

## Dressed to Impress

### *Adam as a Priestly Figure in Eden*

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The puzzle I hope to solve today is this: How was it possible for perhaps the most well-known man without clothes in the Hebrew Bible to be compared with perhaps the most well-known man wearing the most sacred of clothes in Jewish thought? During Judaism's Second Temple period, several authors drew connections between the temple and the creation stories recorded in Genesis, even going so far as to describe the Israelite high priest and his clothing in terms of Adam. I will examine several texts written during this period of time in order to tease out what interpreters saw as Adam's priestly role in Eden, and will explore how these authors may have discerned such ideas from the very first chapters of Genesis.

The temple in Jerusalem stood as the focal point of Israelite religion when it was destroyed by the Babylonians in the late sixth century BCE. Having been forcefully estranged from this beating heart of their religious life, Jewish exiles in Babylon possessed a heightened sensitivity to the temple and its related imagery.<sup>1</sup> Such sensitivity is evident in the bib-

1. Concerning both temple and Eden imagery, Michael Fishbane writes, "It was not until the woe and dislocation of the exile, and with it the destruction of the land and Temple, that the symbolism of Eden emerges with singular emphasis. In the mouths of the post-exilic prophets, this imagery serves as the organizing prism for striking

lical writings of Ezekiel, a prophetic figure who bridged the gap between those who had lived in the shadow of the Jerusalem temple their entire lives, and those who knew nothing but the ruins of this sacred structure upon their return. In describing his vision of the temple,<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel uses language evocative of Eden, humanity's very first (and perhaps most important) home. For instance, this is evident in the regular appearance of cherubim—a very specific type of heavenly being—in Ezekiel's narrative. While the six gates of the temple's courtyards were all decorated with palm trees (Ezek 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37), indicating a garden-like setting, the walls and doors of the sanctuary proper were decorated with both palm trees and cherubim, the walls and doors of the sanctuary proper were decorated with both palm trees *and* cherubim (Ezek 41:20, 23, 25a). This, of course, is suggestive of Adam's eastward expulsion from Eden—Genesis states that cherubim were placed “at the east of the Garden of Eden” to prevent a westward return to the garden.

This correlation between Eden and the temple may explain the particular term that God uses consistently to address Ezekiel in his temple visions—the phrase *ben-'ādām*, can be translated as both “mortal” and as “son of Adam.” The image of Ezekiel as a priestly “son of Adam” becomes even more significant when we take into account the fact that only the high priest was authorized to enter the temple's Holy of Holies (Lev 16), where both the doors to this most sacred room and the Ark of the Covenant within this sacred space were guarded by cherubim, as was the Garden of Eden.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in the book of Ezekiel, the author made this connection between Adam and the Israelite priesthood more explicit. Chapter 28 describes Eden as being at the top of a mountain, and uses language evocative of the Israelite tabernacle and temple to describe it. The text also refers to an inhabitant of this sacred space as wearing precious stones (Ezek 28:13) similar to those worn by Aaron as he officiated in the tabernacle

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visions of spatial renewal.” Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 369–70. And, regarding the perception of temple imagery during this period, Carla Sulzbach noted that “The assorted strands of references to sacred places that were still clearly discernible in the earlier strata of the Hebrew Bible were mined by the various Second Temple period texts and these were then fused into one grand, intricately contrived temple image.” Sulzbach, “Of Temples on Earth, in Heaven, and in-Between,” 173.

2. See Ezek 40–48.

3. See Sweeney, “Ezekiel: Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet of the Exile,” 141–42.

and shown here (Exod 28:15–20).<sup>4</sup> In the verses that follow, God explains that because of this individual’s “sin” (חטא), “I cast [him out] as a profane thing from the mountain of God,” or Eden (Ezek 28:16). Thus, it appears as though the individual banished from Eden was wearing priestly attire before being expelled, which also seems to imply that this individual was performing priestly duties within the garden.<sup>5</sup> This, then, seems to be an early connection between Adam and ornate priestly clothing, which was presumably manufactured by God.

After the Jerusalem temple was rebuilt by the Jewish people in the early sixth century CE, several authors made similar, yet more expansive conceptual connections between Eden and creation as they wrote about this restored temple in Jerusalem. These texts suggest a creative and complex understanding of what the temple, its rituals, and its worshippers symbolized. For instance, several authors suggested that the temple was symbolic of Eden, and that the high priest was a representative of Adam. As we will see, from this perspective, the Israelite high priest effectively reversed humanity’s expulsion from the presence of God.

One example of such thinking was written by the author of *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, which states that the tabernacle and temple ritual somehow restored what was lost through Adam and Eve’s disobedience in Eden. According to this account, God showed Moses “the measurements of the sanctuary, and the number of the offerings, and the signs by which they shall begin to examine the heavens. And [God] said: These are the things which were forbidden to the race of men after they had sinned.”<sup>6</sup> This likely reference to Adam and Eve’s actions in Eden suggest

4. While the Masoretic (Hebrew) Text of Ezekiel only mentions this figure wearing nine of the twelve stones mentioned on Aaron’s priestly breastplate, the Greek text mentions all twelve stones. For a detailed comparison and analysis of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Ezek 28:11–19, see Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 332–56.

5. Fletcher-Louis agrees with this reading: “The office of high priest was thought to recapitulate the identity of the pre-lapsarian Adam. This goes back at least as far as Ezek 28:12ff. where the prince of Tyre wears precious stones which are simultaneously those worn by the *Urmensch* in the garden of Eden and those of the Aaronic ephod according to Exodus 28.” See Fletcher-Louis, “Worship of Divine Humanity as God’s Image,” 394, 408.

6. *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* XIX.10–11. In his commentary on this passage, C. T. R. Hayward states that this reference to Adam and Eve suggest these first parents were “responsible for losing privileges which human beings should properly have retained. Among these are the ways to Paradise: these and other gifts are, it would seem, partly restored to Israel with the building of the tabernacle and the conduct of its Service. The due celebration of the annual festivals, in particular, give Israel some part

these first parents lost privileges that humans should have retained in other circumstances. The construction of the tabernacle and its various rituals, in part, seem to have restored certain of these privileges that were lost. Here, then, God gives Israel a significant role in affairs that affect humanity as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the creation of the tabernacle and temple could be seen as functional replacements for Eden's primal sacred space.

The book of *Jubilees* also makes conceptual ties between Eden, Adam, and the temple. In this text, Adam and Eve are created outside of the garden; God brings Adam and Eve into the garden at different times—Adam enters the garden after forty days, then Eve enters the garden after eighty days (*Jubilees* 3:9–13).<sup>8</sup> The author makes clear that these procedures reflect the priestly laws governing entrance to the temple in *Leviticus* 12:2–8, and suggests that the Garden of Eden had a similar level of sanctity as did the temple. This particular idea is made explicit in *Jubilees* 8:19, where the narrator describes Noah as knowing “that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, and the dwelling of the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> The significance of this statement can be summarized in the following: If “Adam and Eve were brought into the Holy of Holies prior to their disobedience [then] their expulsion from Eden [was a] removal from the place where God's Presence . . . [was] most immediate for Israel. The high priest's entry [into] the Holy of Holies on [the holy day of] Yom Kippur [would symbolically] correspond to the first man's return to Eden,”<sup>10</sup> albeit temporarily.<sup>11</sup>

Interpretations of Adam's apparel suggest an additional priestly connection. In the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* (in Hebrew), we find a list of

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in the divinely appointed order of things which themselves directly affect the whole human race” (Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 167).

7. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 167.

8. See also Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 89.

9. Translation of Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 89.

10. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 89.

11. In understanding Eden as a sort of primeval temple, Adam's role is equated with the priestly roles later performed by Levites. This is seen clearly in the description of Adam's actions in *Jubilees* immediately following his expulsion from Eden: “And [God] made for them coats of skin, and clothed them, and sent them forth from the Garden of Eden. And on that day which Adam went forth from the Garden, he offered as a sweet savor an offering, frankincense, galbanum, and stacte, and spices in the morning with the rising of the sun from the day when he covered his shame” (*Jubilees* 3:26–27). Adam's offering here appears to be fulfilling the priestly requirements for daily offerings in the tabernacle (and later, the temple) given in *Exod* 30:1–8.

several biblical figures whose grave sites were visited by their faithful descendants. The author then writes that “above every living thing is *the beauty* of Adam” (49:16; emphasis added). The very next verse begins, “Greatest of his brothers and *the beauty* of his people was Simeon the son of [Y]ohanan the priest; In whose generation the house was visited and in whose days the Temple was strengthened” (50:1; emphasis added). While a passing reference to Adam just before a sustained description of the high priest Simeon may seem like a non sequitur, this juxtaposition was not haphazard: “The description of Sim[e]on as the ‘beauty,’ [or] *tipèret*, of his people establishes more than a formal link with the preceding chapter (49:16), where the ‘beauty,’ [or] *tipèret*, of Adam is named.”<sup>12</sup> Here, the author “implies that Adam’s [clothing] is analogous to Sim[e]on’s high priestly robes: if so, he may suggest here . . . that the high priest’s [clothing] are the garments of the first man,”<sup>13</sup> which God made before expelling him from Eden.

In any case, the Wisdom of Ben Sira establishes at the very least a conceptual connection between the perception of Adam and the perception of the Jewish high priest Simeon as he functioned within the Jerusalem temple. This comparison suggests that the author saw the high priest as a latter-day representative of Adam, and that the regular rituals performed in the temple were, in fact, offered on behalf of the whole world.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, then, the aforementioned privileges originally granted to Adam in Eden were recapitulated in Simeon, the high priest,<sup>15</sup> who offered sacrifices on behalf of humanity within the latter-day equivalent of Eden.

A similarly relation between Eden, Adam, and the temple appears in several Qumran texts. In the Community Rule, we read: “For God has chosen them [the community] for an everlasting covenant, and all the glory of Adam is theirs” (1QS 4:22–23). The curious phrase “all the glory of Adam” appears in one of the *Hodayot*: “And you [God] are causing [the community] to inherit all the glory of Adam and an abundance of days” (1QH 4:15). This association between the Qumran community and Adam is further demonstrated throughout the *Hodayot*. For example, one passage reads, “I will recount your glory in the midst of the sons of

12. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 44.

13. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 45.

14. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 14.

15. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 45.

Adam; and in the abundance of your goodness my soul delights” (1QH 19:6–7).<sup>16</sup> In fact, Fletcher-Louis observes that much of this collection “is a sustained and extended meditation on the anthropology of Genesis 2:7,”<sup>17</sup> which describes the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth.<sup>18</sup> These examples suggest that the Qumran community considered the character of Adam as glorious, and believed that they could somehow participate in that glory.

Given the evidence that both the Wisdom of Ben Sira and Jubilees were preserved at Qumran,<sup>19</sup> it is not surprising that additional texts there may contain imagery that associates high priestly figures with the concept of Adam and a return to the presence of God. While the Qumran community saw themselves as inheritors of “all the glory of Adam,” they also saw themselves as priests. These two views are joined in 4Q Florilegium (4Q174 1 i:6–7) “And he has commanded that a sanctuary of Adam<sup>20</sup> be built for him; that there they may send up, like the smoke of incense,

16. I have chosen to render בני אדם here as “sons of Adam” instead of “sons of men.” The first lines of this hymn, “I thank you, my God, for you have dealt wonderfully with dust (עפר), and in forming (וביצר) clay you have made very mighty” (1QH 19:3), allude to the imagery employed in the creation of man as recorded in Gen 2:6–7. By analogy, the particular phraseology בני אדם translated as “son of Adam” appears to be more appropriate than “son of man” or “human” in late Second Temple texts. Marvin Sweeney argues: “Later texts of the Second Temple period . . . note that the priest in the Temple represents Adam in the Garden of Eden, which may explain the appellation *ben-’adam*, ‘son of Adam’ or ‘mortal,’ that is consistently applied by YHWH to Ezekiel throughout the book. The fact that only the high priest may enter the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant is guarded by cherubim much like the Garden of Eden, reinforces this image” (Sweeney, “Ezekiel: Zadokite Priest and Visionary Prophet of the Exile,” 141–42).

17. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 108.

18. An excellent example of such a meditation from this collection is the following: “(God) lifts up the poor from the dust to the [eternal height,] and to the clouds he magnifies him in stature, and (he is) with the heavenly beings in the assembly of the community.” 4QHodayot[set superscript a] 7 ii, 8–9. Based on the translation in Chazon and others, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XXIX*, 100.

19. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 39–40, 85.

20. Some have translated מקדש אדם as “sanctuary of human beings” (for example, Elwolde, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. 1, 125, s.v. אדם). However, if the author wanted to be explicit about the sanctuary being composed of humans, rather than referring to Adam, he or she could have used the more specific אנוש “human,” which appears frequently in the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Elwolde, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. 1, 334–35, s.v. אנוש). At the very least, this statement is ambiguous enough to be alluding to Adam (see Elwolde, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, Vol. 1, 124, 129, s.v. אדם I, IV).

the works of the law.<sup>21</sup> Michael Wise and Carla Sulzbach agree that the translation of מקדש אדם as “sanctuary / Temple of Adam” is preferable to the much more generic “sanctuary / Temple of humanity” in view of the Edenic overtones they see in this text.<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the Qumran community saw themselves as a conceptual sanctuary consisting of priestly individuals who had each received the “glory of Adam,” thus becoming a “Temple of Adam.” It is also possible to combine this idea with the importance of a physical location to perform priestly duties at Qumran. Sulzbach suggests that, “in light of other historical precedents, it may be assumed that *Miqdash Adam* [sanctuary / Temple of Adam] refers to a certain place, the designated *maqom*, where worship and divine service takes place (for the moment, until better times). Perhaps even the synchronized angelic-human [priestly] service as described in the [*Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*] could thus have taken place in the *Miqdash Adam*.”<sup>23</sup>

If the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* in particular were used in a liturgical setting, then its second Song may support the view that the community saw themselves individually as representatives of Adam. Referring to those in the heavens, the Instructor asks: “[What] is the offering of our tongues of dust (לשון עפרנו) (compared) with the knowledge of the g[ods?] (4Q400 2 6–7).” This is a possible allusion to Gen 3:19, where God says to Adam, “For you are dust, and unto dust you will return.” This passage from the second Song is the only instance where humanity comes close to being viewed negatively in the *Songs*; elsewhere, the emphasis is always on glorious figures (often portrayed using priestly language). It should be remembered that by reading *Ben Sira* and *Jubilees* together, the high priest entering the Holy of Holies most likely represented Adam returning to Eden, and therefore signified a return to the presence of God.<sup>24</sup> If the Qumran community embraced this imagery in *Ben Sira* and *Jubilees*, then perhaps the community also understood these *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice* as somehow functioning to reverse the sentence pronounced upon Adam in Gen 3:19; instead of returning to the dust, community members would ritually receive the glory originally intended for Adam. Such a liturgical experience would have held a special significance for

21. For this last clause, I follow the translation of Geza Vermes in *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 525.

22. See Wise, “4QFlorilegium and the Temple of Adam,” 131; Sulzbach, “Of Temples on Earth, in Heaven, and in-Between,” 177.

23. Sulzbach, “Of Temples on Earth, in Heaven, and in-Between,” 178.

24. See above.

those at Qumran, who were unable to participate in the various priestly rituals at the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup> In fact, by laying claim to the “glory of Adam,” it is possible to see the Qumran community as appealing to a tradition even older than the Jerusalem temple in order to justify their community’s performance of priestly functions.<sup>26</sup>

Taken together, these several Second Temple texts display a complex understanding of how the temple and its priests were conceptually related to Eden and Adam—that the temple itself was in some way a recreation of Eden and that the rituals performed by the temple’s priests made restitution not only for Adam and Eve’s disobedience, but that temple rituals also made positive offerings on behalf the entire human race. In what follows, I will demonstrate why this interpretation was plausible (and perhaps natural) by focusing on the language and imagery used in the Eden narrative and will outline how the idea of a priestly Adam was a real interpretive possibility in Gen 2–3.

The first verbal cues that alert us to Adam’s priestly possibilities occur in Gen 2:15. Here, God takes the man and places him<sup>27</sup> in the Garden of Eden “to till it and keep it.” These verbs are elsewhere translated as “serve” (עבד) and “keep [or] guard” (שמר), and are most often used together to describe the priestly actions of “serving” God and “keeping [or] guarding” God’s word.<sup>28</sup> With this connection in mind, some have

25. Carol Newsom writes: “What was specifically needed at Qumran . . . were not merely arguments couched in visionary form to demonstrate the authenticity of the claims of the group but rather some form of experiential validation of their claims. I would suggest that the cycle of songs in the Sabbath Shiroṭ was developed precisely to meet this need for experiential validation. . . . To the extent that the worshipper experienced himself as present in the heavenly temple through the recitation of the Sabbath Shiroṭ, his status as a faithful and legitimate priest would have been convincingly confirmed in spite of the persistent contradiction of his claims in the world” (Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, 71–72).

26. The author of the Hebrews makes a similar rhetorical move by claiming Jesus as a priestly heir of the pre-Levitical Melchizedek (e.g. Heb 7).

27. Solomon was described as having installed sacred furniture in the temple using a similar form of the same verb: 2) וינח Chr 4:8). In other temple-related contexts, this verb and verbal form are used to describe the placement of divine images in their temples. See 2 Kgs 17:29 and Zech 5:5–11.

28. See Num. 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14. See also Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis, Part I*, 122–23, Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” 21; and Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” 144. For a more technical discussion, see Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 67 n. 89.



suggested that “if Eden is seen . . . as an ideal sanctuary, then perhaps Adam should be described as an [ideal Israelite priest].”<sup>29</sup>

Other elements within Genesis 2–3 point to an understanding of Eden’s inhabitants as functioning within temple-related sacred space. The prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil stated that if this was violated, Adam would “surely die” (Gen 2:17).<sup>30</sup> This is significant because, according to early Jewish interpreters, “the [tabernacle] was [seen as] the centre of life, because . . . God was present [there. And] to be excluded from the camp of Israel . . . was to enter the realm of death.”<sup>31</sup> From this perspective, then, God’s statement that Adam and Eve would “surely die” if they ate a particular fruit was less about the length of their lives, as it was about their ability to remain ritually pure within a particular sacred space.

This concept of maintaining ritual purity within such space points us back to Adam’s responsibilities in the Garden of Eden: to “serve” and “keep [or] guard” it. For Israelite priests, one notable aspect of “guarding” meant protecting the tabernacle and temple from ritually impure individuals or creatures entering its precincts.<sup>32</sup> It may have been possible to see the entrance of the serpent, an unclean animal (see Lev 11), as a failure on Adam’s part to guard the temple-like Garden of Eden. The cherubim’s stated purpose of “guarding” the sacred space of Eden could then be interpreted as God’s replacement of Adam as caretaker of Eden’s sacredness.<sup>33</sup> As the cherubim’s duties are described using the same verb that outlines Adam’s responsibility to “guard” (שמר) the garden in the

29. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” 21.

30. See also Gen 3:3–4.

31. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” 24. Wenham finds evidence for this view in the language of Leviticus. See Wenham, *Book of Leviticus*, 177, 201; and Wenham, “Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile?” 432–34.

32. For example, Num 3:6–7, 32, 38; 18:1–7; Neh 11:19; Ezek 40:45; 44:14; 1 Chr 9:17–27; 2 Chr 23:19.

33. Beale notes that this priestly responsibility to guard sacred space “appears to be relevant for Adam, especially in view of the unclean creature lurking on the perimeter of the Garden who then enters.” He goes on to explain: “When Adam failed to guard the temple by sinning and letting in a foul serpent to defile the sanctuary, he lost his priestly role, and the cherubim took over the responsibility of ‘guarding’ the Garden temple: God ‘stationed the cherubim . . . to guard the way to the tree of life’ (so Gen 3:24; see also Ezek 28:14, 16). The guarding function of the cherubim probably did not involve gardening but keeping out the sinful and unclean, which suggests that Adam’s original role stated in Genesis 2:15 likely entailed much more than cultivating the soil, but also ‘guarding’ the sacred space” (Beale, *Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 69–70).

previous chapter, it may be inferred that Adam's duty there was priestly in nature.

Two final elements suggest a priestly context for understanding the roles of Adam and Eve within the garden; these appear in the description of their actions—as well as the actions of God—after Adam and Eve ate the fruit (Gen 3:6). Upon hearing the voice of God in the garden, they hid themselves “from the presence of the LORD God.” It has been suggested elsewhere that, “in general, any [ritual] activity [using the phrase] ‘before the Lord’ can be considered an indication of . . . a temple at the site, since this expression stems from the basic conception of the temple as a divine dwelling-place and actually belongs to the temple's technical terminology.”<sup>34</sup> If this is the case, then Adam and Eve's previous actions within the garden could have been viewed as paralleling the actions of priests in the Israelite tabernacle and temple. This suggestion is strengthened by the actions of God that follow Adam and Eve's indictment: God “clothes” them (וילבשם) with “garments” (כתנות) of skin. The same verb meaning “to clothe” (לבש) appears several times in passages that describe Moses clothing the priests of the tabernacle with “garments” (כתנות) (again, the same word used in Genesis), suggesting that God's clothing of Adam and Eve could be seen by its audience as having had priestly overtones.<sup>35</sup>

The inclusion of Eve in these temple-oriented passages certainly complicates the idea of an all-male priesthood in ancient Israel. Nevertheless, from the aforementioned Second Temple writings, it is clear that there was a common perception of Adam in the Genesis narratives as a sort of priestly figure; an idea so potent that it was seen by some as radiating into the present from primeval times, and by others as an interpretive lens through which to illuminate the stories of humanity's beginnings. While some ancient interpreters saw Adam as being dressed in sacred clothing (presumably manufactured by God) while walking about Eden, many others at the very least saw similarities between the role and function of Adam in Eden and that of the High Priest in the temple. This idea

34. Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, 26.

35. For example, Exod 28:41; 29:8; 40:14; Lev 8:13. See also Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” 21–22; and Parry, “Garden of Eden: Prototype Sanctuary,” 145. For a discussion of early Jewish and Christian traditions that make a similar association between Adam's garment and priestly clothing, see Tvedtnes, “Priestly Clothing in Bible Times,” 649–62; and Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection*, 122–24.

of one person making offerings to God on behalf of humanity as a whole endowed both the space of the Jewish temple and the threads worn by the High Priest with sacred significance.

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