

Outline of a Biblical Theology of God's "House" or "Dwelling" And Its Relation to Post-Temple Judaism

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I. Creation as God's "house." Heaven and earth are a royal dwelling-place, where God reigns as benevolent King. Note the royal language in the creation narrative: God issues royal commands to the various aspects of creation, ordering creation according to His holy purpose, and even places some aspects of creation into positions of "sub-rule" under Him:

Gen. 1: 16 And God made the two great lights—the greater light *to rule* the day and the lesser light *to rule* the night—and the stars. 17 And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, 18 *to rule* over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have *dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."... 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and *subdue* it and have *dominion over* the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Thus, later, it is not surprising that the entire created order is referred to as God's royal dwelling-place:

Is. 66:1 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my *throne*, and the earth is my *footstool*; what is the *house* that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?"

Acts 17: 24 The God who made the *world* and everything in it, being Lord of *heaven and earth*, does not live in *temples* made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

II. The Curse as Banishment from God's House, Presence, and Blessedness (Gen. 3)

After banishment, "heaven" is the dwellingplace of God, and "earth" is where rebellious humans dwell, until at some later, eschatological time, the dwellingplace of God is with humans again, and they return to their heavenly, eschatological home.

2 Chr. 6:21 And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen from *heaven your dwelling place*, and when you hear, forgive. (This expression also appears at 1 Kings 8:30, 39, 43, 49; 2 Chr 6:30, 33, 39)

Ezek. 37:27 My *dwelling place shall be with them*, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Mat. 6:10 “Your *kingdom* come, your will be done, *on earth as it is in heaven.*”

2Cor. 5:1 For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a *house* not made with hands, *eternal in the heavens.*

John 14:2 In my Father’s *house* are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?)

2Cor. 6:16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Rev. 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the *dwelling place* (ὁ σκηνώσῃ) of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Rev. 21:22 And I saw *no temple* in the city, for its *temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

III. Tower of Babel (בְּנֵי בָבֶל): Rebellious Attempt to Return to God’s House, Presence, and Blessedness without Atonement (Genesis 11)

IV. Joseph’s Ladder/Tower/Ziggurat (מִצְדָּה): Divine “Dream/Pledge” of Return to God’s House, Presence, and Blessedness

Gen. 28:10 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11 And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! 13 And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. 14 Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than *the house of God*, and this is the gate of *heaven.*”

[n.b. Jacob’s “ladder” is later understood as a type of Christ, because no physical ladder or tower will restore communion between heaven and earth, but the incarnate Son will. Thus note the expression “the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” here, referring to the ladder of Jacob’s dream, is later used by Christ to refer to himself: John 1:51 And he said to him (Nathaniel), “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”]

V. Tabernacle Religion: Temporary House, Presence, and Blessedness Secured by Atonement Under Moses, the Israelites build a temporary/travelling tent/house, called the “tabernacle,” where Yahweh dwells and where sacrifices are offered.

Ex. 25:1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. 3 And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, 4 blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, 5 tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, 6 oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 7 onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. 9 Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Ex. 33:7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

This tabernacle has a sacrificial altar (Ex. 27), where Aaron and his sons would bear sacrifices on behalf of the people

Ex. 28:40 “For Aaron’s sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. 41 And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. 42 You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; 43 and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die.

Deut. 12: 5 But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, 6 and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.

VI. Temple Judaism: “Permanent” House, Presence, and Blessedness Secured by Atonement

A. David desired to build a house for God, but was prevented from doing so because he was violent

2Sam. 7:1 Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, 2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.” 3 And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.” 4 But that same night the

word of the LORD came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. 7 In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”” 8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth....Moreover, the LORD declares to you that *the LORD will make you a house*. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 *He shall build a house* for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

1Chr. 22:8 But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because *you have shed so much blood* before me on the earth.

B. Solomon built a “permanent” house for God

1Kings 5:2 And Solomon sent word to Hiram, 3 “You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. 4 But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune. 5 And so I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD said to David my father, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.’

[n.b.: Whether out of respect for his father, out of ignorance, or out of sinful stubbornness, Solomon attributes David’s failure to build God’s house to the violence of David’s *enemies*, rather than to *David’s* violence]

1 Kings 6 (Solomon builds the house) Kings 6:37 In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid, in the month of Ziv. 38 And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

C. This “permanent” house was looted and sacked by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC (2 Kings 25:9, 13-17)

2Kings 25:8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 And he burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down.

VII. Second Temple Judaism: Another “Permanent” House, Presence, and Blessedness Secured by Atonement

A. Exiles return from Babylon (537 BC) and begin work on a Second Temple. When completed, the older members, who had remembered Solomon’s temple, wept because the second was inferior to the first (Ezra 3:12-13)

B. Herod’s Temple (begun 19 BC) was a massive restoration of the Second Temple, which had itself been looted by the Seleucid dynasty (c. 175-163 BC). This work was still ongoing during Christ’s ministry (John 2:20)

C. Jesus referred to the Temple as “my father’s house,” a house characterized by the presence and blessedness of God, as a type of the eschatological and heavenly reality (n.b. that the only other place he used this expression was at John 14: John 14:2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?).

He also pledged to rebuild this “house” in three days, referring to his “body,” because in the incarnate Son and in His bodily sacrifice, heaven and earth *are* re-united, reconciliation between God and humanity is achieved.

VIII. Post-Temple Religion: No Need for God’s House; No Need for Atonement?

After the destruction of Herod’s Temple by the Romans in AD 70, the survivors make no subsequent effort to rebuild a temple in Jerusalem. Thus, a new form of Judaism, a new religion altogether, emerges, “Post-Temple” Judaism, or “No-Temple” Judaism. Even the Jewish rabbinic scholar Jacob Neusner has noted that post-Temple Judaism has no more claim to being the successor to Temple Judaism than does Christianity:

“Let me at the outset explain why formative Christianity demands to be studied in the context of formative Judaism, and formative Judaism in the context of formative Christianity” (10)...Both Judaism and Christianity claim to be the heirs and products of the Hebrew Scriptures...Yet both great religious traditions derive not solely or directly from the authority and teachings of those Scriptures, but rather from the ways in which that authority has been mediated, and those teachings interpreted, through other holy books. The New Testament is the prism through which the light of the Old comes to Christianity. The canon of rabbinical writings is the star that guides Jews to the revelation of Sinai, the Torah....The claim of these two great Western traditions, in all their rich variety, is for the veracity not merely of the Scriptures, but also of Scriptures as interpreted by the New Testament or the Babylonian Talmud (11)...while most people are familiar with the story of the development of Christianity, few are fully aware that Judaism

constitutes a separate and distinctive religious tradition” (11)...Both the apostles and the rabbis thus reshaped the antecedent religion of Israel, and both claimed to be Israel. That pre-Christian, prerabbinic religion of Israel, for all its variety, exhibited common traits: belief in one God, reverence for and obedience to the revelation contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, veneration of the Temple in Jerusalem (while it stood), and expectation of the coming of a Messiah to restore all the Jews to Palestine and bring to a close the anguish of history. The Christian Jews concentrated on the last point, proclaiming that the Messiah had come in Jesus; the rabbinic Jews focused on the second, teaching that only through the full realization of the imperatives of the Hebrew Scriptures, Torah, as interpreted and applied by the rabbis, would the people merit the coming Messiah. (12)...For the Christian, therefore, the issue of Messiah predominated; for the rabbinic Jew, the issue of Torah; and for both, the question of salvation was crucial.” (13, all citations from Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Beginning of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

IX. The Christian Assembly as God’s (present, pre-return) House, Presence, and Blessedness Secured by Atonement

1Cor. 3:9 For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building (οἰκοδομή). 16 Do you not know that you are God’s temple (ναός) and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple (ναόν), God will destroy him. For God’s temple (ναός τοῦ θεοῦ) is holy, and you are that temple.

1Cor. 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple (ναός) of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

1Tim. 3:15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God (οἶκῳ θεοῦ), which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

Eph. 2: 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ), 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple (ναόν ἅγιον) in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1Pet. 2:4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like *living stones* are being built up as a spiritual house (οἶκος πνευματικός, not a material/physical house), to be a holy priesthood, to offer *spiritual* sacrifices [πνευματικὰς θυσίας, not physical or material sacrifices] *acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*.