

## Temple Voices in Conflict and Chorus:

### A Comparative Approach to Temple Imagery in Genesis 1-3 and the *Enuma Elish*

Recent biblical scholars have done an admirable job of excavating Israelite tabernacle and temple imagery from the text of Genesis 1-3 and bringing it to light for modern audiences. However, such studies tend to focus on individual narratives (either Genesis 1 or Genesis 2-3). As several Second Temple authors observed, however, temple imagery permeates both creation narratives and suggest a closer conceptual connection between the two than is commonly recognized. Also, most studies comparing this Israelite creation narrative with the Babylonian creation narrative in the *Enūma Eliš* have primarily been concerned with Genesis 1, leaving Genesis 2-3 out of the conversation.<sup>1</sup> However, when the temple imagery of Genesis 1-3 *as a whole* is brought into dialogue with the temple imagery of the *Enūma Eliš*, several significant points of comparison emerge that would have otherwise remain unnoticed. This study is not concerned with determining the historical relationship between these two texts; rather, I will demonstrate that a focused, temple-oriented conversation between Genesis 1-3 (taken as a whole) and the *Enūma Eliš* serves to more clearly define the views put forth in each text regarding the concept of temples.

While scholars have been successful in identifying temple imagery independently in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3, few have highlighted the fact that temple imagery overarches and permeates both narratives. To my knowledge, the only scholar to argue for the literary unity of Genesis 1-3 on the grounds of temple imagery is Gordon Wenham, who writes: “On this [temple-oriented] interpretation of Genesis 1 there is a very smooth transition to chapters 2-3. Admittedly there are changes in the symbols used, but all three chapters look forward to the construction of the

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. John Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*.

tabernacle.” He concludes, “Whatever the stylistic differences between the two sources..., ideologically the J [Genesis 1] and P [Genesis 2-3] sources are much closer to each other than is usually held.”<sup>2</sup>

Several Second Temple authors seem to have recognized this implicitly, drawing explicit parallels between the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3 and the temple as they understood it. Carla Sulzbach suggests 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.”<sup>3</sup>

The following example is representative of this approach: in *Jubilees* 8:19, the narrator describes Noah as knowing “that the Garden of Eden is the holy of holies, and the dwelling of the Lord,”<sup>4</sup> thus suggesting conceptual ties between Eden, Adam, and the temple. C.T.R. Hayward explains the significance of viewing the Garden of Eden in light of the temple in these words:

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<sup>2</sup> Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Carla Sulzbach, “Of Temples on Earth, in Heaven, and In-Between,” in Ian H. Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema, eds., *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity: Presented to James H. Charlesworth on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> Translation of Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook*, p. 89. Also, in the *Jubilees* account of creation, Adam and Eve are created outside of the garden; God brings Adam into the garden after forty days, and then brings Eve into the garden after eighty days (*Jubilees* 3:9-13).<sup>4</sup> The author makes clear that these procedures reflect the priestly laws governing entrance to the temple in Lev. 12:2-8, and suggest that the Garden of Eden had a similar level of sanctity as did the temple.

“It would appear, then, that Adam and Eve were brought into the Holy of Holies prior to their disobedience: their expulsion from Eden thus signifies their removal from the place where God’s Presence on the earth is most immediate for Israel. The high priest’s entry in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur might, then, in some manner typologically correspond to the first man’s return to Eden, for a season, to be reconciled with his Maker face to face.”<sup>5</sup>

In understanding Eden as a sort of primeval temple, Adam’s role is equated with the priestly roles later performed by Levites. A similar sort of temple orientation appears in *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* and several of the texts found at Qumran. Other authors—such as Philo<sup>6</sup> and Josephus<sup>7</sup>—expand this temple imagery and envision the entire cosmos as a sort of temple (which the Israelite tabernacle and temple represented in microcosm). This temple-oriented view of Adam, Eve, Eden, and creation as a whole highlights Second Temple Jewish ideas regarding the temple and its relationship to Deity and humanity. However, in order to better recognize the richness of these ideas, they must be “silhouetted” against another tradition.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook*, p. 89. Marvin Sweeney similarly explains that “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,” pp.141-142).

<sup>6</sup> “The whole universe must be regarded as the highest and, in truth, the holy temple of God. As a sanctuary it has the heaven, the most holy part of the substance of existing things; as votive offerings it has stars; as priests it has angels” (*De Spec. Leg.* I. 66.).

<sup>7</sup> In commenting on the Israelite tabernacle (the structural and symbolic precursor to the temple), Josephus wrote that each area was “designed as a copy and configuration of the universe, if [one] is willing readily and with intelligence to make enquiry,” and provides several examples. See *Ant.* III. 180-182.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. William W. Hallo, “Compare and Contrast: The Contextual Approach to Biblical Literature,” in William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly, eds., *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1990), p. 3.

For the purposes of this study, I have chosen the Babylonian temple tradition manifested in the *Enūma Eliš* as the conversation partner for a holistic, temple-oriented view of Genesis 1-3. Compared to Genesis, it is much easier to recognize a temple-oriented worldview presented in the *Enūma Eliš*. For instance, several temples are explicitly mentioned throughout the text.<sup>9</sup> Beyond this, we know that the text itself was read at least once a year within the central Babylonian temple during the *Akītu* festival—perhaps one of the most significant Babylonian religious festivals.<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, in this paper, I hope to offer a different way of talking about both Genesis 1-3 and the *Enūma Eliš*. Rather than demonstrating some sort of genetic or historical relationship between the two, I want to bring the “temple voices” of these two texts into conversation with each other to more clearly highlight the temple ideology in each. In doing so, I follow the lead of Peter Miscall who argued that it is possible to read two thematically similar texts “*without deciding or arguing for a particular historical priority*. This is a literary or poetic reading and not an argument for a specific chronology of historical authorship.”<sup>11</sup>

### Temple Beginnings

The idea of a temple is suggested at the very beginning of the *Enūma Eliš*. The first several lines describe the lack of order in creation, which includes the following: “a reed sanctuary

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. the temple of Apsu, Esharra, and Esagila.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. “The Babylonian ceremonies consisted of a sequence of rites which were concerned (1) with celebrating or marking the spring barley harvest; (2) with a patronal festival of the city god, Marduk, including his enthronement (known as “taking Bel by the hand”), incorporating (3) symbolic representation of certain episodes in the Babylonian Epic of Creation; (4) with marking the calendrical aspect of the New Year; (5) with the affirmation of the king as bearer of the sacred duties of kingship; and (6) with the reception and enthronement of the god Nabû...It certainly included a procession and journey out to the *bit akiti* or *akitu* building,<sup>10</sup> a ritual humiliation of the king, and an “offering” (most probably a reading), on the fourth day, of the Epic of Creation, in addition to a whole series of magical and cultic rites of various significance” (Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 137).

<sup>11</sup> Miscall, “Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book,” p. 47, emphasis mine.

(*gipāru*) was not braided, nor reed thicket was found” (I:6). This suggests that the initial state of the universe was best described, among other things, by its absence of temple-related structures. The text then goes on to describe the creation of temples as part of the process of creating the cosmos (in particular, the creation of temples in the underworld, the heavens, and on earth). Thus, the use of temple imagery at the very beginning of this text suggests the significance that these sacred structures play in the overarching narrative of the *Enūma Eliš*.

Genesis 1-3 differs from the *Enūma Eliš*, in that it does not explicitly mention a temple. However, as I mentioned earlier, several Second Temple authors recognized temple imagery in this narrative of creation. In particular, there are several parallels between the creation of the cosmos in Genesis 1 and the creation of the Israelite tabernacle<sup>12</sup> and temple.<sup>13</sup> These Jewish interpreters saw the cosmos and the tabernacle / temple as “structures sanctioned by God for the divine presence,”<sup>14</sup> and that in this text, “the world is like a temple.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the first chapter of Genesis could be seen as a sort of extended exposition on the temple, implying that the establishment of a temple is foundational to the order of creation (much like the invocation of temple imagery in the opening lines of the *Enūma Eliš* was used to describe an initial state of cosmic disarray). From this perspective, the inclusion of temple imagery at the very beginning of Genesis functions in a similar manner as the inclusion of a temple reference at the beginning of the *Enūma Eliš*; it sets a thematic tone for the text that follows.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> E.g. Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and Enthronement,” p. 503.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the creation narrative of Genesis, at the very least it may have signaled the significance of temple imagery in the description of creation that followed in chapters 2-3. It is also possible that this signals the

## Temple and Cosmos, Temple as Cosmos

As mentioned earlier, Genesis depicts God's creation of the cosmos in terms evocative of the Israelite tabernacle and temple. The *Enūma Eliš* expresses a related idea, albeit on a more limited scale. Some scholars see here the traces of a similar impulse to describe areas of the cosmos in terms of the temple. After slaying Apsu (the primeval fresh-water being), the god Ea “established upon (UGU [= *eli*]) Apsu his dwelling (*šubatsu*)” (I:71). A few lines later, Ea names this temple “Apsu” (I:76), leading some to interpret this passage as describing the entire cosmic realm of the underworld (which consisted of Apsu's corpse) as a sort of temple.<sup>17</sup> Some also view the language used to describe the Ešarra temple that Marduk established in the heavens (IV:141-146) in similar terms. The name Ešarra means “temple of the universe,”<sup>18</sup> which has led Andrea Seri to argue that “unlike Ea, Marduk does not simply create a personal shrine; he creates the *universe* thus superseding his father.”<sup>19</sup> While there are reasons to challenge such an interpretation,<sup>20</sup> this particular view comes closest to the description in Genesis 1-3 of the cosmos

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significance of the temple in the subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible, and for Christian audiences, it signals the significance of the temple in the entire Christian canon, which is bookended by the portrayal of the heavenly temple in the book of Revelation, the concluding book of the Christian canon. See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (2004) and Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (2008).

<sup>17</sup> Seri explains: “After Ea kills Apsû, this primordial matter (i.e., the fresh waters) was subject to a transformation. Ea built his dwelling place on it, and Apsû is now a cosmic shrine. In Mesopotamia the building of temples required much elaboration and stood opposite to the original state of nature. From being a shapeless substance, Apsû is transformed into a shrine” (Seri, “The Role of Creation in *Enūma eliš*,” p. 20).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Seri, “The Role of Creation in *Enūma eliš*,” p. 22. Lambert translates this title as “Temple of Totality” (Lambert, “Mesopotamian Creation Stories,” p. 23).

<sup>19</sup> Seri, “The Role of Creation in *Enūma eliš*,” p. 13, italics added.

<sup>20</sup> Walton provides compelling reasons to refute this idea of Marduk creating a sort of “universal” temple in the following: “In the ancient Near East, the concept of temple universal was not a likely scenario for several reasons. First, any god who claimed the entire cosmos as his temple would have left no temple for any other god. Such an extreme level of imperialism among the gods would not have been acceptable. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk's Temple could be central but not universal. Second, in the ancient Near East, the temple was understood as the world of the gods, and people were always intended to serve the gods, from their domain, outside. This understanding requires that

as a sort of temple.<sup>21</sup> However, the narrative of the *Enūma Eliš* quite clearly associates the creation of each of the three cosmic realms with the building of a major temple, suggesting that some sort of conceptual equivalence between the cosmos and temples was intended.<sup>22</sup>

### Women and Temples

In addition to describing the cosmos as temples, both texts also describe characters in the narrative using temple imagery. This occurs in the *Enūma Eliš* with its description of the primordial female, Tiamat: “Creator (*mummu*) Tiamat, the one birthing (*mu'allidat*) their universe” (I:4) goes on to “build” (*ibbannūma*) the first generation of gods (I:9). The first qualifier of Tiamat, *mummu* (“Creator”) is related to the phrase *bīt mummi* “workshop of a temple,”<sup>23</sup> which was the location where divine images of the gods were ritually created or repaired.<sup>24</sup> When viewed in this way, Tiamat can be equated with the Babylonian temple, wherein the sacred images of the gods were brought forth before they were brought to life by the *Mīs pī* ritual. Once created, the gods of the *Enūma Eliš* exist within Tiamat, an area referred to as “the Divine Abode” (I:24), which suggests the idea of a temple-like divine dwelling place.<sup>25</sup> Also, Tiamat’s name does not carry with it the

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there be an ‘outside’” (Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*, p. 110). See also the discussion of this particular passage in chapter three.

<sup>21</sup> Wyatt argues for this particular interpretation in the following: “Esharra...meaning ‘House of the Universe,’ was a title of several ancient Near Eastern temples. Here it has a more general sense of the universe, but it highlights the idea that the entire universe is a divine abode, and conversely, that a temple (É.GAL: ‘great house’ - dwelling of a god or king) was a microcosm (the universe in miniature)” (Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East*, p. 65).

<sup>22</sup> Seri observes that “the narrative of the creation of different levels of the universe is ingeniously equated with the creation of cosmic shrines for the three traditional main deities of the Babylonian pantheon: Anu, Enlil, and Ea” (Seri, “The Role of Creation in *Enūma eliš*,” p. 25).

<sup>23</sup> Black, *et. al*, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), p. 216. See also Heidel, “The Meaning of *Mummu* in Akkadian Literature,” pp. 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> See Dick, “The Mesopotamian Cult Statue,” pp. 61-62. See also *CAD M v. 2*, p. 198, s.v. *mummu A*, and Lambert, “Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians,” p. 109.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, p. 109.

traditional determinative sign for divinity—the *dingir*—whereas all of the children existing within her do possess such a sign before their names. Given this use of temple imagery in the description of Tiamat, it is possible that the reason for her apparent lack of explicit divinity was to allow audiences the possibility of associating this being (who carried deities inside her) with the primary Babylonian temple, which housed the images of the nation’s gods (cf. VI:45-54).

A similar invocation of temple imagery occurs in Genesis 2 with the creation of the primordial woman, Eve. Verse 22 reads, “And the LORD God built (ויבן) the rib (צלע) which he took from the man for a woman, and he brought her to the man.” The word used here to describe the creation of Eve (בנה) differs from the word used to create Adam (יצר) in Gen. 2:7. The word used in the creation of Adam (יצר) has the sense of “form [or] fashion,”<sup>26</sup> whereas the word used in the creation of Eve (בנה) has the sense of “build.”<sup>27</sup> Early Rabbinic commentators were the first to explicitly connect this language to the biblical language used to describe the tabernacle—the term translated as “rib” (צלע) is the same term used to describe the side of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:20).<sup>28</sup> This term was also used to describe the side of the Holy of Holies in Ex. 26:35, and was eventually used in 1 Kgs. 6:15 and 16 to describe the side of the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, it was possible for early Jewish interpreters to see an association between the צלע used by God to create woman and the צלע used to describe the sides of the tabernacle and temple.

Regarding the mode of creating Eve, the root בנה “build” is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as a common verb for architectural construction. However, as was the case in the

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<sup>26</sup> HALOT, p. 428, s.v. יצר.

<sup>27</sup> HALOT, p. 139, s.v. בנה.

<sup>28</sup> See *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1 and 17:6.



aforementioned description of Tiamat in the *Enūma Eliš* (I:4, 9), this verb was also used in relation to temple-related construction projects. In the Hebrew Bible, בנה “build” was used to describe the building of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 5-6), and “occurs an unusually large number of times in these chapters.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, derivatives of the root בנה are used for nouns related to the temple. For example, “*binyah*, *binyan*, and *mibhneh* are found exclusively in the block of traditional material ascribed to Ezekiel that deals with the program of building the temple [in chapters 40-42].”<sup>30</sup> Thus, there is at least a plausible association between the root בנה and the temple. This, along with the abundance of temple imagery preceding the creation of Eve, suggests that the audience could have viewed this event from the perspective of the tabernacle / temple.

### The Place of Temples

The *Enūma Eliš* covers a wide scope of cosmic action and depicts temples being built in each of the three primary areas of the cosmos: the earth, the heavens, and the underworld.<sup>31</sup> In the

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<sup>29</sup> Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. II, p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> Botterweck and Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. II, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> While Genesis 1-3 does not mention temples in the heaven or underworld, Second Temple Jewish authors maintained that all three cosmic realms were represented in the Israelite tabernacle and temple, and that these sacred structures served to link them together. Regarding the correlation between the structure of the tabernacle / temple and the three levels of the cosmos, Hayward explains that both Philo and Josephus provide “an understanding of the Temple and its furnishings as symbolic of different parts of the universe... Thus Josephus can state that the tripartite division of the sanctuary corresponds to the sea, the earth, and the heavens” (Hayward, *The Jewish Temple*, p. 8). He elaborates upon this idea later when he writes, “Similarities with Philo’s discussion of the Temple as representing the universe come to mind. The three divisions corresponding to sea, earth, and heaven, however, draw attention to a matter which Philo does not emphasize. The waters of the sea recall the ‘deep,’ the abysses where the waters under the earth (Gen. 7:11) are located [i.e. the underworld]. Josephus may be hinting that the Temple in some manner holds together with the earth what is above it (the heaven) and what is below (the sea [/ underworld]); if so, he obliquely alludes to the Temple as a stabilizing and unifying centre for the universe, a view expressed by earlier writers and by the so called Pseudo-Philo, who was most probably his contemporary. The abysses or the deeps are parts of the universe: people may go down into them (e.g. Ps. 107:26); and they would therefore be appropriately represented in the tabernacle” (Hayward, *The Jewish Temple*, p. 148. See also Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, pp. 74-75).

Hayward also explains one particular way in which the author of the Second Temple period work *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*LAB*) describes the Israelite tabernacle / temple’s role in uniting the various realms of the cosmos. The author recounts the words of Moses to God, wherein he likens Israel to a vine that God has planted and “set its roots

*Enūma Eliš*, for example, Apsu constructs his temple in the underworld (I:71-76), Marduk creates the Ešarra temple in heaven (IV:141-146), and then the gods establish Marduk's Esagila temple on earth (V:119-124).

While a discussion of the cosmos appears in both texts, the *Enūma Eliš* spends much more time than does Genesis in exploring the happenings of different cosmic locales. In fact, a cursory reading of Genesis 1-3 would suggest that only two general areas of the cosmos are even referenced: the heavens (briefly) and the earth. However, it is possible to see a reference to the underworld as well in the text's initial verse. While Genesis 1:1 announces the creation of "the heavens and the earth" (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ), "earth" (אָרֶץ) can be translated elsewhere as "underworld."<sup>32</sup> This may suggest that Genesis 1:1 depicts a three-tiered cosmos of the heaven and

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in the abyss, and hast stretched out its branches up to Thy highest seat...And now, if Thou be angry with Thy vine, uproot it from the abyss and dry up its branches from Thy highest and everlasting seat, never again shall the abyss come to nourish it, nor shall Thy throne come to refresh that vine of Thine which Thou hast burned. For Thou art He who art all light, and hast decorated Thy house with precious stones and with gold, and also with perfumes, spices and balsam-wood, and cinnamon, and with roots of myrrh and costum Thou hast decorated Thy house; and Thou hast filled what Thou hast created with different foods and with the sweetness of different drinks" (*LAB* XII. 8-9).

In explaining the significance of this passage, Hayward notes that "Should God destroy the vine, the link between abyss, earth, and heaven will cease to exist: everything will have been made for nothing, to no purpose. Israel, God's vine, is the unifying force in the created order. *LAB* XVII. 10; XXIII. 12; XXVII. 4; XXX. 4; XXXIX. 7 also speak of Israel as a plantation which links earth and heaven. This imagery is bound up with the sanctuary, since God has *planted* Israel on His mountain, the sanctuary which His hands have made according to Exod. 15:17, the very verse which the Rabbis took to mean that the earthly and heavenly dwelling places of God correspond to one another. And the language which the author of *LAB* XII. 8-9 employs to speak of God's house refers not only to His heavenly dwelling, but to the earthly sanctuary with its precious stones, its light..., its incense, food of animal sacrifices and wine offerings...The vine-symbol belongs firmly in the realm of beliefs about the Temple...The earthly sanctuary, which Moses was shown in a pattern, is inextricably bound up with Israel as vine, holding together the component parts of the universe. For God to forsake this vine is tantamount to his forsaking creation; by showing mercy to the vine, He ensures that His work has not been in vain" (Hayward, *The Jewish Temple*, pp. 159-161).

<sup>32</sup> Examples of this use of אָרֶץ as "underworld" in a cosmological context appear in Ps 33:6-8, 89:12; Isa. 44:23-24; Jer. 10:12.

the underworld, with the earth placed in between the two.<sup>33</sup> In spite of this possible allusion, the primary action in Genesis takes place in the earthly realm, within the sacred borders of Eden.

While multiple temples appear at separate levels of the cosmos in the *Enūma Eliš*, they are not isolated from each other. In fact, Marduk's supreme earthly temple—Esagila—explicitly facilitates interaction between those who inhabit the upper and lower levels, or, the heavens and the underworld. When Marduk announces his intention to build his temple on earth, he declares: “I will build a temple (É)...When you [the gods] come up from the Apsu [i.e. the underworld] for an assembly [of the gods], let it be your stopping place for the night before your assembly; When you come down from heaven for an assembly, let it [also] be your stopping place for the night” (V:122, 125-128).<sup>34</sup> The Esagila temple that was established on the earth, therefore, stood as a place of transition for those leaving their own temples to travel between the other cosmic realms.<sup>35</sup> This particular idea of the relationship between different temples situated throughout the cosmos in the *Enūma Eliš* is noticeably absent in Genesis. While some Second Temple texts mention a “heavenly temple,”<sup>36</sup> these texts do not seem to perceive a precedent for this in Genesis. Perhaps

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<sup>33</sup> In fact, Nicolas Wyatt suggests that the use of “earth” (ארץ) in this verse carries with it “overtone of the underworld” (Nicolas Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996], p. 23.). He goes on to argue that the phrase “the heavens and the earth” signifies “the entire cosmos...in an incipient, provisional condition, before a third element, the middle part, habitation of the animal kingdom and man as its pinnacle, has been added. When this is incorporated, the result is a threefold structure” (Wyatt, *Myths of Power*, p. 23). Following this possible reference to a tripartite cosmos in Genesis 1 and after describing creation in terms of the Israelite tabernacle and temple, the primary field of action in Genesis 2-3 is a world where humans live. This, in turn, results in an emphasis on Eden as a temple in this particular region of the cosmos. On the largest scale, early Jewish authors saw the cosmos in terms of the temple in Genesis 1, as well as a much more limited temple-like structure represented in Eden.

<sup>34</sup> See also VI:51-54.

<sup>35</sup> Further developing this idea, Wyatt notes that “another name for this temple, equally cosmological in its sense was É.TEMEN.AN.KI...‘house of the foundations of heaven and earth’” (Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East*, p. 65). This title suggests that the Esagila temple connected the previously created temples of the heavens and the underworld, serving as a sacred location where the gods of those regions could meet.

<sup>36</sup> E.g. *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*.

the reason why multiple (and interrelated) temples were not perceived by Second Temple writers was because the narrative of Genesis 1-3 focuses primarily on earthly matters, rather than the workings of the heavens.

### Humanity and Temples

The description of those functioning within the temples or temple-like structures of Genesis 1-3 and the *Enūma Eliš* differs somewhat between the texts. Desmond Alexander observed that “if Genesis portrays the Garden of Eden as a sanctuary or temple-garden...[it follows that] because they met God face to face in a holy place, we may assume that Adam and Eve had a holy or priestly status.”<sup>37</sup> The first couple’s priestly capacity within Eden is reinforced by the stated purpose that they are “to till and keep” (לעבדה ולשמרה) the sacred garden (Gen. 2:15). These verbs are translated elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as “serve” (עבד) and “keep / guard” (שמר), and are most often used together to describe the priestly actions of “serving” God and “keeping / guarding” God’s word.<sup>38</sup> For Israelite priests, “guarding” meant protecting the tabernacle and temple from the entry of ritually impure individuals or creatures.<sup>39</sup>

G. K. 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.”<sup>40</sup> Upon being expelled from Eden, God assigns Adam and Eve’s duty to

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<sup>37</sup> Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> See Num. 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chron. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14. After commenting upon this association, Wenham even went so far as to state that “if Eden is seen then as an ideal sanctuary, then perhaps Adam should be described as an archetypal Levite” (Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” p. 21).

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Num. 3:6-7, 32, 38; 18:1-7; Neh. 11:19; Ezek. 40:45; 44:14; 1 Chron. 9:17-27; 2 Chron. 23:19.

<sup>40</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p. 69.

“guard” (שמר) this sacred space to the cherubim (Gen. 3:24),<sup>41</sup> who are charged to keep the couple from re-entering Eden, perhaps due to their ritual impurity. Thus, the sanctity of Eden was a major concern in this particular narrative.

Since deities are the primary characters in the *Enūma Eliš*, these divine beings are the ones who are most frequently depicted as dwelling within (e.g. IV:146) or visiting (e.g. V:122-130) temples. However, much less is said about those who are given duties within these temples. In fact, the only possible reference in this text to heavenly beings performing temple-related functions are the nursemaids responsible for raising Marduk (I:85-86), who was conceived and born in a temple (I:79-84). Later in the narrative, Marduk creates humanity in order to relieve the gods from having to provide for their own needs (VI:7-8), which would have included feeding and clothing the gods’ divine images, as well as maintaining the temple complex itself.<sup>42</sup> However, humans are nowhere described in the narrative of the *Enūma Eliš* as functioning inside of any of the several temples. Once again, perhaps this drastic differences can be attributed to the different vantage points of each work. Genesis 1-3 (especially 2-3) is largely anthropocentric, while the *Enūma Eliš* is entirely theopocentric and largely takes place before the creation of humanity. With such perspectives, it is natural that whereas Genesis would discuss the roles of humans in the temple-

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<sup>41</sup> Ezek. 28:13-16 suggests that cherubim were functioning within Eden’s sacred space even before Adam and Eve’s expulsion, and in describing one of the cherubim as wearing precious stones similar to those that were worn by Aaron as he officiated in the tabernacle (Ezek. 28:13, cf. Exod. 28:15-20), perhaps this author saw the cherubim also functioning in priestly roles within Eden. This connection is made more explicit in the Greek text of this verse; while the Hebrew text only mentions nine stones (as opposed to the twelve stones mentioned for the priestly breastplate in Exodus), the Greek text mentions all twelve stones. For a detailed comparison and analysis of the Hebrew and Greek texts of Ezekiel 28:11-19, see Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, pp. 332-356.

<sup>42</sup> Frans Wiggermann notes that “in a way, everyone employed by the temple to carry out its manifold tasks could be called a priest.” See Wiggermann, “Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia,” p. 1864. He adds: “More equivalent to what we call priests were those functionaries directly involved in the cult” (p. 1864).

like space of Eden, the narrative of the *Enūma Eliš* would focus on the actions of the gods (and only briefly note the creation of humanity).

### Gradations of Sacred Space

This idea of temple-related sanctity finds an additional expression in the gradation of sacred space within these texts. In some cases, this is signified by the description of multiple chambers within a particular temple. In the *Enūma Eliš*, when Ea creates his Apsu temple in the underworld, he also creates his own private chamber (*kummišū*)<sup>43</sup> wherein he rests (I:75). This private chamber is further described as a *gipāru* (I:77), which carries with it cultic overtones of the *enu*-priest or *entu*-priestess' personal chambers within Mesopotamian temples.<sup>44</sup> The terminology that the narrator uses here suggests that this space within the temple was even more significant and sacred than the other rooms within the temple.<sup>45</sup> Since Marduk built the Ešarra temple in the heavens as an “equivalent” or “counterpart” (*méhrit*) of this multi-roomed Apsu temple (IV:142), we can assume that this heavenly temple also had multiple rooms, one of which may have also been more sacred than the others. And, since the narrator describes Marduk's Esagila temple on earth as being patterned after Ea's Apsu temple in the underworld (VI:61-64), we would expect to find a similar gradation of sacred space here, too.

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<sup>43</sup> See *CAD K*, p. 533, s.v. *kummu A*.

<sup>44</sup> See *CAD G*, p. 83, s.v. *gipāru* 1. Cf. discussion below on Sumerian “sacred marriage” ritual. This is also the same temple-related term that appears at the very beginning of the *Enūma Eliš*.

<sup>45</sup> While there is no explicit reference to Ea building additional rooms for others here, some argue that Ea's naming of the temple “‘Apsu,’ [in] which he assigned shrines” (*imbišumma ZU.AB uaddu ešreti*, I:76) demands that the temple contained multiple rooms. For example, Heidel writes, “Upon the slain Apsū, Ea subsequently established a spacious abode. He named it ‘Apsū’ and appointed it for shrines for himself and for other deities. There he and his wife, Damkina, dwelt in splendor” (Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 5). This interpretation is borne out by the following lines, where goddesses and an attendant also appear within the building (lines 85-86).

When Marduk declares his plans to construct the city of Babylon (a city made sacred by his presence), he states that “within it [Babylon] I will establish its sanctuary (*maḥazašú*)” (V:123), or in other words, his Esagila temple. Within this sacred space of Babylon, a structure of greater sanctity exists, and within that temple, Marduk declares that an even more sacred space will be created in the form of his own private chamber (*kummi*, V:124). This sacred chamber is set apart from the more generic “places” (*ášruššu*, V:126, 128) where the other gods would spend the night (V:125-128), which was also presumably differentiated from the space within Esagila where Marduk would hold festivals for the gods (V:130). A throne is also mentioned within this temple (GIŠ.GU.ZA = *kussû*, VI:93) in an area where the gods assembled (VI:94-95) and prostrated themselves (*uškinnu*, VI:96) before Marduk, suggesting a heightened level of sanctity in this room as well. Thus, in the *Enūma Eliš* we see varying degrees of sacred space, even within its already sacred temples.

In contrast, Genesis 1-3 does not explicitly mention specific chambers in the temple-like Eden. Some argue, however, that separate areas are suggested by the seeming differentiation between Eden and the garden as a whole in Gen. 2:10 (“and a river went out *of Eden* to water *the garden*”), as well as a further division that separated Eden and its garden from the land surrounding this sacred space (e.g. Gen. 3:22-24). Beale writes:

“One may be able to perceive an increasing gradation in holiness from outside the garden proceeding inward: the region outside the garden is related to God and is ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31) in that it is God’s creation...; the garden itself is a sacred space separate from the outer world..., where God’s priestly servant worships God by obeying him, by cultivating and guarding; Eden is where God dwells...as the source of both physical and spiritual life.”<sup>46</sup>

This view of increasing sacredness is amplified when combined with the view discussed above that the initial chapter of Genesis can be seen as portraying a sort of cosmic temple inhabited by God. Taking Genesis 1-3 together as a whole and combining these ideas, the cosmos itself could be seen as sacred, containing areas of increasing sacredness that culminate in the most sacred space of Eden. This conceptualization is roughly parallel to the description in the *Enūma Eliš* of Babylon’s creation as a sacred city, within which was a more sacred temple (Marduk’s Esagila temple), which contained even more sacred spaces, such as Marduk’s personal chambers and his throne room. While there is no throne mentioned in Genesis 1-3, this narrative goes one step further than the *Enūma Eliš* by increasing the scope of sacredness to encompass the entire cosmos.

### Sacredness and Sexual Relations

A temple-oriented reading of Genesis 1-3 and the *Enūma Eliš* differ greatly in terms of sexual relations and sacred space. In the *Enūma Eliš*, after Ea builds his temple in the underworld, he establishes a sacred inner chamber where he dwells with his wife Damkina (I:73-78). It is in this most sacred location the two conceive (*ittarḫema*, I:80) the supreme god Marduk, and it is here that Damkina likely delivered (*ḫaršásšu*, I:84) her divine son. Given the cultic associations

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<sup>46</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, p. 75.



with the term *gipāru* used to describe the chamber where this sexual union takes place (I:77),<sup>47</sup> it is possible to see here echoes of the Sumerian “sacred marriage” ritual,<sup>48</sup> which was conducted in ritually dedicated chambers within temples.<sup>49</sup>

This element of sexual union within a demarcated sacred space is noticeably absent in Genesis—it is only after Adam and Eve have been expelled from Eden that the text explicitly mentions sexual relations between the two (Gen. 4:1). This absence makes more sense if the author intended Eden to be viewed as a temple-like environment where Israelite laws of purity were enforced.<sup>50</sup> For instance, in preparation for God’s appearance at Sinai, Moses commanded the Israelites to abstain from sexual contact (Exod. 19:15). And, according to Lev. 15:16-18, those who engaged in sexual acts were ritually unclean until the next evening. Thus, in Genesis, it is only *after* being expelled from the temple-like Eden that the narrative describes Adam and Eve’s consummation, and the fact that this act is described in the *very* first verse following our temple-oriented narrative of Genesis (Gen. 4:1) only seems to reinforce this view.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> If we accept that the term *gipāru* evokes a sacred structure made of woven reeds (as discussed above), then there is an additional overlap here between the *Enūma Eliš* and Adam and Eve’s sacred, sequestered chamber in *Paradise Lost* where “the roof / Of thickest covert was *inwoven* shade” (IV:692-693, emphasis added).

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Douglas Van Buren sees the construction of a reed hut in Mesopotamia (cf. *gipāru*) as a prototype for bridal suites thought to be located in a garden. See Elizabeth Douglas Van Buren, “The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia,” *Orientalia* 13 (1944), p. 31. Although this particular passage in the *Enūma Eliš* is not connected to the Sumerian “sacred marriage,” see the valuable study of this concept in ancient Mesopotamia in Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2004), especially pp. 29-91.

<sup>49</sup> Van Buren, “The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia,” pp. 26-30, 48-50. These chambers were sometimes depicted as stylized gardens. See Van Buren, “The Sacred Marriage in Early Times in Mesopotamia,” pp. 13-15, 19, 26, 30-31. Sumerian love songs regularly set sexual encounters in gardens. See Yitschak Sefati, *Love Songs in Sumerian Literature: Critical Edition of the Dumuzi-Inanna Songs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998), especially pp. 321-323.

<sup>50</sup> For an excellent discussion of this issue, see the chapter entitled, “Where Did Adam Know Eve?” in Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection*, pp. 43-62.

<sup>51</sup> Intriguingly, other Jewish interpreters held that the idea of sexual union was central to the holiness of the Israelite temple, and that this concept was actually depicted in the temple’s Holy of Holies in the form of the two cherubim

## Conclusions

So, what do we learn from such a focused comparison of temple imagery in Genesis 1-3 as a whole and the *Enūma Eliš* that we might otherwise overlook? At the outset of these texts, the *Enūma Eliš* concisely presents a world without temples, and therefore without order. Genesis, on the other hand, does not focus on disorder, but rather on the gradual, orderly creation of a temple-like cosmos. Thus, the concept of the temple in Genesis appears to be much more expansive and all-encompassing than that of the *Enūma Eliš*. However, the *Enūma Eliš* states that, rather than one cosmos-sized temple, the cosmos abounds with temples at every level. This plurality of temples for a variety of deities presupposes the possibility of interaction between the inhabitants of these divine structures, an element that is absent in Genesis. Within the smaller temple-like space of Eden, God is the only character who is depicted as entering or leaving (that is, until Adam and Eve are expelled).

Within the cosmos of both texts, the primordial women may be seen through the lens of temple imagery, though the function of these feminine temples are markedly different—Tiamat can be seen as a sort of temple housing the images of other deities, whereas the temple language used to describe the creation of Eve is much more subtle and passive. Now, regarding humanity in general within temples, specific duties are given to Adam and Eve within the sacred space of Eden (such as guarding and tending to the garden), whereas in the literary world of the *Enūma Eliš*, humanity is only mentioned in passing and is never given any specific roles within any of its myriad temples.

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that sat atop the Ark of the Covenant. The best treatment of this interpretive tradition is Eugene Seaich, *A Great Mystery: The Secret of the Jerusalem Temple, The Embracing Cherubim and At-One-Ment with the Divine* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008).

Finally, the idea of graded sacred space is present in both Genesis and the *Enūma Eliš*, where there are concentric areas of increasingly holiness. In particular, the area of Babylon is depicted as being more sacred than the surrounding areas, the even more sacred Esagila temple sits within this sacred land, and Marduk's inner chambers stand as the most sacred area within this earthly realm. Genesis depicts a similar nesting of sacred spaces, but on a much more cosmic scale—the temple-like Eden is situated within the cosmos, which is itself like a holy temple. However, what is considered “sacred” within these sacred centers differs drastically—in the *Enūma Eliš*, sexual relations are practically expected within the innermost chambers of temples, whereas Genesis' ideas of purity require that these same actions are impermissible.

Such similarities and differences in Jewish and Babylonian thought have been overlooked by scholars who have been focused on demonstrating a historical or genetic relationship between these texts, as well as those who focus entirely on Genesis 1 in their comparisons with the *Enūma Eliš*. Such a literary, temple-oriented reading of Genesis 1-3 and the *Enūma Eliš* is able to reveal the unique (yet sometimes overlapping) worldviews of the two cultural worlds that authored and received these texts. Could there be demonstrable, historical points of connection between the two texts specifically in regards to temple ideology? I'm open to that possibility, especially in light of the Babylonian exile, where educated Jews were likely aware of the *Enūma Eliš* and the temple-centered Akitu festival. But that is another study entirely.