979: 122.

⁴⁰ See discussion in Block 1997: 101, n. 79; Greenberg 1983: 48.

⁴¹ See particularly Keel 1977: 125-273; Greenberg 1983: 54-56.

Egypt the sky rests not only on pillars, mountain, or winds, but also on lions (maybe sphinxes?)⁴² and even on people holding staves.⁴³ In Syro-Palestine, several cylinder seals represent the pillars of heaven (or the cosmic mountains) as animals.⁴⁴ At Ugarit the sacred mountains are often animate and are even portrayed as divine beings (a concept also attested among the Hittites).⁴⁵ The imagery seems to closely parallel the frequent depictions of west Semitic gods standing or riding on the same elements, pillars, mountains, winds (cf. Pss 18:11; 104:3), or animals (e. g., bulls).⁴⁶ In the ninth-century Mesopotamian tablet from the temple of Shamash mentioned above, the throne of the sun god seems to stand on zoomorphic creatures. In both Judahite and non-Judahite traditions, the supports of heaven are commonly four in number, presumably one for each cardinal direction.⁴⁷ Wright astutely notes that although the supports of heaven “appear typically in pairs in Egyptian iconography, the pair in fact represents four supports, thus the ‘four corners of the earth.’”⁴⁸ A similar interchangeable use of two and four may surface in Ezekiel’s depiction of the *היות*. According to Ezek 1:5, there are four composite zoomorphic/anthropomorphic creatures supporting the throne of the divine presence.⁴⁹ Yet, the four *היות* are associated in Ezek 10 with the temple cherubim, which were two in number. The two cherubim constituted the seat of the divine throne in the Jerusalem Temple (1 Kgs 6:23-28; 8:6-7; 2 Chr 3:10-13).⁵⁰

⁴² Wright 2000: 15. Wright’s figure 1.12 (on page 17) depicts the sky resting on mountains, but the standing animals (monkeys?) represented at the top of the mountains with their upper limbs stretched toward the sky seem to provide additional support of the vaulted firmament. If this is so, the image represents an interesting combination of two different paradigms. Similar animals appear in figure 1.13. Their function, however, is less clear, since the limbs are stretched not toward the sky, but toward the god Horus, in an apparent act of worship.

⁴³ Wright 2000: 13-15. This recalls the Greek myth of Atlas supporting the heavens (Hesiod, *Theog.* 713-748).

⁴⁴ Clifford 1972: 94-95.

⁴⁵ Clifford 1972: 61-64.

⁴⁶ For reviews and discussions of texts, see Maier 1964: 114-118; Clements 1965: 28-39; Keel 1977: 152-158.

⁴⁷ For Egyptian sources, see Wright 2000: 13-15.

⁴⁸ Wright 2000: 15.

⁴⁹ The number of the creatures has been previously related to the four winds or directions of the compass. Thus, see Block 1997: 97; Block 1988: 32-33; Keel 1977: 241-243; Zimmerli 1979: 120; Greenberg 1983: 57-58.

⁵⁰ See also Mettinger 1982a: 19-37, esp. 20; Mettinger 1982b: 109-138. It is significant to note that in the Masoretic text Ezek 10:2 and 4, as well as 9:3, refer (maybe collectively?) to a single cherub upon whom the *kabod* is enthroned. However, in all

Second, the depiction of the throne in Ezek 1:26 further supports the probability that Ezekiel understands the divine presence itself as heaven, and any vision of the presence as an ascent to heaven: "Above the expanse (רְקִיעַ) over their heads [that is, of the הַיּוֹת] was the semblance of a throne in appearance like lapis-lazuli stone (MT סַפִּיר; LXX λίθος σάπφειρος)." The lapis-lazuli stone in the form of the throne is the seat of the divine *kabod*.⁵¹ Lapis-lazuli is identified as the stone of the firmament in several ancient Near Eastern sources. In ancient Mesopotamian texts, the floors of heavens are commonly made of stone, generally clear or transparent.⁵² At Ugarit, Baal's heavenly dwelling on mount Zaphon is made of lapis-lazuli (CTA 4.5.80-81). Another glimpse of the lapis-lazuli heaven emerges in Exod 24:9-10, which describes "the God of Israel" on Sinai who has, under his feet, a work resembling a lapis-lazuli brick as clear as the sky.

The evidence presented so far leads to the tentative conclusion that Ezek 1 describes the divine presence in itself (in and outside of the temple) as heaven. In this understanding, any vision of God is a vision of heaven and an ascent to heaven. This conclusion is also supported by reading Ezek 1 in conjunction with the two other visions of Ezek 8-11 and 40-48. Scholars have previously noted that within the structure of the book there is a subtle unity and parallelism between Ezek 1 and the prophet's two other visions. First, three key formulae appear together only in these three visions. All three sections of the book are introduced as "visions of God" (מְרִאוֹת אֱלֹהִים), an expression that occurs in no other places in the book; all mention the hand of God as being upon the prophet; and all contain specific date references (1:1-3; 8:1-3; 40:1-2).⁵³ Moreover, all the visions refer to a spirit lifting up the prophet (3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5).⁵⁴ Furthermore, all three passages are bound together by the cross-reference formulae of 10:15, 20, 22 ("These were the living creatures that I saw by the river Chebar") and 43:3 ("The vision I saw was like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar").⁵⁵

three passages the LXX is consistently attuned to the temple narratives and uses the plural.

⁵¹ This stone is not the modern sapphire, since this stone was not known in ancient times (Quiring 1954: 200-202; Block 1997: 102, n. 89).

⁵² Wright 2000: 34-36.

⁵³ Tuell 1996: 649-664; Joyce 2007: 25-26.

⁵⁴ van Dyke Parunak 1980: 61-74.

⁵⁵ Tuell 1996: 649-664; Joyce 2007: 25.

The place of the opening vision in this complex parallelism is not immediately evident. I would suggest that Ezekiel constructs the three visions in a certain progression, building each on the previous one. The editorial hand that produced the cross-references of 10:15, 20, 22 and 43:3 seems to have perceived this progression, since it has introduced each vision as an expansion of the previous narrative. The logic of this complex construction suggests that the essential vision – on the basis of which the other two exist, or on which the subsequent visions develop – is the opening vision of Ezek 1-3. Indeed, the temples of Ezek 8-11 and 40-48 contain the *kabod* of Ezek 1 (the second temple to a better outcome than the first). By this logic, the *kabod* of Ezek 1 is the essential core of the temples.

This correlation between the three visions seems imbalanced by an expression that only introduces the vision in Ezek 1-3, namely, “the heavens opened” (נפתחו השמים). Zimmerli notes that the expression does not occur in any other subsequent visions in Ezekiel, or for that matter anywhere else in the Bible.⁵⁶ Zimmerli contrasts this introduction to the first vision with the emphasis in the other visions that God dwells in Jerusalem:

Ezekiel 1:1 is the only text in the book of Ezekiel which presupposes so clearly the heavenly dwelling place of Yahweh. Far more frequently, on the other hand, we find references in Ezekiel to Yahweh’s dwelling at the holy place, in Jerusalem (cf. 8:1ff.; 43:1ff.; 48:35).⁵⁷

Contrary to Zimmerli, I would argue that, given the complex correlation between the three visions, this unique introduction of the first vision, as the opening of the heavens, corresponds exactly with the subsequent emphasis that God dwells in the temple; and that this correspondence between heaven and temple collapses any possible distinction between an earthly and a heavenly presence of God. This initial opening of the heavens constitutes the theophanic substance of all subsequent visions.

Another dissimilarity between the three visions is also probably meant to be interpreted in the same manner. The visions of Ezek 8-11 and 40-48 are visions of the earthly temple (within mirrored processes of destruction and reconstruction), while there does not seem to be any focus on the temple in Ezek 1-3. However, a close reading of Ezek 11:16 and 1:13 suggests that the first vision of the book already redefines the *kabod* as a temple.

⁵⁶ Zimmerli 1979: 116.

⁵⁷ Zimmerli 1979: 116.

The *Kabod* as Temple in Ezekiel

Ezekiel 11:16 seems to take Ezekiel's understanding of the divine presence one step further: "I have been a sanctuary (מקדש) to them [Israelites] for a little while [or, in small measure: מעט] in the countries where they have gone."⁵⁸ The term מעט has puzzled modern scholars and ancient interpreters alike. It has been read adverbially, in reference to either time ("a sanctuary for a while," RSV, NRSV, REB, NASB, NIV)⁵⁹ or measure ("a sanctuary in small measure," AV),⁶⁰ or even adjectivally ("a little sanctuary," KJV).⁶¹ Joyce has made a compelling argument that, given its context, the phrase מקדש מעט should not be taken in reference to time, but rather as a statement of degree.⁶² Moreover, I would argue that מעט does not qualify only מקדש, but the entire idea that God is a sanctuary to the people (ואהיה להם למקדש). In other words, the phrase does not imply that God is a מקדש in a limited, imperfect degree, but that God offers himself (as מקדש) in a limited measure.

While the passage has been taken as a mere historical allusion to the divine presence within the tabernacle, מקדש is always (21 times) used in reference to the temple in Ezekiel.⁶³ Ezekiel 11:16 suggests that the divine presence in itself is the ultimate temple. Human-built temples only house this sanctuary. The temple as a material building only encompasses the real temple, the divine presence, and it does so imperfectly. This use of temple language in reference to the divine presence itself should undoubtedly be seen as integral part of Ezekiel's overarching theology about God's freedom of movement and ultimate independence from the physical temple.⁶⁴ It occurs in the context of Ezekiel's insistence that the divine presence is self-sufficient and complete in itself (a point that Ezekiel makes at length in 36:22-32).

Samson H. Levey suggests, in his introduction to the *Targum of Ezekiel*, that in the moving divine throne Ezekiel presents a mecha-

⁵⁸ For the probability that this is an original Ezekielian composition, see Kutsko 2000: 98 n. 63. For the unity of the verse, see Joyce 1996: 45-58.

⁵⁹ See Brownlee 1986: 155, 164, and comments in Blenkinsopp 1990: 63-64.

⁶⁰ Zimmerli 1979: 230, 262; Joyce 1996: 45-58.

⁶¹ Thus Greenberg 1983: 186, 190.

⁶² Joyce 1996: 55-56.

⁶³ Thus Ezek 5:11; 8:6; 9:6; 23:38; 24:21; 25:3; 37:26, 28; 43:21; 44:1,5,9,15,16; 45:3,4,18; 47:12; 48:8,10,21.

⁶⁴ For a recent thorough analysis of Ezekiel's focus on the divine presence, see Kutsko 2000. For the physicality and mobility of the *kabod*, see especially Kutsko 2000: 79-93; Weinfeld 1972: 200-206; Weinfeld 1974, 7: 22-38.

nism for God to leave the Jerusalem temple and survive its destruction.⁶⁵ However, Ezekiel seems to state more. For Ezekiel, the divine presence is not simply a part of the temple (albeit the central part) that is salvaged from destruction; the divine presence *is* the temple. The entire holiness of the temple and the entire heaven is concentrated in the divine presence. In rescuing the divine *kabod* from destruction, Ezekiel rescues all of the divine presence and the entire temple. In this sense, for Ezekiel a presence-less or *kabod*-less temple is not a temple at all; it no longer carries any holiness; while a temple-less *kabod* is as perfect or sufficient as the *kabod* within the Jerusalem temple. The divine presence is a complete temple in itself. It is from this perspective that Ezekiel can conceive of the heavens as supported on the back of four moving creatures.

It has been stated before that Ezekiel's use of מקדש in Ezek 11:16 is without equivalent in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁶ However, Isa 8:14, a particularly difficult text, describes God in both MT and LXX versions as a מקדש.⁶⁷ Moreover, Ezekiel's reinterpretation of the divine presence as a temple in itself is not unparalleled. At least one other passage in the Hebrew Bible, namely Exod 24:9-11, suggests that some ancient Judahites thought of the divine presence as a temple, with or without physical walls to surround it:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel (וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל / και εἶδον τὸν τόπον οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ ἰσραηλ). Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness (וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לַבַּיִת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְמַעֲשֵׂה הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר / και τὰ ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου και ὡσπερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῆ καθαριότητι). God did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

The similarities between this text and the vision of the divine *kabod* in Ezek 1 are evident, and they have been noted in previous scholarship.⁶⁸ Among these are the focus on the surroundings of the divine presence, the repetitive use of כ, the mention of the vision of God and of heaven, and the reference to the lapis-lazuli stone (MT ספיר; LXX σάπφειρος). In addition, the LXX version of the Exodus passage uses two concepts that appear in Ezekiel's first vision: τόπος/οὐρος, which

⁶⁵ Levey 1987: 3.

⁶⁶ Thus Zimmerli 1979: 262, and Block 1997: 97.

⁶⁷ This parallel to Ezek 11:16 is noted in Joyce 1996: 54.

⁶⁸ Greenberg 1983: 50; Childs 1976: 506-507.

was a specific title for the Temple already in the seventh century,⁶⁹ and which Ezek 3:12 uses in reference to the *kabod*, thus redirecting a title of the Jerusalem Temple toward the divine presence; and στερέωμα/עֲרֵכָה, which occurs several times in Ezek 1. Scholars have noted before that the setting of the divine presence in Exodus 24, and the actions of Moses and the elders, have liturgical overtones.⁷⁰ First, God and the leaders of the people share in a sacrificial meal. Second, although the scene takes place on a mountain, מעשה לבנת and ἔργον πλίντου suggest that this sacrificial meal takes place in a construction of some sort. It appears then that Exod 24:9-11 conceives the divine presence to be in itself a temple, just like Ezekiel.

To take the parallelism between Exod 24:9-11 and Ezek 1 further, Ezek 1:13 mentions a liturgical inner-working of the divine presence:

In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked⁷¹ like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire.

Zimmerli notes perceptively that the image of the burning coals "cannot be separated from 10:2 where there is a reference to the scattering of the burning coals which were between the cherubim."⁷² The scattering of the coals in 10:2 occurs in between the cherubim of the temple of Jerusalem. The parallelism between 10:2 and 1:13 suggests that Ezekiel conceives the temple ritual as continuing uninterrupted in between the creatures that carry the divine presence. Ezekiel integrates fully the ritual of the Jerusalem temple into the throne-*kabod* structure. Therefore, the ritual leaves the physical temple with the divine presence within it.

Conclusion

The above observations lead to several tentative conclusions. First, the Book of Ezekiel seems to adhere to a certain ancient Near Eastern understanding of the divine world that does not differentiate between the divine presence in heaven and the divine presence on

⁶⁹ See especially Murray 1990: 298-320; Levinson 1997: 23-52, 98-143; Leuchter 2005: 93-109.

⁷⁰ E. g., Clifford 1972: 111-112.

⁷¹ Thus in LXX (ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ζῶων ὄρασις). MT reads וְדָמוֹת הַחַיִּים מְרֵאִיָּהֶם. However, most scholars follow the LXX at this point (e. g., BHS; Brownlee 1986: 8; Zimmerli 1979: 84; Greenberg 1983: 46).

⁷² Zimmerli 1979: 122.

earth. Therefore, the entire dialectic of heavenly versus earthly is misplaced when it comes to the Book of Ezekiel, simply because this distinction seems to be unknown to the author of this biblical text. Second, several elements in Ezek 1 suggest that the opening chapter of the book describes the divine presence itself as heaven. Third, a complex parallelism between the opening vision in Ezekiel and the visions in chapters 8-11 and 40-48, and a close analysis of Ezek 11:16, imply that the Book of Ezekiel as a whole redefines the earthly-heavenly temple and focuses the theophanic nature of the temple into the divine *kabod*. For Ezekiel the divine presence *is* the temple. The entire holiness of the temple and the entire heaven is concentrated in the divine presence. Within this parallelism the Jerusalem Temple (both the lost and the renewed) simply embodies the divine presence in the fragile plan of human history. Thus for Ezekiel the visionary's glance at the *kabod* is an ascent to heaven and a vision of the heavenly temple. In the terms of the ancient Near Eastern texts introduced above, the visionary, by simply being in front of the divine presence, is in heaven and in the temple.